



Dead Boys

Return of the Living Dead Boys - Halloween Night 1986 [DVD]

(MVD)
US release date: 18 March 2008

by [James Greene, Jr.](#)

It may surprise you, but as of this writing, only one of the Dead Boys is actually deceased. That would be lead singer Stiv Bators, cut down in the prime of his life by a laundry truck in 1990. So you can just check all those nasty jokes about this band living up to their ghoulish name, good sirs and madams.

On the whole, the Dead Boys have done a phenomenal job staving off the Grim Reaper. Their survival rate succeeds that of both the Velvet Underground and *Diff'rent Strokes*. Of course, it would be just like that haggard, evil bitch we call Fate to strike down three Dead Boys the minute this piece goes up. Watch your backs, guys. This supernatural hussy don't take coffee breaks.

Return of the Living Dead Boys: Halloween Night 1986, as the title suggests, documents a Dead Boys reunion concert from October 1986. Joey Ramone, a long time supporter of the New York-by-way-of-Cleveland quintet, introduces the band, but not before *he's* introduced by some lesser MC. Like anyone's going to mistake the pale, seven foot mess of hair and lips that is Joey Ramone for Henry Kissinger or Juice Newton. He doesn't even look like any of the other Ramones, and they all look alike (even lesser-known members, such as Buckwheat and Vance Ramone).

But I digress. Joey sputters a few clumsy words and then gives the stage over to the night's main attraction. The show gets off to a dubious start when one Dead Boy manages to fudge the opening notes of "Sonic Reducer". If this were an Internet meme, a huge "PWND!!" would have immediately popped up and shamed said band member for eternity. Once they shake off their nerves, though, the Boys of Dead fall into a groove and bang out their patented sleazy gutter rock sound like it's not even an issue. Yessir, they sound pretty good ten years later, which forgives the fact the the entire performance was shot from the back of the venue with one camera *a la* a children's Christmas pageant (tape snags do occur here and there, but they are only barely noticeable).

The Dead Boys cycled through almost every song they'd ever written that night, including "High Tension Wire", "Flamethrower Love", and "Son of Sam". This being shot on All Hallows Eve, there are plenty of costumes and props strewn about the band/audience. Stiv is wearing an Alice Cooperian leather bondage get-up; guitarist Cheetah Chrome is dressed like the cheapest pimp in town. One crowd member who keeps finding his way to the stage is inexplicably wearing a Ronald Reagan mask and lab coat. Perhaps he got lost on his way to the DEVO/Dead Kennedys concert.

One frightening and completely authentic accessory is the giant, glorious mullet attached to the burly security guard occasionally seen stalking the stage. It's not often you see film of this much-ballyhooded hairstyle during the height of its non-ironic popularity. Savor it.

Fulfilling his contractual obligation to toss off lame, unremarkable stage patter, Stiv jokes about Mama Cass before "Caught With the Meat in Your Mouth", and remarks later that the Rolling Stones have "staying power...like Johnny 'Wadd' Holmes." These dated references seem irrelevant and hacky, but there's a good chance the man born as Steve Bator was living in some weird time bubble wherein he thought it was constantly 1978. What looks like a moment of real panic flashes across the singer's rodent-like face when he's forced in the DVD's bonus 1980 interview segment to pinpoint the current year. It's a moment that's played for laughs, but you can see a little relief on Stiv's face when someone else jumps in with an answer.

The Dead Boys close their monumental 1986 Halloween set with another run through of "Sonic Reducer". The group can get a lot of mileage out of that tune, because (and I think I can say this without being challenged by even the surviving members of the band) the empowering, hard-charging street punk anthem is their greatest musical accomplishment. No other song in the Dead Boys' two album catalog is better suited for Stiv's guttural choke, Cheetah and Jimmy Zero's raging guitars, or Johnny Blitz's bombastic drumming. Why not play the bastard twice? Based on the malaise that seems to set in during some of the other songs (especially the ones from *We Have Come for Your Children*), methinks Los Muchachos Muertos should have played "Sonic Reducer" a few times in the middle

there to keep the energy up.

Going back to that interview extra on *Return of the Living Dead Boys*—it's a segment from what I imagine was a public access chat show in Ohio called "Wake Up, Youngstown" that Stiv and Cheetah's replacement Frank Secich appeared on in 1980. The interviewer hails them as returning heroes, local boys done good. Stiv cracks a few weak jokes and talks about how the world had to catch up to the Dead Boys. Frank just sits there and smiles.

The only honestly interesting parts of this ancient footage are the rarely seen "Sonic Reducer" video that is aired in its entirety prior to the interview (surprisingly well done, considering the clip includes lots of tired WWII newsreel footage and screen shots from "Space Invaders") and equally rare photographic evidence of Dead Boys fan and drummer John Belushi the night he sat in with the band.

There are more intense Dead Boys DVDs on the market (including the one where, mid-performance, Stiv blows his nose into a piece of bologna and eats it), but *Return of the Living Dead Boys: Halloween Night 1986* should be enough to appease true fans of these mid-western rabble rousers who escaped the hellish torment that is Cleveland and landed in the tattered pages of New York's punk rock history book. I can't say this late '80s reunion was incredible, but, as the packaging states, it surely does not suck.

RATING:  6

— 8 April 2008

[advertising](#) | [about](#) | [contributors](#) | [submissions](#)
© 1999-2008 PopMatters.com. All rights reserved.
PopMatters.com™ and PopMatters™ are trademarks of PopMatters Media, Inc. and PopMatters Magazine.