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Sullivan Hall NYC

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The Black Crowes - Cabin Fever

Silver Arrow

"The music sounds just like it feels." So reads the caption on the disc's inner sleeve, over a photo of the wintery, rustic beauty of the road leading to the Levon Helm Studios. While watching the Crowes perform these songs to an intimate audience in the same room where the legendary drummer holds his always-well-received Rambles, I couldn't imagine a more fitting place for the band's recently released double-album *Before the Frost...Until the Freeze* to be recorded.

Before the Frost... was released on CD via standard online and retail outlets. Included inside the packaging was an access code to be used at the Crowes' website for a free digital download of the *...Until the Freeze* portion of the material. Both were recorded live in front of an audience at Helm's Woodstock, New York home/studio, and *Cabin Fever* is the video documentary of that process. This release clocks in at just about 75 minutes. As those familiar with the album(s) will realize, that unfortunately does not allow enough time to cover all the material contained in its audio-only companion(s). While there are undoubtedly those who would take issue with which songs were included here and which were not, there is enough serious jamming and vocal gusto included on this disc that most fans are likely to be not only satisfied, but also impressed. Additional benefits to recording where they did are the presence and chops of multi-instrumentalist and Helm's musical right-hand man, Larry Campbell, who's featured with the band throughout.

The first offerings are "Aimless Peacock" and "Good Morning Captain," also the first tracks on each of the two album components. The "Shady Grove" that follows is not the version that made it onto the digital album, but rather a private run-through in what looks to be Levon's front room, with Rich Robinson playing acoustic while Chris sings and taps out the rhythm with his feet and hands. Then, in one of only two non- *Before the Frost...Until the Freeze* selections, we are treated to Rich leading the full band through Velvet Underground's "Oh Sweet Nuthin'." (A real solid highlight in this reviewer's opinion.) The "Garden Gate" that appears is done bluegrass-style, with the band playing as they all stand facing each other in a circle. True beauties "Roll Old Jeremiah" and "Appaloosa" are up next, followed by the other non- *Before the Frost...Until the Freeze* song, Chris' "Little Lizzie Mae." Then another one with Rich leading, this time on his own "What Is Home?," and the show portion is closed with the smooth rocker "Been a Long Time (Waiting on Love)." The credits roll as we watch a silent montage of off-stage video clips of the band, working hard and enjoying it all, while "Shine Along" plays as accompaniment.



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Interspersed amongst and between the songs presented on this video are several "behind the scenes" moments. One of the first is a heartfelt exchange between Chris and Levon, wherein the chief Crowe expresses his gratitude to Mr. Helm for allowing them to record their newest material at his home/studio. It is not at all difficult to see the genuine satisfaction that Levon gets from being able to have some role in the magic that the Crowes are laying down these days. This newest line-up has really come together and gelled in ways few could have predicted when Luther Dickinson and Adam MacDougall joined the band just about two years prior to this performance. While MacDougall is not yet showing the same strong presence on keys that his predecessor old-man Harsch had, Dickinson comes across as such a natural fit that it is no surprise these guys are in such a fertile creative space. Throughout the performances captured here, The Black Crowes just seem to completely inhabit their countrified roots-groove in a way that makes it distinctly their own.

In addition to seeing Chris Robinson engage in some of his renowned audience interaction on this disc, we also get him sharing a couple of amusing anecdotes with his bandmates. One of these is a description of his own psychedelic exploration from the previous evening. Hearing that simple verbal acknowledgment of the band's access to and recognition of that agent of existential insight that has already given so much to so many, I was able to better understand how it is that they can consistently do their thing with such power and sincerity. After having now watched *Cabin Fever* several times over, I'm left with every reason to believe we can expect more instant classics from these guys soon.

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