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DVD Review: Shonen Knife: Live at Mohawk Place, 2009

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Images from the Internet



Shonen Knife: Live at Mohawk Place 2009

Directed, edited and authored by John Grimaldi

Good Charamel Records, 2010

90 minutes, USD \$16.95

GoodCharamel.com

ShonenKnife.net

MVDvisual.com

Mohawk Place in Buffalo, NY, is a great venue to see bands. The last time I was there, Mystic Eyes was playing. While it seems a bit small for a band of the stature of Shonen Knife, who has been around in some form since 1981, it certainly seems like a tight fit for the size of the audience. However, the intimacy of the place is felt warmly.

On a tour of the United States to promote their latest release, *Super Group*, they picked Buffalo as their last stop. The power-pop trio gave it all it's worth, even though admitting to be tired, as the tour was 30 dates in 32 days.

Lots can be (and has been) said about the triteness of the lyrics, much about food or just simply a bizarre string of western words, but the music is just so interesting, in a Ramones / '60s pop way. Nothing really complex or long guitar solos, even with their self-proclaimed heavy metal influenced "Muddy Bubbles Hell," so the songs are sharp and do not go on for a long time. Get in and get out.

What is interesting about their sound, I find, is that they are immersed enough in western culture to get the formula idea for a great pop song, and yet exotic enough to the genre to bring something new. That is part of why they have managed to last for so many years. And heck, they even dress like the '80s garage band, the Pandoras.

Their occasional rat-a-tat-tat repeated lyrical beats stand out, such as the "pig out" chorus of "BBQ Party" and "big big big cat" of "Giant Kitty." Their new songs, such as the self-titled "Super Group" and the aforementioned "Muddy Bubbles Hell" hold up equally well with their older material here, like "I Wanna Eat Chocobars" or "Flying Jelly Attack."

Their concept, on some level, has shown up in other bands, such as the enjoyable, much tougher and musically proficient (but less joyful) 5.6.7.8's, and they were even sort-of made the subject of a spoof in a Cameron Diaz hosted *Saturday Night Live*. But Shonen Knife is the real deal. Like their touchstone Ramones, they are fun to watch, even if you can't always make out what they're actually singing about.



On guitar and main vox (and chief songwriter) is the last original member of the trio, Naoko Yamano. The new bass player who is on her first tour of the U.S., with some amazing tresses (and knows how to swing it), is Ritsuko Tameda (who sings former member Michie Nakatani's songs). The last is Etsuko Nakanishi, who is a fantastic drummer (she was replaced by Emi Morimoto shortly after the tour).

This show visits the band's entire career, with 18 songs of pop mayhem. After the 15-song set list, they come back for two encores dressed in tee-shirts, along with ex-member Atsoko Yamano (she is currently living in Los Angeles), who does lead vocals on "Fruits and Vegetables." She leaves and they break into one of their faster songs, with hints of a hardcore influence, "Antonio Baka Guy."

Over the end credits, “Twist Barbie” is played, as we watch – in multiple windows – still and moving images of their tour as they travel from town to town by car. Included in the credits is one humorous notice: “No roadies were harmed in the production of the DVD concert.”

As a last historical footnote, their hair – which looks spectacular as they flip it all around – is credited to Erin Moser, of Chez Ann Salon, in Buffalo. Erin is the daughter of Bruce Moser, a chief promoter in the Buffalo area, Mary Martin Moser, who once worked at the much lamented indie Play it Again Sam’s Record Store on Elmwood Avenue (which became Home of the Hits before closing recently), and the niece of Buffalo cult musician Bernie Kugel. The last time I saw Erin she was a young child, back in the late ‘80s. Good work, Erin, and congrats!

Songlist:

Konnichiwa
Banana Chips
Super Group
A Map Master
Barnacle
Johnny Johnny Johnny
I Wanna Eat Chocobars
BBQ Party
Flying Jelly Attack
Devil House
Bear Up Bison
Muddy Bubbles Hell
Explosion!
Giant Kitty
Pyramid Power
Fruits and Vegetables
Antonio Baka Guy
Twist Barbie