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Jesus Lizard DVD

It's Yow Time: The Jesus Lizard lives on

BY [T. BALLARD LESEMANN](#)

One of the most unconventional and aggressive post-punk acts of the 1990s, The Jesus Lizard are probably best remembered for lead singer David Yow's wild, shirtless behavior and anguished yowl and the band's machine-like precision. They certainly were influential and underappreciated — one of the best live bands of their time.

Just released on DVD by MVD Entertainment this month, the concert film *The Jesus Lizard - Live* features the band at their finest with Yow in full swing and his bandmates straight-faced and intensely focused. The documentary assumes that the viewer is already up to speed with the sweaty who's who and what's what. Dedicated fans who've seen the group live in clubs will immediately tense up, fists clenched and elbows ready, with that familiar feeling ... that queasy mix of fright, excitement, aggression, and release.

Anyone familiar with the revved-up antics of Yow, guitarist Duane Denison, bassist David Wm. Sims, and drummer Mac McNeilly sure as hell know what I mean.

The Lizard's first few albums — starting with the 1989 debut EP *Pure* and 1990 full-length *Head* — were produced with Chicago studio wiz Steve Albini at the helm and released on the Touch & Go label.

While they influenced a generation of "alternative" and "grunge" bands in the '90s and packed venues during a decade's worth of grueling road work, the band barely received airplay on commercial radio and rarely got played on MTV (aside from a few moments at the tail-end of a few episodes of *120 Minutes*). Mainstream they were not, but their fans were loyal and open to any sonic challenge.

The 65-minute *The Jesus Lizard - Live* mostly shows the quartet in tight formation, performing at the Venus De Milo venue in Boston in 1994 during their lengthy tour behind the album *Down*. Terrific stuff, but the bonus footage from a rougher, more intimate gig at CBGB's in 1992 rocks even harder.

Shot mostly from a fan's perspective in the crowded front row and side stage areas, both sets of clips look a little shaky, but they suit the tone of the events. The main footage from the Boston set was taped on hand-held video gear by budding photographer and video production man Chuck Prefontaine (of Hype TV) with well-balanced live sound (probably mixed from the main board inputs). The CBGB's stuff sounds much fuzzier. It went straight into videographer Merle Allin's (of Murder Junkies) camera. The static and distortion actually enhances the grainy quality of the scenes.

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Videotaped from gigs in 1992 and '94: the mighty Jesus Lizard

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Liner notes come from super-cool music critic Michael Azerrad, author of the vital *Our Band Could Be Your Life*. "When the Jesus Lizard played one of their mighty shows, it was a cathartic rite," he writes. "On Oct. 4, 1994, their temple was the Venus de Milo club, the show captured in living color and thoroughly crankable high-fidelity audio on the DVD you're now holding in your little hands."

And there's plenty of glory. Musically, there's the monstrous two-note riff of "Seasick," the crunchy rhythmic complexities and syncopation of "Mouthbreather" (in 6/8 time) and the menacing "Boilermaker" (tricky stuff in 4/4); the grinding drone of Sims' distorted bass riff driving "Gladiator;" the relatively straightforward "Puss" (featured on a 1992 split single with Nirvana), and the pounding "Fly on the Wall" and "One Evening" — both of which demonstrate McNeilly's Bonham-esque drum work and Denison's effective dissonant, minor-key melodic guitar explorations.

Visually, there's Yow hanging on to his microphone as he habitually leaps off the stage and into his audience, inevitably getting shoved back over the monitors to his spot in front of the drum kit. *The Jesus Lizard – Live* documents it all. Visit www.mvdb2b.com for more.



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