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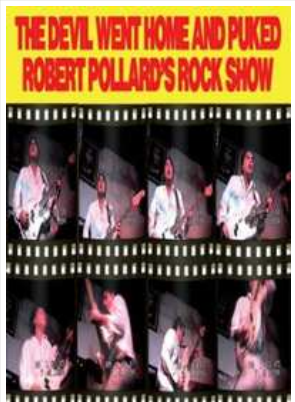
**Guided By Voices**  
**The Devil Went Home and Puked: Robert Pollard's Rock Show [DVD]**

(Rockathon)  
 US release date: 17 November 2009

By **Jake Meaney**

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Since I'm going to wager that the majority of readers who come across this review are Guided By Voices (hereafter GBV) stalwarts and Robert Pollard zealots, let me cut off your vitriol at the pass here by providing my credentials for the following critical lashing. Though I've since lapsed in my faith, there was a good chunk of my life, a decade probably, when I was unwavering and unquestioning in my catholic, across the board, all consuming GBV obsession. I bought, listened to, and pored over every GBV release, no matter how incidental or tangential.



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Bandleader and only constant member Robert Pollard was my oracle for my 20s, a visionary demiurge in the guise of boozy, middle aged, middle-American school teacher, whose obscurantist lyrics and relentless, unflagging pursuit of the perfect pop-rock song indicated some greater search for universal truth. Or... well... something like that.

My interest in GBV started to wane about the same time Pollard's did in his trademark moniker. When he "retired" the band in 2004, in favor of his innumerable, often indistinguishable side projects and solo efforts, I took this occasion to leave the church, and have barely looked back. It was a function pure exhaustion - of both my wallet and listening time—and the growing suspicion that Pollard's talent had exhausted itself.

Prolific enough during the '90s heyday of GBV, Pollard (who claims to be the world record holder in songwriting, and he may just hold it) kicked things into overdrive with the beginning of the '00s. Not content to release a GBV album a year, he started putting out "solo" albums (which, when you are the only constant member, and sole songwriter, of a band, solo is sort of an arbitrary and meaningless distinction) at a furious clip, and recording tossed off albums out of whimsically named side projects with members of GBVs lineup (again, begging the question). It all got to be too much, especially since the quality of songs, and the ratio of good/great songs to dreck start to widen (in favor of the latter).

Consistently brilliant despite (and maybe because of) a truly manic prolificness in the '90s, Pollard ran in to two major problems in the '00s. He started to believe his own press about his songwriting genius; and no



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one could tell him no. With no editorial check in place, he started releasing every goddamn thing that came into his head and made it onto tape, to ever diminishing returns. While he released nothing that was overtly unlistenable, he's come close (the "Circus Devils" side project is a sustained experiment in audience annoyance). It was too much, and becoming too much the same, and too repetitive. I was waved out.

Checking back in after a good four or five years of indifference, here I have before me the DVD release *The Devil Went Home and Puked*, which promises a bonanza of rare GBV footage from all periods (but especially early, "classic" era GBV), studio outtakes, and behind the scenes stuff. Instead, what we get is a completely unhinged, unconnected, often unwatchable 67-minute "collage" of concert snippets shot on crappy video equipment, bad homemade music videos, and unattributed interviews with the extended GBV family. It's a mess, from start to finish, an utter disaster of conception and execution that simply begs reason.

Conceived by Pollard himself, I can only assume that its existence and distribution to fans is some practical joke, or a test to see how far the zealots can be pushed to gobble up anything Pollard spits out. I thought Pollard had reached the nadir when he released a vinyl only album of drunken boozy stage banter (and nothing but!), but *The Devil Went Home and Puked*, is something else entirely – a sustained middle finger that almost achieves a certain brilliance in its aggressive sociopathic incoherence.

So what is here? I'm not sure. I guess I could just rattle off what I saw, but it would result in just an unreadable unintelligible report that would be similarly incoherent. I could try to synthesize it, but I either can't see the larger picture at work here, or don't have the patience (or both). There are indeed some old clips of GBV shows of yore – they are mostly short, as is fitting, since most of their songs back then were short as well, and yet still I don't think I saw one complete performance of a song beginning to end.

There's one show, or one particular clip from a show, that is returned to again and again (maybe the earliest one extent?), shot from some backroom of a bar in July of 1994. I can't tell what the song is, since the audio sounds like it was recorded on a busted boombox that was placed behind a toilet in the men's room, and I really can't even tell if Pollard is there, since the only sustained shot is off former GBV bassist Greg Demos – or, more accurately, his pants. Or his crotch. Whatever.

All we can hear is rattling bass, and all we can see are the bass player's legs. Oh wait! No, there's Pollard standing on a table! For a second... and, back to the pants. And *The Devil Went Home and Puked* keeps coming back to this again and again, like some totemic leitmotif.

This is par for the course for the rest of the DVD. There's no eloquent or nice way to put this: it just flat out sucks. The video quality is terrible (especially of the videos for songs themselves, only one of which is an actual GBV song, the sublime "The Best of Jill Hives"). The cut and paste ADD-addled composition is exhausting and nauseating. But worst of all, it's boring, a long slog even at 67-minutes (I had to watch it in four chunks, since I got antsy after 15-minutes). I just don't know who this is for: fans, friends, enemies maybe?

Probably only Pollard himself can appreciate and enjoy what's going on here. It's bewildering, and infuriating, in equal measure

The only real extra of note is a short "farewell" montage/collage of photographs that ran prior to every show on GBV's final tour (I know, I was there for every exhausting second of one of these epic three hour plus gigs). Set to a wistful instrumental version of late period GBV song "Window of My World", it is a simple slideshow that covers Pollard's career from high school through to the end, and is so much better than anything else in the main feature that it makes you wonder if *this* was really supposed to be the main program here, but was too short to justify its own release.

RATING: **2** 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

— 22 February 2010

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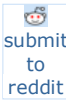

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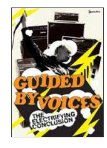
				
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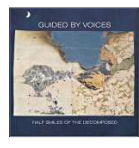


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