



## Wisdom in Chains

### Die for Us, Live [DVD]

(MVD)  
 US release date: 24 April 2007

by **Erik Hinton**

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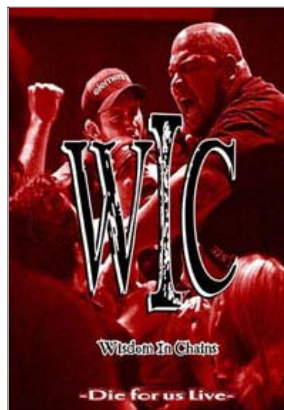
There is something contradictory about a live DVD of a hardcore band. As anyone who has ever been to a hardcore show will testify, the band's performance itself is hardly the focus of such shows. Since its inception in the late '70s, hardcore (birthed from the acerbic womb of bands such as Minor Threat, Black Flag, etc.) has revolved around the communal cohesion and response to the music being played. One needs but to glance at the liner notes or interviews with any hardcore band and, most likely, one will find more instances of "family" than in even the least creative genealogy texts.

Hardcore shows are a forum for similarly attuned teenagers and young adults to gather in a unity that only a sweat-soaked, choleric pit of peers fighting each other can truly bring. This togetherness is the real focal point of a hardcore show. Often, as demonstrated many times throughout the course of this DVD, the band will cede their microphones to atonal fans to sing the refrains. Such exhibitions reveal a fundamental truth of hardcore: unlike most genres of music from opera to virtuosic guitar rock, hardcore is not about the spectacle of the band but rather the all-inclusive participation of everyone present.

So how does one translate such an experience in which subject and object are conflated to a medium which strictly divides the two such as video? The simple answer: You don't. That is not to say that *Wisdom in Chains: Die for Us Live* does not try to do so. This record of the May 2006 show in Kingston, Pennsylvania combines an assortment of low angled shots, extensive footage of crowd response, and a wide variety of close-ups edited quickly together in an attempt to emulate the frenetic energy of the show. While this is done sloppily and only vaguely matches the beat, such mimesis fails not because of the flaccidity of its execution but because of the impossible chasm which it means to span.

If anything, these flailing attempts to match the dynamism of being in a pit and screaming lyrics with one's friends piled on top of them make the failure of the video medium all the more salient in its conspicuous attempts at reconciliation. Every wide-angled frame of an enthusiastic youth crowd surfing reminds viewers that they are firmly on the ground, every telephotoed face-to-face shouting into a microphone of the crowd and singer marks the video's audience's distance from the fray.

Another failing of the DVD, albeit perhaps predicated by the subject rather than the technique, is that the 25-odd minutes chronicled on the disk do not build or arc whatsoever. One of the most enjoyable aspects of watching recorded concerts is being able to replay the momentum of a show which grows from a simple song or two to an experience as the musical elements permutate. It would be facile to blame this shortcoming on hardcore music itself, the songs of which are very similar. However, I have experienced many such performances and, more times than not, there is a definite



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progression in milieu.

What starts as a few excited unlookers running around and hardcore dancing with a somewhat apprehensive crowd morphs into an omnipresent "moshing" in which nary a single youth is inert. Finally, as fatigue combines with a peculiarly generated fellowship, the crowd congeals as the set comes to a close, flailing arms repurposed for the holding of a mass of teenagers together.

Family. No such spectacle occurs here; intimacy is frustrated rather than flourished. I feel that a large factor in this disappointment of expectations is the camera's stagnant repetition of shots: close-up of singer. Low angle of guitar. Wide shot. Rinse. Repeat. Nothing is withheld from the spectator in which to facilitate a build. The camera should have kept a safe wide-angle which gradually crept into a telephoto climax throughout the course of the set. Additionally, the arrhythmic editing completely eschews acceleration in favor of a complacent medium tempo.

Finally, there is no post-mortem. One derives endless pleasure from witnessing a pit fan out and self-abused fans collect themselves...and often pieces of their clothing. Without such closure, the DVD seems to just end and the experiencing of witnessing the show is anything but emulated.

The two special features provide a clear binary between the strengths and weaknesses of this release. The first is a three song recording from a live show at the First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia. The recording quality makes the performance unwatchable, there is hardly any editing, and, most damningly, the performance feels sterile. The shortcomings of the medium are grandstanded.

However, there is also an interview with Mad Joe Black, the lead singer of Wisdom in Chains. In this roughly 10-minute segment, Black cogently outlines how hardcore music unites people and delivers a brief recap of hardcore's history. The spoken content of this interview is useful in its explication of the oft-maligned and misinterpreted genre. However, again, poor camera work—who shoots an interview in extreme low angle?—undermines the quality of the piece.

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— 23 May 2007

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