

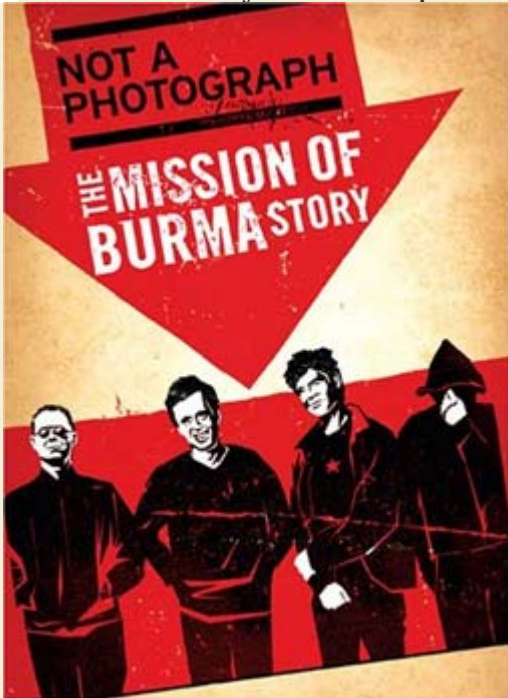
UP AGAINST THE WALL

- **A Musical Snapshot**

NOT A PHOTOGRAPH: THE MISSION OF BURMA STORY

Review by Scott Jason

You've either heard of the legendary band Mission of Burma or you haven't. To those who know them, they are revered as one of the most influential post-punk bands. Even people who'd heard of MoB but have never heard them, revere them as some kind of Holy Grail in the post-Pistols landscape.



USA 2006. 70 minutes
Dir. by David Kleiler, Jr.,
and Jeff Iwanicki

A three-man team (singer/bassist Clint Conley, singer/guitarist Roger Miller and drummer Peter Prescott), they played a loud, hard mix of post-punk/new wave music, with a heavy guitar sound, driving bass chords and aggressive percussion, coupled with touches of (gasp!) progressive/art rock flourishes. Miller, a classically trained musician, grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, digging his favorite bands, The Stooges and the MC5, but tiring of the Detroit scene, relocated to Boston in 1978. There he joined Conley in the band Moving Parts, which ultimately splintered into Mission of Burma. Joined by Prescott on drums and Martin Swope, a buddy of Clint's, who handled their onstage tape effects, they immediately made a (literal) noise in the Boston scene.

Between 1979-1983, the band played hard in clubs, produced some singles and EPs, and released a studio album called VS. before they split up in 1983. The fact they were on the verge of what many diehard MoB fans in the press believed was massive international success confounded the faithful but was no anti-publicity stunt; the band were tired, burned out from relentless gigging, felt they had peaked creatively, but the main reason was Miller's increasing problem with the hearing disorder tinnitus. The three musicians dropped out of sight, heading in totally different

directions. Apart from a posthumous live album, THE HORRIBLE TRUTH ABOUT BURMA, and a couple of compilation discs, MoB were officially R.I.P. by 1988. (Bassist Conley went into TV news production as a producer and never once picked up a guitar, until 2002.)

Which is where NOT A PHOTOGRAPH begins.

A month-long reunion tour was planned and mounted, and they recorded a new record, ONOFFON. The documentary, which also includes some cool archival footage as supplements, follows the process. Unlike other reunion tour docs, such as The Pixies' LOUD-QUIET-LOUD (which was reviewed in issue # 4), there's no interpersonal tension, no childish drama or bullshit egos on display. This is a low-key portrait of three middle-aged men who seem bemused that two decades after they broke up they still have a rabid international following and are held in such high regard by top talent like R.E.M. and Moby, both of whom have covered MoB songs.

If you don't know who Mission of Burma were, now's your chance to find out on his excellent disc—another fine release from Music Video Distributors.

<http://www.upagainstthewallmag.com/ISSUE06/DVDDementia.html>

- [DVD \\$17.99 @ Amazon](#)