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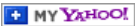
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Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted September 22, 2010 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

The Product:

When is a favored music group no longer themselves? Put another way, do constant member changes and personnel shifts forever alter the making up of a beloved rock and roll outfit, so much so that they really aren't the same? There's always chemistry to consider, and artistic direction. But if Journey is successfully touring the country minus its memorable lead singer, Steve Perry, or if Styx stays afloat absent its keyboard playing founder Dennis De Young, are we still talking about the same band, or just a cash machine milking shadow of its former self? That's the issue facing fans of Japanese pop punk queens Shonen Knife. As the move into their 30th year in the biz, they have had at least five significant alterations to their line-up. In fact, the spunky trio playing for appreciative fans in this DVD souvenir of their 2009 Buffalo, NY show have since reconfigured their membership - again. So, infectious music aside, is one original player supporting two others really Shonen Knife? The proof is in the power chords.

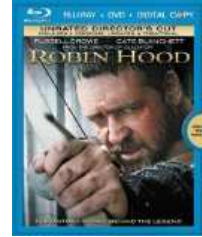
The Plot:

As the last stop on their short North American tour, Shonen Knife - original member Naoko Yamano (guitar/vocals), bassist Ritsuko Taneda and drummer Etsuko Nakanishi - deliver 17 sizzling slices of their Ramones inspired blitzkrieg pop. Taken from various stages in their lengthy career, we are treated to material from their latest album *Super Group* as well as offerings from as far back as 1983. With limited onstage banter (these ladies are from Japan, after all, and English is not their strongest linguistic asset) and a tightness that comes from excessive gigging, these girls really do provide a great deal of mindless musical fun. Sure, they sing about jelly beans, monsters, and kitty cats, but they do so with a buzzsaw intensity matched only by their bubbly charm.

The DVD:

Shonen Knife has always been a sort of sonic guilty pleasure. Clearly inspired by the three chord mantra of early punk and proficient in forming memorable melodies out of same, the trio take their initial kitsch camp factor and flummox the listener with their ferocity. This is not always true on record, where production often pacifies their magic, turning it tame and twee. But live, even in the smallest venue of the Mohawk Place, they are powerful indeed. Longtime frontwoman and axe-lady Naoko may look a little older, but she plays with a passion that would put her far younger contemporaries to shame. Similarly, drummer Etsuko could show her male counterparts a thing or two about slamming the skins with chummy, cheerful verve. Since they are not complicated, the songs don't leave much room for intricate instrumentation, but bass player Ritsuko has more than a couple memorable lead lines. Together, they provide a din so delightful you can't help but clap along. And yet there's the nagging suspicion that you're not really seeing a band, but a carefully constructed byproduct of same. Ritsuko and Etsuko play their roles well (the latter has since left the band), but they seem like place holders. This is especially true when another original member, Atsuko Yamano (Naoko's sister) takes the stage to sing along to "Fruits and Vegetables". As she croons away, loving every minute of her minimal reunion with the group, we start to see the real Shonen Knife peaking out - the one devoted to their muse, not the music industry. While they've never been big seller, these Japanese gals have had major league

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support from the likes of Nirvana, Redd Kross, and perhaps most importantly, noise rock pioneers Sonic Youth. Thanks to numerous assignments as an opening act, Knife has since become a cult, a college music mainstay and goofy go-to for the proto-cool. There is no denying how hooky and memorable their music can be - tunes like "A Map Master", "I Wanna Eat Chocolate", and "Muddy Bubbles Hell" speak for themselves. It's just too bad the one time mistresses of Eastern DIY seem so manufactured now.

The Video:

MVDvisual and Good Charamel Records release this hour long concert in a decent 1.78:1 anamorphic widescreen image that captures the video recording vibe of gig perfectly. The colors are carefully controlled, the amount of detail truly excellent. Some may be put off by the ADD added directing style and the less than flattering angles featured, but overall, the transfer is terrific.

The Audio:

While some may argue over the sonic choice presented, we are given a nice, clean Dolby Digital Stereo 2.0 mix. The various instruments blend together well, and even when Naoko heads into a solo, the drums and bass offer sensational support. Crowd noise is kept to a minimum, but we do get a clear sense of being at a live performance. With its expert modulation and aural power, the ear worm element of the music is preserved perfectly.

The Extras:

There is a snippet of a longer interview available on the disc at the end of the show. You will have to seek it out by looking at the 'Main Menu' and then heading over to 'Scene Selection' choice. There, you will come across as 20 plus minute talk with the group and it's a very endearing discussion indeed. Unfortunately, that's all the added content available.

Final Thoughts: So, this is Shonen Knife Mach 7 - or is it 8? Anyway, no matter how you read it - rock and roll Hellions or pure J-Pop product - what takes the stage here is staggering in its slash guitar bliss. While some may balk at the baby book lyrics and silly singsong ideas, the music makes an incredibly powerful statement. Earning a **Highly Recommended rating, Shonen Knife: Live at Mohawk 2009 is an amazing experience. While it doesn't wholly represent their entire career, no show really could - not with 16 albums available to pull from. Still, for what they do as a trio, what they create from the basics of rock and roll, they are a fun loving force worth considering...even in a less than perfect make-up.**

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Shonen Knife: Live at Mohawk Place 2009

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