

And now a few words from someone recalling their first exposure to a little band called the Minutemen:

"They were so inspiring and so motivating from the very first time I heard them. I discovered them through skate videos. 'Paranoid Chant' was the first song and I just remember being so blown away by it."

Sounds about right.

by Andrew Lau

## the minutemen on the movie screen

Tim Irwin is taking a quick trip down memory lane; but he isn't just any old fan, Irwin is the director of the new documentary, **We Jam Econo-The Story Of The Minutemen**. He and friend/producer Keith Schieron spent the last two years putting together the band's story doing eighty interviews and collecting scads of unreleased photos and performances that make up the film.

That said, **We Jam Econo** is perhaps one of the most anticipated rock documentaries to hit the screen since the 2003 MC5 film, **A True Testimonial** that, after only a handful of screenings, was pulled due to legal battles between the filmmakers and band members. A sad and ugly name-calling match that has kept the film locked away.

Irwin and Schieron's film seems to have gone in the opposite direction. "We've been very fortunate with this one, everyone has been amazing," Irwin says and then sighs, "but, wow, I've been part of films where some painful stuff has happened. Making a film is such a commitment; it's years of your life."

Still, after all the work, he seems in awe of the project. "This is the first film where cooperation from almost everyone we talked to was almost instantaneous. I remember the first trip we went on and Keith told me we had fourteen interviews lined up, and I thought, alright, if we come home with seven I'll be really, really happy. And we came home with seventeen. That never, ever happens. That's went it hit me that we were really onto something."

Perhaps the reason for all this cooperation is due to the massive amounts of respect that the band has gained throughout their short career and beyond their untimely demise in 1985.

Coming out of the Southern California port town of San Pedro, the trio (D. Boon, George Hurley and Mike Watt) meshed unusual influences (Creedence Clearwater Revival, Wire, and Blue Oyster Cult to name but three), and lived by the Do-It-Yourself motto to the extreme.

Most importantly, they cut their music down to the basic core: no solos, no choruses and much of their early material clocks in around sixty seconds. What you have here are amazingly catchy, grass roots political songs created by three working class kids; spastic, thundering diatribes with compassion. The Minutemen were extraordinary and the result was nothing short of an amazing run of twelve records in five years. Together, with the rest of their SST label mates (Black Flag, Husker Du, Meat Puppets, et al.) they barnstormed the country and Europe in vans and never looked back. Known for their non-stop work ethic, they once played fifty-seven shows in sixty-three days. Unmatched punk careerism.

Still, it's difficult to put into words the effect this band had. Everybody seemed to love them not just for their music but love them as people, as well. The infectious zeal of their personalities radiated from stage, from interviews and their records. The Minutemen were 100% true to their word. Sounds odd, I know.

"Punk Rock" was more of a feeling than a blueprint to these three. Pick up an instrument and just learn; record some tunes and put them out; load up a van and drive; get on stage and play. Anyone could do it. In a 1985 interview, D. Boon stated: "There should be a band on every block, 'cuz it can happen." What he meant by "it can happen" was not that anyone could be famous, but anyone could play music and live happy by creating. Period.

"There was a comment that didn't actually make it into the film," explains Irwin, "from Jello Biafra and he's telling this story where it was during a sound check. He and D. Boon were chatting and this guy comes up, totally whacked out, wearing a cape, and his shirt said CAPTAIN ANARCHY. He comes up to them and says: 'I'm Captain Anarchy!' and Jello wonders how they can get away from him this guy without interacting with him very much. But D. Boon looks at him and goes: 'That's

cool. What do you do for Anarchy?' And the guy goes: 'I thrash!' Anyone was worth having a conversation with to [the Minutemen]. Anyone wasn't any less or more than they were."

Sound like a perfect band, and for some people they were just that. The bond between these three was extremely close knit, especially between Watt and Boon who fought and loved each other like brothers since the age of fourteen. Tragically, (and there always seem to be tragedy for bands like this) D. Boon was killed in a van accident in December 1985 while they were in-between tours. The beautiful story of the Minutemen seemed to grind to a halt. After a hiatus, Hurley and Watt continued with their next group, FIREHOSE, after which Watt took on a solo career.

Since their demise, the Minutemen's legend grew slow and steadily. "I didn't even discover them until 1989," says the director, "everything I knew about them was from the CD's I was listening to."

The idea for the film dates back to Irwin and Schieron's high school days in San Jose. Then, after being out of contact with each other for ten years, their paths again crossed; Irwin had been knee-deep in documentary film work ("All I ever made in that [high school] video production class was either skateboard videos of my friends or documentaries on local bands. Fifteen years later I find myself doing the same thing and I'm pretty delighted about that."), Schieron, meanwhile, had been working in radio and, obviously, the idea for the film came up again. A mutual friend told Watt about their idea and Irwin met him before a show in Salt Lake City. "I just introduced myself and told him how much impact they had on my life. I said: 'Why don't you think about it, after your tour we'll come out to Pedro see you and, if it makes sense, we'll do it. If not, we won't do it.' There was no pressure."

Later that year, Watt took the two on a tour of

beloved San Pedro in his van. "He showed us all the spots, and at the end he said: 'Okay, I think you're right this is an important story to tell, I think we should do it.' He kinda gave us the go ahead."

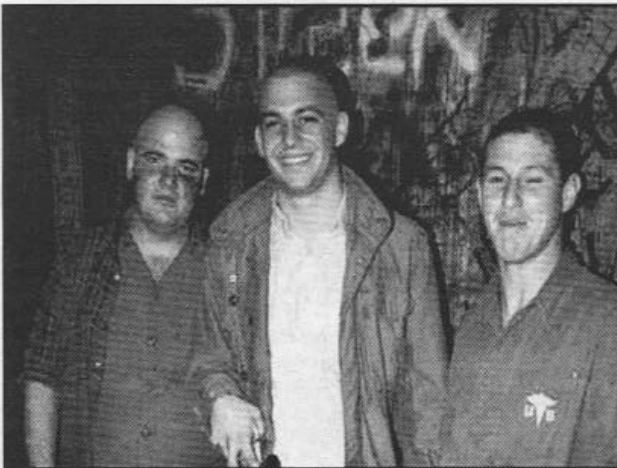
Two years later, We Jam Econo premiered February 25th at -where else-- San Pedro's majestic Warner Grand Theater. It was a success; it was sold out, friends and fans shoulder to shoulder. "It was the first time I was able to watch the film as a spectator. I had been so immersed in it that I never got to just watch it. And that night it hit me very hard emotionally."

Now comes the work of getting out to the rest of the world. "We're talking to three or four different distributors so it's just a matter of deciding which one would treat the film the best. Theatrically, we've already started booking a tour. Some cities it'll only be a day and others it'll be three or four and, as those have been coming up, we just put them on our web site. [themintemen.com] The response has been." here, Irwin pauses, "I couldn't have asked for anything better."

Not only is a DVD version in the works, but: "We're also trying to put together a book," says Irwin. "It was Keith's idea and when we started talking about it we told Watt and one of his ideas was to basically to just do a transcript of the film. We won't do any writing, it'll all be word-for-word from the film and then, of course, photos from the film. But that's further down the road."

The Minutemen's end is heartbreaking and taking the two former band members back to that time couldn't have been easy. "It was really hard for Watt, I don't know if he's watched the whole thing, he e-mailed us back and said that his mom loved it and we felt like we were on the right track. I really appreciate the fact that he realizes what an important story it is to so many people and he was willing to put himself out there to let that story be told."

"It's a sad story, it doesn't end happy.[but] we offer some hope after that." Irwin pauses a moment and says, "It's such an important story we just want to help as many folks as possible to either remember the inspiration from when they first heard the Minutemen or experience it for the first time, you know? And Watt was real geared up on the idea of the book because, in his words, you can't take a movie with you on tour in the van but you can take a book."



## A Letter To Mary Timony

by Michael Fortes



Dear Mary,

It's been three years since I last saw one of your live performances. You had released your second album, *The Golden Dove* (Matador), and your quirks were quite entertaining. I loved that cat mask, and the little dance you did towards the end of your set. Those vintage keyboards were the shit. I never get sick of those soft, smooth, pre-digital electronic sounds. Music really seemed to have set you free, though the monkey, the lion and the ocelot seemed to have skipped town that night. Their testimony would have turned the concert into an event. In lieu of the animals, I was satisfied when you confirmed for me that you were not on any drugs during the Helium set I witnessed in '95.

So after all this time, we meet again, and I must say - what a difference three years makes! One listen to your new record, *Ex Hex* (Lookout!), and my immediate reaction was, "whoa!" The rhythms were very DC-sounding to my ears, as if you had signed to Dischord or something. Of course, recording at Inner Ear Studios with Brendan Canty producing and Devon Ocampo from the Medications -- another card-carrying

Dischord artist -- drumming, will probably have that sort of effect on the music.

The crowd that gathered to hear the new music at Café du Nord seemed really happy with what you gave us. I kept hearing someone yelling for "Return to Pirates," which you made sure to include in your encore. It was a scorcher, that one, even without Mr. Canty's bass. He was great to hear, and watch while he was up there with you and drummer Devon Ocampo before the encore.

I also sensed that you were very happy with the crowd that assembled before you. We were all in a good mood, and the smiles you sent from the stage were as infectious as the music you played. It seemed like a loose, fun, low-stress night for you, with giggles and good vibes smoothing over some of the awkward endings of the songs. "Music and Charming Melody," in particular, didn't appear to be quite as long as the version on your LP *The Golden Dove*.

But it was all good. And all that pogoing you were doing during "9x3" looked like a blast. Never expected to see that. There has always been this sort of slow-moving, semi-melancholy-ness to your music that has come across on stage during past performances of yours I have witnessed. You must have eaten your Wheaties that morning, for sure.

And doves... what is your fascination with those birds, anyway? There's a "dead dove" in "Magic Power" and in the title of your second album, and on the new album, there's a "little white dove" in "Return to Pirates." I imagine you must like those white doves a lot, though the word "dove" tends to remind me of the rock doves all over San Francisco, which aren't particularly loveable - not when they're relieving themselves all over our buildings and street corners, anyway.

No matter, it's all part of the charm of the worlds you create with your songs. What really matters here is the new musical territory you are covering. Like when Devin played a drum solo that evening at the end of "Backwards/Forwards" - I never thought I'd hear one of those during any of your songs, and actually enjoy it. Those Black Sabbath-like chords you were spitting out after the drum solo were pretty bad-ass too. You've really become quite the riff-master, a guitar goddess of sorts. Oh heck, why qualify it - you ARE a guitar goddess! I've a feeling you wouldn't agree, but I think the riffs you've been writing bear it out.

Cases in point: "9x3," the quick driving lines cruise along like it's none of the business of Pearl Jam's "rearviewmirror." And how about the way that the singing riffs of "Hard Times Are Hard" provide a neat bed for your conversational lyrics? They make it safe for a line like "people like you and people like me should just agree to disagree" sound less like a cliché and more like a rockin' refrain that means something real. No small feat, I say.

I am expecting that when you return to this locale, playing an opening set for Sleater Kinney at the Warfield on June 4, those ladies from Olympia might have their work cut out for them trying to sound like a commanding headliner compared to you. Perhaps it will be like the battle of the bands, a musical war field of sorts, where the byproducts are less lost limbs and more inspiration to play even better than the last time. Could be yet another exciting time, I'm sure.

Well, I'm glad we met again in the context of another fine show, a most noteworthy performance at that. And thanks for all the great tunes. Don't ever stop!

Sincerely yours,

-The short guy in the front row