

Search



ABOUT | SUBMISSIONS | ADVERTISING | STAFF | [f](#) [t](#) [a](#) [RSS](#)



FEATURES ▾ COLUMNS ▾ BLOGS ▾ MUSIC ▾ FILM ▾ TELEVISION ▾ DVDS ▾ BOOKS ▾ COMICS ▾ MULTIMEDIA ▾ EVENTS ▾ NEWS

DVDs

[Home](#) > [DVDs](#) > [Reviews](#) > [Bruce McDonald | Logo](#) > [Hard Core Logo](#) | [Hard Core Logo 2](#)



NOW ON POPMATTERS

Today • Popular

On Not Spoiling a 16-Year-Old Masterwork: 'Hard Core Logo: All Access Edition'

By [Shaun Huston](#) 7 December 2012

Reviewing a film like *Hard Core Logo* (1996), particularly in conjunction with its belated sequel, *Hard Core Logo 2* (2010), poses a special challenge, one brought into sharp relief by the new Blu-ray edition of the former which includes the latter.

Hard Core Logo contains a surprise, a moment of shock, that strikes me, both as an individual critic and as someone who teaches the film, as important to any initial viewing. I think that this moment has value not because of plot reasons, akin to learning that Verbal Kent is Keyser Soze, but because it's a moment about character, one that will influence how you understand the nature and motivations of, particularly, main character, Joe Dick (Hugh Dillon) (Bruce McDonald's film is, in any case, essentially plotless).

Teaching the film, I have observed that students either love *Hard Core Logo* or they hate it. The surprise is arguably more meaningful to those who love the movie, but even the haters have different reactions. If the reveal were simply about the machinery of the story, I'd be less concerned with how to approach the film. The fact that the unexpected in *Hard Core Logo* is about affect and emotion, rather than a particular, traceable consequence to the reading of plot, is what leaves me feeling circumspect about openly discussing the film and its successor.

While worrying over the details of a story in a 16-year-old movie, especially when those details are as accessible as the nearest web browser or Wikipedia app, may, on the face of it, seem silly, I don't think that the question of spoilers is as simple as that. No matter how old a film or book or television show may be, it is always new to somebody.



Hard Core Logo: All Access Edition (Blu-ray)

Director: [Bruce McDonald](#)
(US DVD: 20 Nov 2012)

[Amazon](#)

Like 0

Tweet 1

PRINT

EMAIL

0 COMMENTS

SHARE

Text: A A A

Features

- The Best Metal of 2012
- The Best Country Music of 2012
- Black Friday Boogie: The Exclusive with "Filiation Generation's" Andy Mangels
- Oliver Sacks' 'Hallucinations'

Columns

- SHORT ENDS & LEADER: Are You in a Film or in Reality? Jean-Luc Godard's 'Weekend' Will Have You Wondering

Blogs

- MIXED MEDIA: 'Tchoupitoulas': A Timeless Night in New Orleans
- SOUND AFFECTS: Counterbalance No. 109: N.W.A's 'Straight Outta Compton'
- MOVING PIXELS: A New Appreciation for Simple Movement

More

Some works, of course, are so woven into the fabric of popular cultures that all kinds of people end up "knowing" them without having seen them, or, even being consciously aware of what they know.

It's virtually impossible to grow up in the United States, for example, without getting pieces of movies like *Casablanca* (1942) or *The Godfather* (1972) inserted into your consciousness. There are certain other films, like *Metropolis* (1927) or *Vertigo* (1958), that are almost inevitably included on the syllabi of intro to film courses on most college and university campuses, or that are routinely elevated by canon-setting institutions like the American Film Institute or *Sight and Sound*. There would be a pointlessness to concerning myself with preserving some sense of initial discovery or surprise when it comes to these kinds of movies. I'm sure there are people who get to cold watch, say, *Citizen Kane* (1941), but such individuals must be few and far between and they probably don't live in the United States, or, I imagine, most English-speaking countries where feature films are a part of shared culture.

Hard Core Logo is not a cultural touchstone. Even in Canada, where it shows up on various "best of" lists and could reasonably be placed in a canon of Anglophone film, I would venture that it is more a cult object than a mass entertainment. So, while it is true that anyone with access to a computer and an internet connection could know all there is to know about the movie before seeing it, that doesn't mean that everyone already does. It seems likely that a majority of people taking note of this review will either only have some vague recollection of having heard the title before, or have this piece as their introduction.

I might be overvaluing my own experience watching the film for the first time, or reading too much into the reactions of my students, but I do think that *Hard Core Logo* is best viewed once where the moment of shock hits you from out of the blue, or maybe just out of the corner of your mind's eye, but certainly not straight-on, and then again after you've been taken aback the once and have had time to process what you've seen. However quixotic or fetishistic my choice may be, I am not going to proceed with a full review, but with just enough of one to, hopefully, bring the film to the attention of those who have yet to see it, but who will be thankful for knowing about it now.

Hard Core Logo is frequently compared to *This is Spinal Tap* (1984), and, as a matter of form, the comparison is apt. Both films are faux documentaries about fictional rock bands, each of which lend their names to their film's title. Neither group is shown at the height of their reputed powers. Not surprisingly, given the nature of the mockumentary, both films work as absurdist comedies. Both rely on the tour as a narrative device. The two also share the conceit of having the director of the actual movie also play the role of the director of the film within the film (Rob Reiner as Marti DiBergi in *Spinal Tap* and Bruce McDonald as "Documentary Filmmaker" in *Hard Core Logo*).

However, while it is easy to list the ways in which *Hard Core Logo* is similar to *Spinal Tap*, such a comparison also masks critical differences. These differences are foregrounded by the opposing identities of the two bands.

Spinal Tap are in the metal/arena rock/get rich/get famous mode of aspiring rock stardom, while Hard Core Logo are in the punk/clubs and auditoriums/get angry/be alienated mode, a state of being necessarily at odds with the very idea of stardom. *Hard Core Logo's* relationship to *Spinal Tap*, whether intentional or no, reprises punk's historic response to prog rock.

Appropriately, the members of Spinal Tap are depicted as bombastic and buffoonish, deluded about their place in the world, but also charming, and a little sad, in their dysfunction. Where Spinal Tap are, ultimately, harmless despite cultivating an image as hard rock bad boys, the members of Hard Core Logo are, largely, marginal misfits, edgy to the point of violence.

The one exception in Logo's band of outsiders is guitarist Billy Tallent (Callum Keith Rennie), who begins and ends the movie moving onto a more popular and mainstream American band, "Jenifur". Tallent's reach for the kind of fame that the members of Spinal Tap unabashedly pursue puts the guitarist in a love-hate relationship with frontman Joe Dick. Whether Joe is disgusted by Tallent's "selling out" or jealous of it, maybe both, is likely unresolvable, but the complexity of their relationship is indicative of the darker and more twisted nature of the Canadian film.

For those hoping to see more of Dick and Tallent, and bandmates, John Oxenberger (John Pyper-Ferguson) and Pipefitter (Bernie Coulson), *Hard Core Logo 2* will fall somewhere between interesting puzzle and disappointment.

Despite the conventional-sounding title, *Hard Core Logo 2* is not a straight-forward sequel. The newer film does not so much continue the story of the first, but reflect back on the events and aftermath of the original, concerned more on dealing with the past than addressing the present, or what happens next.

McDonald, along with co-writer Dave Griffith, honor the passage of time by setting the second film fifteen years after the first rather than picking up with the characters closer to the mid-1990s, or excavating Hard Core Logo's pre-history. This decision necessarily entails a re-orientation of the narrative, but *Hard Core Logo 2* goes so far as to introduce an almost entirely new cast of characters, albeit for the purpose of looking back on the old.

McDonald, or "Bruce the Filmmaker" as he is credited in the present work, is one of two returning characters, the other being music producer and Joe Dick mentor/rival, Bucky Haight (Julian Richings). However, Filmmaker Bruce has a new band to focus on, Die Mannequin, but while *Hard Core Logo 2* teases with the idea that Die Mannequin is the new Hard Core Logo and frontwoman Care Failure, credited as herself, is the new Joe Dick, this time, the filmmaker, and not his subjects, is placed at the center of the story.

As the director follows Die Mannequin to a recording session with Haight, in an old dancehall near Regina, Saskatchewan, Bruce himself is being filmed by Wiccan video artist, and reality TV

PM PICKS



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Call for Feature Essays About Any Aspect of Popular Culture, Present or Past
Call for Music Critics and Music Bloggers

More 

producer, Liz Moore (Shannon Jardine). This set-up opens a number of the narrative veins running through *Hard Core Logo 2*. What is the responsibility of the documentarian and how is what they do different from reality television? How does the camera influence what people do? What is celebrity and how is it different from talent or art?

The film within a film within a film structure places the sequel more in the company of meta-fictions like *Adaptation* (2002) than in the register of the conventional mockumentary. *Hard Core Logo 2* has the structure of being a filmed version of Bruce the Filmmaker's notebook, in which he writes constantly during his, but also Moore's, shoot. The result is that questions like the ones noted above are more often rhetorical musings than issues of fundamental concern. *Hard Core Logo 2* does offer a kind of closure to the two films, but not necessarily in the way that viewers and fans of the first film might want or expect. One could skip the second movie altogether and not miss much in terms of the original. On the other hand, for some, the second film may offer a kind of resolution, at least in the way that Bruce the Filmmaker also finds solace by the end.

The new Blu-ray "All Access Edition" of *Hard Core Logo* includes the sequel and two sets of extra features. Related to the original film are: a commentary track with McDonald, Hugh Dillon, and writer, Noel Baker, a video for *Hard Core Logo*'s biggest "hit", "Who the hell do you think you are?", the original trailer, and an excerpt from Paul McEwan's book-length critical treatment of the film published by University of Toronto Press (2011; the disc also includes a discount code for purchase of the book).

The commentary track is freewheeling and entertaining, while the music video intercuts shots from the film with "concert footage", and a riff on The Beatles in *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). The original trailer, like *Hard Core Logo* itself, stays in "character" as a preview for a documentary.

The extras included for *Hard Core Logo 2* can be divided into two groups. One extends the conceits of the film, treating the characters from the movie as if they were real people. This group includes a director's commentary track, with Simon Less, the musical director on the film, acting as an interviewer, and a short feature. Somehow the commentary track works not only as an in-joke, but also as an effective discussion of the film proper.

The other group consists of a series of filmmaker interviews, and steps outside of the joke to speak to the director, producer Rob Merilees, and actors Failure and Richings as the actual makers of *Hard Core Logo 2* and not as characters from the film.

The version of *Hard Core Logo* on the Blu-ray is a new transfer, supervised by McDonald, and the side-by-side comparison of the two films on the disc allows for an appreciation of the different media used for each, analog in the case of the original, and (mostly) digital in the case of the sequel.

Hard Core Logo is a great film, one of the best fictional treatments of rock ever made. *Hard Core Logo 2* falls well short of that greatness, but does so in such a sideways kind of way that its failings, or imperfections, hardly tarnish the original.

Rating:  10
Extras rating: 



Shaun Huston is an associate professor in Geography and Film Studies at Western Oregon University, where he primarily teaches courses in political and cultural geography. He is currently working on a documentary film about the community of comics creators in Portland, Oregon. You can learn more by visiting his [faculty webpage](#).

Like Tweet  

MEDIA



PopMatters on Facebook

 Like 9,986

Login

You need to be logged into Facebook to see your friends' recommendations.



The Best Progressive Rock (and Metal) of 2012

439 people recommended this.



The Best Metal of 2012

73 people recommended this.



The Best Country Music of 2012

15 people recommended this.



The Best Indie-Pop of 2012

95 people recommended this.

Facebook social plugin