

Film Review: Everyday Sunshine The Story Of Fishbone



Chris Metzler and Lev Anderson's almost two-hour documentary on Afro-Punk godfathers Fishbone is an interior look at the band's origins, their internal battles and external battles with an industry that never had a prominent place for swarthy genre-crossing rockers. Fishbone became rare Black punk rockers who melded funk, ska, reggae and R&B into a lone sound that had a minor flirtation with mainstream audiences in the mid 90's. Laurence Fishburne narrates the story of how Angelo Moore, Norwood Fisher, Kendall Jones, Walter A. Kibby II, Phillip Fisher and Christopher Dowd got together as a band while attending junior high school in South Central Los Angeles. They happily declared a musical outsiderism passed down from Arthur Lee, Jimi Hendrix and Bad Brains where their version of Blackness could only resonate with mostly white audiences. Despite the influence of Sly Stone, George Clinton and Prince their confrontational and unapologetic depth of references never cracked the level of popularity those artists achieved. As young musical insurrectionists, the band became a guiding light for groups like Jane's Addiction, No Doubt and The Red Hot Chili Peppers as they became legendary on the punk scene for their kinetic showmanship.

Their originality became a blessing and a curse once they entered the segregated music industry that failed to find a commercially viable place for them. David Kahne, who signed them to their first recording contract with Columbia, recants the way the company's Black music division looked at Fishbone with scorn and immediately categorized them as a rock/ white band. The only problem was that the industry had

never made a Black rock star save for Jimi Hendrix. Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Ike Turner and Bo Diddley were successful but never had the major spotlight of a Pat Boone or Elvis Presley. Consequently after the disappointing sales of *The Reality Of My Surroundings* Sony gave them another chance with *Give A Monkey A Brain and He'll Swear He's The Center Of The Universe* and then released them from their only contract with a major label. The problems with the industry were exacerbated by their inside wars that climaxed with kidnapping charges and various members leaving the fold. Attempts at democracy were difficult with six egos and competing creativities to manage. Angelo Moore's termin-loving alter ego named Dr. Maddvibe became a violent annoyance to other members. Christopher Dowd felt underappreciated for his songwriting skills and everyone ultimately believed that his voice had no equal footing among the rest. History has taught music fans via The Beatles, The Temptations and so many more groups that any band worth its stay is replete with warfare.

[youtube]ChXk4R0mGNw[/youtube]

Commentary from peers like Vernon Reid adds perspective and more legitimacy to the narrative especially when Reid comments on the quandary of Fishbone recordings never being able to duplicate the live experience. Reid's status as a Black rocker who also experienced a brief but more accomplished bout with the industry is the kind of insight needed to illuminate Fishbone's story. Little Richard, who recorded with Fishbone, would have also been a great resource in addition to the other living Black granddaddies of rock and the industry's chosen token Lenny Kravitz.

Ice-T, who carries the unique double badge for being a credible rapper and rocker also opines on the absence of a neat mold and compartment to market the guys. Despite this never-ending conundrum Fishbone made it through the '90s by constantly touring and releasing the soulful thrashing of

Chim Chim™s *Badass Revenge* on Dallas Austin™s Rowdy Records. The camera follows the group into the 2000™s and we see the crestfallen release of *Still Stuck In Your Throat* from 2007 but there is no mention of 2000™s *Fishbone and the Familyhood Nextperience Present: The Psychotic Friends Nuttwerx*. The album from 2000 put them on a cultural ascendance manifested in a Sly Stone cover with guest appearances from Gwen Stefani, Rick James and George Clinton and more musically and socially accomplished songs. Casual viewers will read the film as the story of a band that failed instead of an industry that holds the dominant narrative of rock captive and ignores those who fall outside of it. Other audiences will find a unique posse of artists making music that exposes several textures of Blackness purely on commission from the soul.

[Check for Fishbone screenings.](#)