

The Dead Boys live again on Halloween 1986 DVD

DVD REVIEW | APRIL 8, 2013 | BY: PETER ROCHE |



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Formed by Youngstown singer Steve "Stiv" Bators and Cleveland guitarist Gene O'Connor—better known as [Cheetah Chrome](http://www.examiner.com/topic/cheetah-chrome/articles) (<http://www.examiner.com/topic/cheetah-chrome/articles>), of Rocket from The Tombs fame—the Dead Boys fled to the Big Apple in the latter half of the Seventies to capitalize on the burgeoning punk scene. Their incendiary shows at Ma. Kansas City and CBGB's become the stuff of legend and their two Sire releases You Loud, and Snotty and We Have Come For Your Children remain mandatory listening self-respecting rust belt rocker.

The band—which also featured William "Jimmy Zero" Wilden on rhythm guitar, Jeff "Magnum" Halmagy on bass, and Johnny "Blitz" Madansky on drums—disintegrated by 1980 over musical differences and health problems. Chrome's 2010 autobiography *A Dead Boy's Tale: From the Front Lines of Punk Rock* tells the whole story, but this DVD certainly captures the band's pugnacious spirit in concert.

Shot from the back of the venue on one or two cameras, the hour-long film shows a still vital (if professionally defunct) quintet tearing through classics from their official releases as well as a pair of covers that pay homage to mentors like The Rolling Stones and The Stooges. Mohawked youngsters storm the stage throughout the raucous set, and chain-smoking, mulletted roadies become inadvertent costars as they intermittently pop up on camera and brusquely shove overenthusiastic ticketholders back into the throng.

Of course, the hard rock and humor are tempered by the knowledge that Bators would be dead five years later, struck by a car in Paris, and Chrome would be wallowing in addiction throughout the Nineties. The cursory band intro by punk icon Joey Ramone—who died in 2001—makes it all the more bittersweet.

The Boys get ripping with the anthemic "Sonic Reducer," with Bators bounding onstage in a faux leather black ensemble that includes armbands, gloves, biker hat, and approximately seven studded belts. It's a look that predates Guns 'n' Roses motorcycle-meets-spandex image by at least two years, a guise Bators milks throughout this set for dramatic effect. Meanwhile, Chrome abuses a Les Paul while sporting a leopard-spotted shirt over a black T. Bators mocks the guitarist affectionately later on by suggesting his newly-bald head makes him the "Uncle Phester of rock." Blitz pummels his drum kit while Magnum more or less minds his own business on bass in front of the rostrum. Zero conjures jagged chords to Magnum's

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right but earns a few close-up shots when he stomps over to sing along in Stiv's microphone.

"Caught With the Meat in Your Mouth" is prefaced with a funny—if politically inappropriate dedication—to Mama Cass Elliot and Karen Carpenter.

"If only Karen had eaten that ham sandwich, there'd be two people alive today," muses Bators.

The singer jokingly refers to Come For Your Children track "Calling on You" as a Led Zeppelin song and explains how the band felt forced to learn covers while making ends meet. Proper covers arrive later, in the forms of the 1964 Jagger / Richards song "Tell Me" and 1973 Stooges gem "Search and Destroy." Bators admonishes the audience not to dismiss older bands so quickly in their hunger for new and exciting music.

"There's a lot to learn from them," he observes. "Now people realize they've got staying power...like John Holmes!"

With his snakelike hips and wiry moves, the charismatic singer evokes Iggy Pop and Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, and it becomes clear whose wardrobe and handbook of stage demeanor Axl Rose borrowed. Bators is hardly a terrific textbook vocalist, but his energy and presence here are talismanic and infectious, his verses irreverent, and his rapport with the people unquestioned. The Ritz video has Stiv howling while crouched on his knees, sprawled on his back, and swallowed up by an adoring crowd. He writhes, he collapses, he springs back up again for another barely decipherable verse—and it's all peculiarly hypnotic.

"Eins, zwie, drie, vier!" comes his German count-out.

The Zero-penned "Won't Look Back," "What Love Is," and "I Need Lunch" get the crowd swirling on the floor and keep the stagehands busy separating bodies. Even Bators gets in on the action, gradually removing articles of clothing and disappearing into the audience with his microphone wire trailing behind. In keeping with the holiday, a few costumes are spotted during the show; a patron in a Ronald Reagan mask flits across the screen in a trench coat before throwing himself back into the writhing mob. "Down in Flames," "Ain't Nothing to Do," and "Detention Home" recall the youth culture of boredom and discontent in the latter half of the Seventies.

The main set closes with the creepy "Son of Sam," a heavy homage to the serial killer who terrorized NYC with a .44 caliber bulldog revolver the summer The Dead Boys arrived. Encore numbers include "Third Generation Nation," "Flamethrower Love," and a second pass through "Sonic Reducer," by which time Bators is incomprehensible (and nearly naked).

"C'mon, it's your show," he goads the slam-dancers. "Come on up!"

Bonus material consists of a 1980 television appearance on Good Morning Youngstown featuring "local fella" Stiv Bators and Sharon, PA. musical collaborator Frank Secich. Clad in a three-piece suit, host Gary Cubbery talks music, movies, and the punk movement with a dapper-dressed Bators, who spices the interview with laid-back charm and self-deprecating humor. The fifteen-minute clip is mildly distorted but quite watchable, even if the program's theme, graphic, and garish brown décor (and abundance of dried flowers) seem chintzy by today's standards.

The DVD is available now for under ten bucks at the link below.

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