

# Mighty Lizard

Blood, sweat and beers gush in this rare look at one of the '90s finest live rock bands By Andy Beta

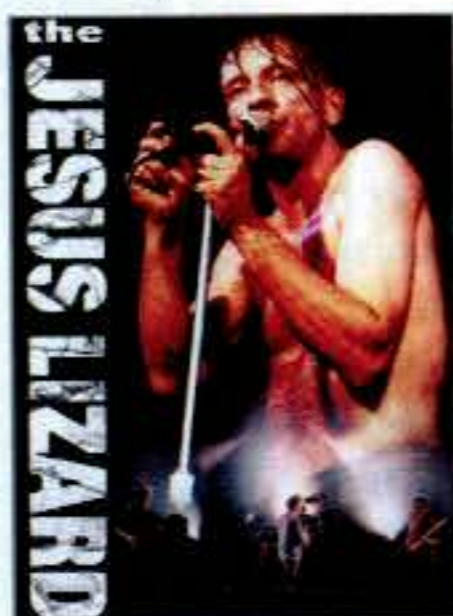
## THE JESUS LIZARD

Live

[MVD VISUAL] ★★★★★½

In a recent profile in the *Village Voice*, LCD Soundsystem frontman James Murphy states unequivocally that the Jesus Lizard, a rock quartet from Chicago, was “fucking good live.” Murphy is slightly understating the fact though; when operating nightly at their peak through the early '90s, the Jesus Lizard were in fact fucking great live, their concerts a merger of the profane and profound, capable of rendering cheap-beer swill so it cleansed like holy water.

I myself got baptized back in high school, sneaking out one night back in 1992 and driving 90 miles to Austin, Texas, to see the band play. I was sprayed by cheap beer, sweat and no doubt some blood. It was a homecoming for Jesus Lizard bassist David William Sims and feral-looking frontman David Yow, who both played in hallowed Austin punk band Scratch Acid before relocating to Chicago, where they formed The Jesus Lizard with guitarist Duane Denison and—dumping a drum machine that plagued their earliest efforts—dynamic drummer Mac McNeilly.



Together, The Jesus Lizard embraced the noisiness endemic to the Midwest's underground-punk scene at the time: part Amphetamine Reptile bludgeoning mixed with the teeth-gnashing atonal guitar rock favored by Chicago-based producer Steve Albini. With Albini behind the boards, The Jesus Lizard perfectly merged the psychobilly/cowpunk leads of Denison and the throttling low-end of Sims and

McNeilly (as captured on albums like 1991's near-perfect *Goat* and 1992's equally intense *Liar*). The music was capped by Yow, who looked like a derelict who spent his days drinking down by the river and had a penchant for embodying (to borrow a term from Charles

Bukowski) “tales of ordinary madness.”

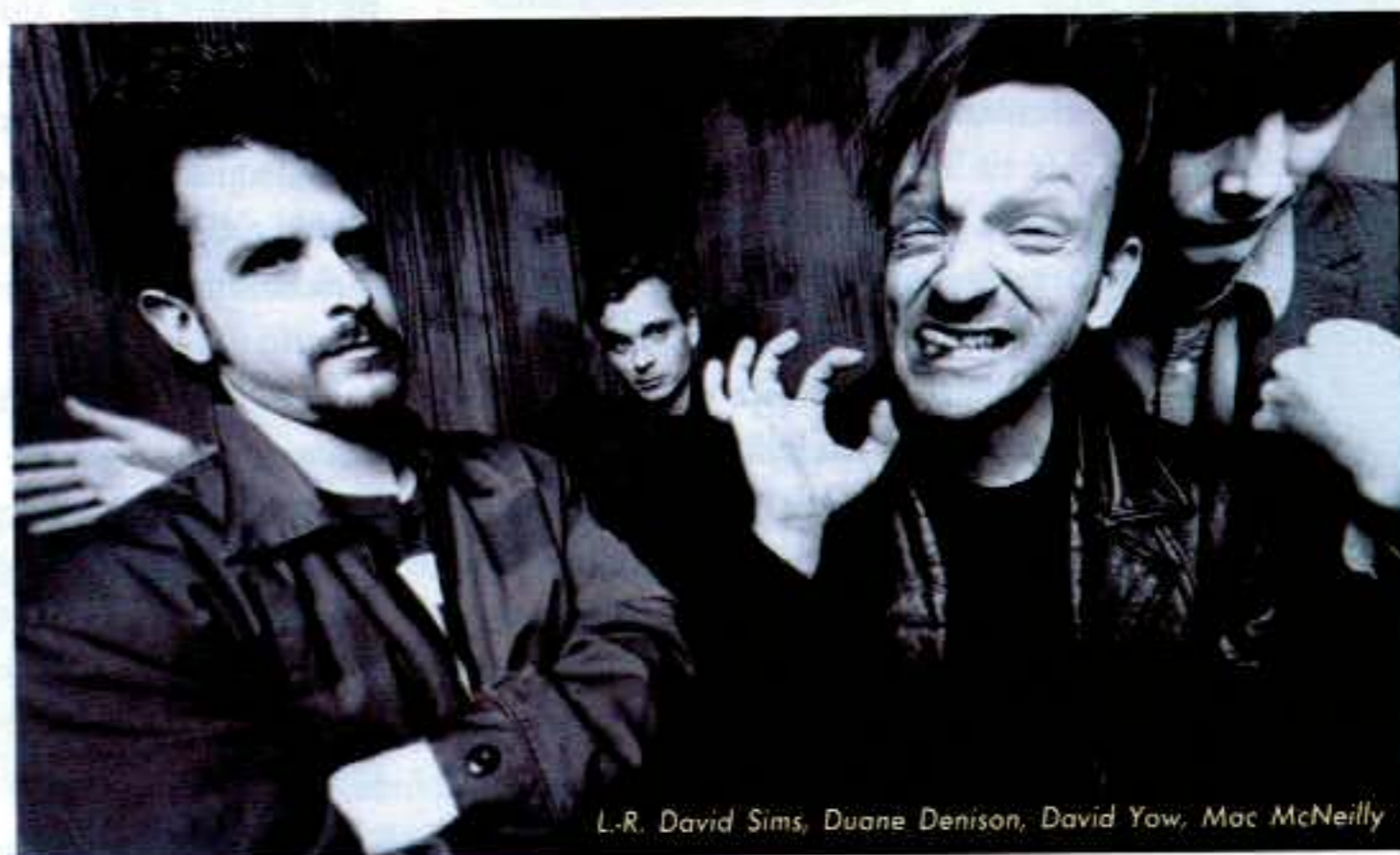
Characters such as homeless vets, mass-murderers, belligerent drunks and psychopaths populated and crawled across The Jesus Lizard's songs, all conjured by Yow's sneers, snarls and howls. As frontman and focal point, he acted like the deranged sort of folk you were taught to avoid contact with at all costs, and yet the band was as massive and undeniable as Led Zeppelin had been in its era. It's no wonder that Nirvana nearly blanched at doing a split single with

the band in 1993. Never mind that Kurt Cobain, Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic were the biggest band in the world at the time—they got blown off their side of the wax by the fierceness of the Lizard. But after being co-opted by mainstream labels and snubbed by producer Albini for “selling out,” The Jesus Lizard slowly slid downhill, finally dissolving in 1999.

This welcome DVD set offers a tantalizing glimpse of The Jesus Lizard in all the raw power of its heyday. Playing in October of 1994, in Boston, the two-camera setup here captures a good deal of the experience, yet offers a weird remove. Recalling my own night spent in the pit, in the maelstrom itself, holding up Yow's rag-doll frame as he continually flung it at us with scant

regard for his physical well-being, it feels strange to see the swell of bodies at a distance now.

The intensity remains searing, even a decade hence. Songs like “Puss,” “Mouth Breather,” “Gladiator,” and “(Fly) On (The Wall)” have rarely been equaled. While the band lays down its monstrous riffs, Yow works the packed crowd into a lather. He picks spots and leaps into the maw, never missing a word even as his body is tossed among the sea of hands. A mid-concert close-up of his slight frame captures Yow perfectly: bent over, drooling with exhaustion, his back glistening with sweat and drawn-blood dappling his greasy jeans. It's a divine image.



L-R. David Sims, Duane Denison, David Yow, Mac McNeilly

## TOM JONES

This is Tom Jones: Rock 'N' Roll Legends

[TIME LIFE] ★★★★★½

DVD collection remembers time when a variety-show star actually shone brightly

There once was a time when, if you were successful (The Muppets) or attractive (Donny and Marie), you got a variety show. Tom Jones was both. The nine episodes in this collection (57, overall, ran from 1969-71) feature The Who (with a bugged-out Keith Moon) performing “Pinball Wizard,” a young Richard Pryor, a drum-bashing Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin and several others. It's



Tom Jones

a revelation to see these talents in their prime, but there's no denying that Tom Jones is the star of every episode, as he sings with each guest (his duets with Janis Joplin and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young are par-

ticularly thrilling) before holding a mini-concert at show's end. And, while Jones has since become somewhat of a Vegas joke, this set is a reminder of just how dynamic a performer he was in his heyday. *Gilbert Cruz*

## THE KILLERS

Leaving Las Vegas

[PRIDE] ★★

Documentary captures The Killers' rise from out-of-step Las Vegas Brit-poppers to international superstars

The Killers, just now reaching their fifth anniversary as a creative unit, seem like an odd choice for the retrospective-documentary treatment, something *Leaving Las Vegas* largely confirms. Comprised of interviews with the band's original drummer, assorted friends and a handful of Las

Vegas club promoters and radio programmers, the film labors to establish The Killers' struggle against the wave of nü metal and emo bands that dominated the local music scene in 2002. However true, the story of The Killers' trek to Britain to find an audience, and the resulting multi-platinum success that greeted them upon their return, just isn't that compelling, and there are few revelations to make up for the lack



of original interview footage or licensed music from the band. By the end, it seems like the band members themselves are only a footnote in their own story, making the film feel long at just over an hour. *Matt Fink*