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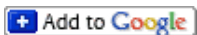
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Robert Pollard: The Devil Went Home and Puked

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Review by Bill Gibron | posted November 27, 2009 | E-mail the Author | Start a Discussion

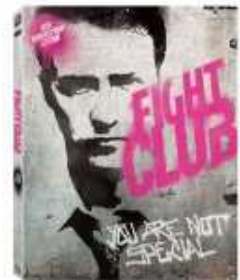
The Product:

Until someone comes along and decides to do the definitive ala Anvil documentary on Guided by Voices and their cockrock inspired founder, Robert "Bob" Pollard, we will have to be happy with occasional video flights of fancy from the former grade school teacher turned pop song genius himself. Mr. "Tractor Rape Chain" has always been an accomplished artist, his creative collages adorning many, if not all, of his solo work and GBV's albums/singles covers since the very beginning. It's an approach he applies to the occasional home movie fan souvenir as well, mash-ups with intriguing names like Some Drinking Implied and The Who Went Home and Cried. It's time to add a third title to said list, a post-mortem so to speak of archival footage and contemporary compilation. Called The Devil Went Home and Puked - Robert Pollard's Rock Show, this 67 minute montage of performance pieces, music videos, and various odds and sods showcases the aging whiz kid and his previous muse in a wonderful warts and all cavalcade. While newbies may be lost amidst all the slop and silliness, the dedicated will simply adore this behind the scenes scrapbook.

The DVD:

With no plot to speak of and a randomness that often feels like a schizophrenic's stream of consciousness, The Devil Went Home and Puked is a multi-purpose Pollard

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overview. We get in-studio snatches of our hero singing the classic "Mammoth Cave" from 1990's *Same Place the Fly Got Smashed* LP. We then fast forward to his recent work with his own side project, Circus Devils, as well as random moments from several concert stops. As usual, Pollard does his best faux Daltrey, channeling Townsend's tonsils with the same high kicking, microphone swinging abandon of a man half his age. Sure, he sucks on a beer in between stanzas and often mumbles the lyrics in a semi-conscious state of power chord bliss, but we forgive the foibles. This is Bob Pollard, after all, the man who made the spastic bass bombastic of Greg Demos into something akin to Olympian magic. This is the man who took various incarnations of Voices around the globe, giving his often inspired three minute pop gems a real stomp and roar. Sure, we'd love to see more complete songs and wish moments like the recent reunion with guitarist Tobin Sprout (on a sloppy live version of "Dayton, Ohio, 19 Something and 5") were longer. Still, there are some standout moments among the rock rubble.

The best bits are the full length videos, a hilariously clip for latter GBV's brilliant "The Best of Jill Hives" featuring a combination of social clichés (cheerleader, swinger, housewife) dancing around while a man in a carrot suit lip syncs. Even better, the group Svelt (featuring Chris Slusarenko who is part of Pollard's new band, Boston Spaceships) gets to show off their amazing clip - a near shot for shot remake of Devo's Rolling Stone's cover "Satisfaction" - for the song "Shrunken Head". Elsewhere, new Pollard material like "Circle Saw Boys Club", "Shadow Port" and "Bughouse" rubs shoulder with the Circus Devil's more experimental "I-Razors", "Bogus Reactions", "War Horses", and "Get Me Extra". Finally, the aforementioned Spaceships gets a great **Yellow Submarine** inspired clip for the song "Winston's Atomic Bird." Most of the mini-movies are comic, with weird characters dressed in paper masks cavorting around mindlessly. Others feature fascinating looks at Pollard's collage work. All are worth checking out, especially for the fan who may have lost touch with the talented musician since GBV "dissolved" in 2004.

Of course, there's a caveat, a warning for those whose only interaction with Pollard's sonic stadium sentiments are recent nostalgic nods like "Teenage FBI", "Glad Girls", or anything post the incorporation of Cobra Verde. Like the hulking hit or miss majesty of the man's *Suitcase* series (an ongoing collection of demos - 100 tracks each installment - from all facets of the musician's career), these video compilations are like linking verbs, pieces of a puzzle we really didn't know we were missing filling in blanks that even the most devoted denizens didn't know existed. Watching the various "F-off" introductions given to latter day Voices, seeing Pollard pour his heart into the chorus of "The Hard Way", witnessing a teary-eyed former student praising his teacher over his lack of educational prowess ("all he did was tell ghost stories and work on his collages", we hear) are spellbinding. Certainly, more



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complete live material would be nice, especially when solid songs like "Motor Away" are truncated for novelties like the sing-along favorite "A Salty Salute". By this time in their mythic career, someone needs to sit down with Pollard and various incarnation of his Guided by Voices gang and give them the proper factual overview they deserve. Until that time, such genial documents as **The Devil Went Home and Puked** with have to do.

The Video:

Yes, it's full screen. Don't let the 1.33:1 dynamic put you off though. Yes, the various elements employed run the gamut from good (the present day MTV style stuff) to the god-awful (a few clips looks like the worst kind of video dubs). Don't let said scattered visual set-up throw you, however. Finally, things aren't always in focus, the editing is chaotic, and some of the material was best left on the cutting room floor. Still, **The Devil Went Home and Puked** provides a decent digital presentation, especially when you consider the undeniably inconsistent sources.

The Audio:



Of course, purists will complain about the lack of 5.1 channel challenge here, and that's too bad. The Dolby Digital Stereo 2.0 presentation is good, giving all the varying aural elements - live footage, music video, news feed, current clips - a nice amount of clarity. Sure, some of the stuff is tinny and thin, but when you're working with pre-MP3 technology, it's hard to expect iTunes.

The Extras:

Some of the best material on this DVD is saved for the bonus features. First up is a small short film based on the song "Gold Star for Robot Boy". Called a 'performance piece' on the disc, it's an intriguing cinematic non-sequitor. Even more fun is a video elegy for the band (like the kind served up by funeral homes) set to a Muzak version of "The Window of My World". Loaded with publicity photos and shots of flowers and butterflies, it's a delightfully demented kiss-off. While some additional videos would have been nice, the collection of added content here is excellent.

Final Thoughts:

This critic has told this story before, but it bears repeating. When he first discovered Guided by Voices (around the time of *Under the Bushes, Under the Stars*), he was immediately hooked. He then proceeded to go out and uncover every bit of GBV music he could find - albums, EPs, and 45s. Then, for 18 months straight (circa late 1996 to early 1998), he listened to nothing but Bob Pollard and the boys - in the car, sitting at the computer, tooling around with his portable CD player. Nothing else. Honestly. Since then, he's been a staunch defender of the lo-fi champions, even collecting all the installments in the man's solo Fading Captain series. Some 14 years later, Guided by Voices still has the power to amaze and inspire. This means, naturally, that **The Devil Went Home and Puked** will earn a totally biased **Highly Recommended** rating. Sure, neophytes will complain

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