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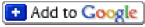
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Review by [Tyler Foster](#) | posted January 14, 2013 | [E-mail the Author](#)

Often hailed as one of the greatest Canadian films of all time, *Hard Core Logo* exists both in time and in the artistic space between *This is Spinal Tap* and *Anvil! The Story of Anvil*. Although theoretically a mockumentary like the Reiner film, the tone of *Logo* is far more serious and realistic, studying the trials and tribulations of a band struggling to exist on the fringes. Director Bruce McDonald (playing a fictionalized version of himself) follows the punk band the film is named after on an impromptu reunion tour across Canada, brought on by the surprisingly cohesive vibe of a benefit concert for Bucky Haight (Julian Richings), an influential producer who lost at least one of his legs in a shooting. The band consists of temperamental, punk prima donna Joe Dick (real-life rocker Hugh Dillon) as the lead singer, the eternally frustrated guitarist Billy Tallent (Callum Keith Rennie), gleeful dope Pipefitter (Bernie Coulson) on bass, and medicated schizophrenic drummer John Oxenberger (John Pyper-Ferguson).

There's a certain grungy, lived-in feel that is crucial to the mood of *Hard Core Logo*. Fans of Blu-Ray transfers may not be entirely impressed, but the washed-out, grainy look of the film perfectly evokes the idea of a band like Hard Core Logo, driving around in a dilapidated shipping van, eating at truck stops and staying in dingy hotels, struggling to complete even a string of shows without a massive meltdown. That feeling is accentuated perfectly by the performances, all four of which drip with a very specific brand of self-loathing, desperation, and bitterness. In the same way that *Spinal Tap* ribs every convention and cliché of rock and roll, *Hard Core Logo* finds the wounds of every band and pours salt into them. McDonald's direction completes the picture, with the interaction between the filmmaker (playing his character) slowly increasing as the band "gets comfortable" around the cameras. By the time the last 20 minutes roll around, the viewer is so far into the groove that they'll accept anything, and McDonald waits until that moment to start stretching the format a little.

If *Tap* was about the goofiness of the job and the people who do the job, *Anvil!* put the spotlight on the relationship between its two core members, and there's strong echoes of that in the contemptuous friendship between Joe Dick and Billy Tallent. Billy is courting a permanent gig with a bigger band in Los Angeles named Jenifur, but he is coaxed out for the benefit for the sake of helping a friend. Joe senses his moment to get his hooks in, and the back and forth between Dillon and Rennie is the blood that pumps through that authentic body. Each conversation is carefully shaded, with the weight of each character's internal monologue hanging overhead. Even when the two men are ostensibly on good terms with one another, there's an awkward vulnerability to both of them in relation to the other that fills in an imaginary decade of good times, heated arguments, and deep grudges.

Personally, I had not heard of *Hard Core Logo* before reviewing this Blu-Ray, so I can't say I had years of excitement built up for McDonald's long-gestating follow up, *Hard Core Logo 2*. Tonally and stylistically, it's the opposite of its predecessor: a light, polished feature that hardly has a second go by in which McDonald (the character) is not an integral part of it. It's also not nearly as interesting or compelling as *Hard Core Logo*, but overall, the movie makes for an entertaining curiosity. The challenge of sequels is finding a balance between everything the audience liked about the original and doing something fresh, and McDonald has to be commended in principle for making a movie that strays completely from the original, which he likely could not have topped in any case.

2 follows McDonald, fresh out of work following the cancellation of his hugely popular Christian western TV show, following up on an interesting story relating to the filming of the original *Hard Core Logo*. Without giving away too many details about *Hard Core Logo*, the influence of Joe Dick and the previous film have turned Die Mannequin lead singer Care Failure (playing a version of herself) into the headlines, and she wants McDonald, as a friend of Joe's, to shoot a documentary about Die Mannequin and their latest album. It sounds like a sham, but McDonald agrees anyway, leading to a fairly goofy 90-minute journey into McDonald's headspace that gently spoofs showbiz, filmmaking, and McDonald himself. It's far from essential (*Trigger*, McDonald's film about two female musicians reuniting after many years that was written as *Hard Core Logo 2* and features Rennie reprising his role as Billy, seems like it could've been a better fit), but seeing as 2 can almost be considered a bonus feature, it's worth a look with expectations in check.

Hard Core Logo: ****½
Hard Core Logo 2: **½

The Blu-Ray

Hard Core Logo is offered in a Steelbook, done up to look like a case of some sort that you'd find in the back of a roadie's van, emblazoned with stickers and tape. Inside the steel case, a montage of black-and-white photographs (seemingly solely from the original film) provide a backdrop, and there is no insert accompanying the single Blu-Ray disc.

The Video and Audio

Hard Core Logo receives a 1.78:1 1080i AVC presentation on this disc, and as mentioned in the body of the review, this is a film which I feel should look the way it does, and not necessarily polished up in a brand new HD presentation. The picture has gone a little yellow / green, with whites turning a mixture of the two colors in that ultra-specific low-budget film stock kind of way. Blacks occasionally crush, but detail is reasonably strong given the nature of the production, and grain is present and healthy, suggesting there might not be much more to be pulled out of the film's original elements anyway.



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Although the transfer is interlaced, I didn't catch any problems arising from it, although I'm sure many home theater aficionados will be disappointed (more on that in the next paragraph...). *Hard Core Logo 2*, on the other hand, presented in 1.78:1 1080p AVC, boasts all the color, clarity, and detail of a film made in the modern age, blowing the presentation of the original out of the water, but also artistically serving as another indication that the two films couldn't be any more different.

Now, here's what will likely be the bummer for many viewers: both films are presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and not an uncompressed format, which seems like a pretty massive oversight for two films about rock and roll, both boasting a ton of music. How this keeps happening to films of this ilk (I'm having flashbacks to *The Blues Brothers*), I don't know, but the next time a distributor thinks about releasing a well-loved music film on Blu-Ray with a standard definition 5.1 mix, they really ought to think twice. On the good side, both tracks are strong for SD, with the audio for the original film really livening up with the music (most of the interview segments are too low key to spread out to the other speakers), and the audio for the second film offering a more general, modern, 5.1 experience (there's probably a little less music in the sequel than there is in the original, but 5.1 being a modern standard, the track makes more use of the surround channels). Both films offer English captions for the deaf and hard of hearing.

The Extras

Both films boast a feature-length **audio commentary**, by director Bruce McDonald, screenwriter Noel Baker, and actor Hugh Dillon on the original, and McDonald and Simon Less on the sequel. The track for the first one is a fairly casual affair, reminiscing about the other material that was shot and the editing of the movie, stories from the set, the construction of the script, differences from the book, and the band dynamics (the give-and-take between Dillon showing the actors how to be a band, and the actors showing Dillon how to be an actor). Reasonably interesting, and free of significant gaps of silence, but surprisingly subdued for such a wild movie (and it's a shame that Rennie is not present). The track for the sequel is similar in tone, but the story of the film influences the commentary -- you could say, in a sense, that this is an "in-character" commentary of sorts. Personally, the gimmick is a little silly, but I suppose the movie is too.

Hard Core Logo extras wrap up with a **"Who the Hell Do You Think You Are?" music video** (2:20, **SD**), and nine pages of **text excerpts** -- very tiny text -- from a making-of book by Paul McEwan.

Hard Core Logo 2 gets a slightly larger spread of material. First up is a **featurette** (18:49, **HD**). Although this is called a featurette, it appears to be a reel of deleted scenes from the film, as the participants continue to reference the characters as if they were real. This is followed by four **interviews**, with Bruce McDonald (17:39, **HD**), producer Rob Merilees (4:49, **HD**), actor Care Failure (4:12, **HD**), and actor Julian Richings (6:55, **HD**). Like the commentaries, these are a little on the low-key, dry side, and McDonald's covers much of the same ground as the commentary. Of them, Richings is the most animated, and the mumbly, uncomfortable Care Failure interview is the most skippable.

Original theatrical trailers for both *Hard Core Logo* and *Hard Core Logo 2* are also included.

Conclusion

I went into *Hard Core Logo* expecting a comedy, what I got was a deft directorial tightrope act that ends up as one of the most painfully accurate films about the ego and emotion in rock and roll. Although there are a bunch of laughs, the performances and style are just so authentic that it's hard to tear your eyes away from the movie, much less believe that Joe Dick and *Hard Core Logo* are a fictional group. Although the sequel is more of a goofy trifle than a serious follow-up to a film that really can't and shouldn't be followed up on, and despite the interlaced picture and DD 5.1 audio, American fans should consider this Blu-Ray disc **recommended** just for the chance to see the movie, and look at the sequel an extensive bonus feature.

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