

From Awkward to Fierce, Dinosaur Jr. Re-Creates 'Bug' Album in Northampton Show

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Maybe skip the interview segment next time.



The influential Amherst indie-rock trio Dinosaur Jr. prefaced a hometown(-ish) benefit show for Whole Children Tuesday at the Calvin Theatre in Northampton by submitting to an on-stage Q&A with punk-rock raconteur Henry Rollins.

It was a fine idea in theory. The band was performing its 1988 album "Bug" in its entirety, and anecdotes from back in the day about the making, and cultural context, of the album would have been fitting accompaniment. But pairing an interviewer as loquacious as Rollins with a band as reticent as Dinosaur Jr. made for an uncomfortable and halting 15 minutes for pretty much everyone in the theater.

The band dispelled the awkwardness when the musicians came out to play, charging through a pair of post-"Bug" songs including "The Wagon," a wistful melody cutting through a churning blend of bass, drums and singer J Mascis' super-heated guitar.

Next came "Bug," the last album the original lineup of the band released before Mascis kicked out bassist Lou Barlow, leading to years of enmity before Mascis, Barlow and drummer Murph regrouped in 2005.

It sounded on "Bug" as though someone remembered belatedly to turn on the house PA system: everything was suddenly louder and crisper, with overpowering blasts of guitar pushed to the brink of feedback on "Freak Scene," the booming crack of Murph's drums on "Yeah We Know" and guitar squall worthy of an army of screeching wildcats on "Let It Ride."

On "Don't," the last song on the original version of "Bug" (the 2005 reissue included an extra track the band didn't play), Barlow invited a fan to help shriek the lyrics in his place after the bassist blew out his voice doing the song Monday night in Maine. Not only did the fan look a little like Barlow, with a big mess of curly hair, he took to the part like a Method actor, howling into the microphone and eventually shedding his shirt as the band thrashed around behind him.

Dinosaur returned after a pause for two more songs, ending with its cover of the Cure's Just Like Heaven."

Rollins did a spoken-word performance before Dinosaur, extolling the work done by the show's beneficiary, an after-school center for children with special needs, and telling anecdotes from his recent travels with a documentary crew for National Geographic.

Before Rollins, Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore, a Northampton resident (and Connecticut native), played a set of hazy acoustic psychedelic folk jams, most of which came from his new album "Demolished Thoughts."

The Warblers, featuring Mascis' brother on vocals and guitar, opened the show with a half-hour of noisy, but catchy, rock.