



THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

MOVIE REVIEW

The Boston Globe

## 'Dispatch' fondly details band's last stand

By Steve Morse, Globe Staff | July 28, 2005

When the indie band Dispatch played its farewell show before tens of thousands of fans at the Hatch Shell a year ago this Sunday, many started a chant of "Don't break up! Don't break up!" Very little was known about why the group was calling it quits -- especially after such stunning grass-roots success -- but the reasons are movingly outlined in the fine new documentary "Last Dispatch," which has its world premiere tonight at Somerville Theatre.

"I think we stopped creating together. It became too much of a head game and we became too defensive about it," Chad Urmston of Dispatch says in the film. "We just weren't supporting each other," adds bandmate Brad Corrigan.

The movie does not dwell on sadness, however. Director Helmut Schleppi, whose first feature, 2003's "A Foreign Affair," was an official selection of the Sundance Film Festival, instead focuses on the spirit of a band that defied the odds by doing things its way and never letting a major record label run its affairs.

The filmmakers say the Hatch Shell show is considered the biggest indie-rock show ever held (it was free) and Dispatch's underdog credibility is why so many fans came from as far away as South Africa and Brazil to attend it. The film captures the 12 days leading up to and including the show, catching the band in rehearsals and in soul-searching moments, as well as at a barbecue at Urmston's family home in Sherborn and at a neighbor's barn at nearby Charlescote Farm.

The cameras follow a trio that had incredible talent (the vocal harmonies among Urmston, Corrigan, and Pete Francis at the rehearsals are spellbinding) and a set of anticorporate principles that caught the imagination of fans -- who put three Dispatch albums on the Billboard charts with only the help of the Internet and word of mouth. It becomes a heartwarming David-and-Goliath story as these three former Middlebury College students make their way through the thicket of cynicism that passes for the modern music business.

"I'm proud of the independence of this band," says Urmston. "The people who listened to us were the only ones who understood that path with us. We never did anything where our vision felt compromised."

The problem is that they never learned how to compromise among themselves. They became flustered when interviewers would ask, "Who is the lead singer?" That's because all three sang. The band's attempted democracy eventually crumbled as each member wrote new tunes that he felt deserved the most attention.

That discord dissolved, at least temporarily, at the Hatch Shell finale, which comes at the end of the film (a previously released DVD called "All Points Bulletin" has more footage of the concert) and shows the band going out on its own terms in a utopian setting. The sight of so many thousands of fans singing every word to the songs is exhilarating -- and the viewer is left hoping that there may still be a Dispatch encore in the years to come. ■

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