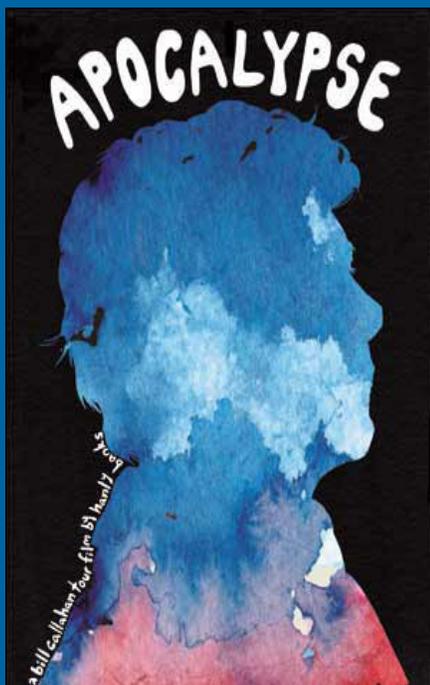


FILM REVIEW: Bill Callahan's Apocalypse



American songwriter Bill Callahan does not go out of his way to win fans. Notoriously reticent and reserved off stage, he lets his cryptic, but never uninteresting lyrics, delivered in a rich baritone, do the talking for him.

Apocalypse: A Bill Callahan Tour Film, a concert film by Hanly Banks currently appearing at festivals around the world, does little to demystify the enigmatic musician. But, shot over a period of about two weeks while Callahan and his bare-bones band were crisscrossing the United States in support of his 2011 album, Apocalypse, the film shows Callahan at his most intimate. "Performing live is the realest me there is," he says at one point.

The film consists primarily of concert footage from a handful of shows, interspersed with fleeting scenes of the American roadside and the disembodied musings of Callahan responding to an invisible interviewer. Banks, who worked

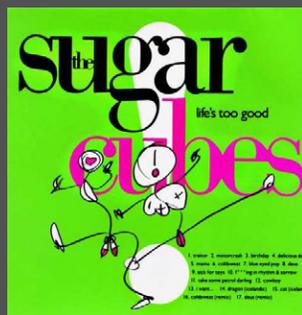
for years producing short films for Fader magazine, has a keen ability to capture the rhythms and textures of a live performance.

She lets the camera linger lovingly over her subject, whether it is Callahan strumming in the shadows on stage or the tender images of America passing by outside the window of a tour van. The strength of the film is the simplicity of its presentation. At the end of every song and montage, you want to stand and cheer.

It is possible to read the film as a love letter to Callahan, but that would be to mistake his introversion for narcissism. It is more accurately described as a paean to the American experience, a meditative depiction of a man searching for a country he loves despite its flaws. Like Callahan himself, the film gets under your skin and is hard to forget.

- Luke Johnson

RE-LIC'D



ARTIST: The Sugarcubes
ALBUM: Life's Too Good
RELEASED: 1988

VERDICT:



Remember this historic import from Iceland? Björk & Co. brought the 'strange' and the kids in the US ate it up...

The debut from this Icelandic group included the hit "Birthday", a single that put them on the map in both Europe and the US. For the less initiated, this offering also kickstarted the career of a certain Ms. Björk (née Guðmundsdóttir).

This is not to be mistaken for an early Björk solo album however, because as a band the Sugarcubes could deliver. It's all here... fun, poppy, upbeat tracks interspersed with raw energy and vocal gymnastics. Layers of instrumentation provide a solid bed for the aural eargasm that hits you between the eyes, from the beginning volume-check of the album (wait before you adjust that dial on the first track!) all the

way through the closing notes. Guitar parts are delivered from Thor Eldon (Björk's husband at the time), and while not overly complicated, fit the kitschy nature of the album while maintaining the "riding the edge of chaos" feel that carries throughout.

One of the most accessible tracks is the US hit 'Motorcrash', a simple, poppy eyewitness account that leaves ample room for Björk's vocal instrumentation. The group has received varied comparisons to groups of the era such as the B-52s, and tracks like this and 'Blue Eyed Pop' are the most obvious sources for such comparison.

Those comparisons quickly end and can turn dark considering the themes running through the

album. Fun, quirky songs about death ('Traitor'), accidents (the aforementioned 'Motorcrash') and a meeting with God ('Deus').

But it all works, as none of it is ever taken too seriously. And that is the Sugarcubes in a nutshell... light-hearted chaos. It's really a brilliant formula, and not easy to pull off so well. And this was a debut!

The most amazing aspect of this album is how well it has stood up over the test of time. Many newer indie albums wish they were this good, which explains why this ranks well on so many 'Greatest Albums of All Time' lists. Life's too good to not give this a listen.

- Josh Seaton