Dan Condon: Sick Tunes, July 11, 2013

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It's time we recognised the significance of the humble bootleg taper.

I don't understand tapers; you know, the people who bootleg live shows. Why would anyone dedicate so much time, effort and money to a thankless task that is going to end in you getting sued, ripped off without credit or fielding complaints about sound quality, timeliness and whatever else us nerds consider to be important.

But I love tapers. Sure, it's not often that I'll sit down and throw on a scratchy recording of a show that happened years ago, but these historical records of live music hold far more value than most will ever realise.

At the very best, a taped show makes you wish you were there, it gives you a chill similar to the kind you experience when you see something that's so good you can't fight against it, no matter how emotionally stoic you feel and no matter how hard you try.

Here are five instances of taping I've been really thankful for over the years. They are all online with permission from the artists.

WILCO – Live At Solid Sound Festival on Friday 21 June, 2013

It was this recent **Wilco** set that made me decide to dedicate this week's blog to the work of tapers. I was never going to make it to the Solid Sound Festival that Wilco put on this year and, as soon as I heard about the setlist they put together for their set full of covers, I was really bummed that I couldn't have seen it myself (despite seeing the band twice in recent months).

Lo and behold, there was someone there taping the whole thing and it has ended up online so that thousands of Wilco fans around the world can hear what it sounds like when Jeff Tweedy and co tackle Daft Punk, Pharrell Williams and Nile Rodgers, among many others. Sure, I still wish I was there, but this is a nice consolation.

RYAN ADAMS – Live at Great American Music Hall, San Francisco on Saturday 17 February, 2001

By their very nature, less is more when it comes to bootlegs and these kinda early **Ryan Adams** recordings are magical. He's pretty kind when it comes to bootleggers, so there is a wealth of material freely available on archive.org and through the trading circles if you're seeking recordings from any stage of his career.

Give that *Heartbreaker* is far and away his best album in my eyes; I always gravitate to the recordings of his shows from around that period. There's always plenty of comical banter and he plays those songs so damn well by himself.

HANK WILLIAMS III – Live at Alley Katz, Richmond VA on Thursday 6 April, 2006

If you're looking for something a little grittier, then **Hank III** – the grandson of Hank Williams and son of Hank Williams Jr. – will make you feel like you're in a dirty, violent, booze soaked US bar, probably fearing for your safety.

This was actually my first exposure to the music of Hank III and I'm pretty thankful for that; the live performances of his country material are full of a nasty kind of attitude that gets buffed off of his studio recordings. It was this almost violent take on country music that endeared me to him and, in the end, made me buy his records.

Having said that, when he starts pulling out his Assjack punk rock material, that's where I switch off; but each to their own.

FUGAZI – Live at Time Tavern, Darwin on Wednesday 25 June, 1997

You can't talk taping without talking **Fugazi**.

I never got to see Fugazi play live, but thanks to the Fugazi Live Series, I can get a little taste of what it might have been like. What's even better than that, is that I can get a little taste of what it might have been like anywhere in the world. I understand if you don't really care what Fugazi playing in Darwin on a Wednesday night in 1997 sounds like, but I sure as hell do.

The best thing about the Fugazi shows, besides the sheer number of them currently available, is that they're graded quite accurately quality wise, so you're not stuck with a shitty transfer from a Dictaphone tape where you can't distinguish the songs – unless that's what you want, of course, in which case knock yourself out.

HEINZ RIEGLER – Live at Jamie's Espresso on Thursday 29 October, 2008

This was one of the best shows I ever saw. The storeroom of a little café on one of Brisbane's most exclusive streets was opened up to Melbourne's Microflora and local man-about-town **Heinz Riegler** – formerly of the excellent Not From There and Nightstick.

We crammed into the disarmingly stark space clutching at tallies of cheap beer we'd brought ourselves, and we stood in awe of stories told, completely unamplified, with restrained beauty. Just a man, an acoustic guitar and two women – Seja Vogel and Meredith McHugh – backing him up with vocals, melodica, guitar and hand percussion.

Maybe it was the mindset I was in at the time (hint: it was *not* a good one) maybe it was the rapidly warming beer (I was drinking a lot of them), maybe it was the fact that none of us really felt like we should have been there, that this wasn't really a place for us and wasn't really a place for music to be played. Maybe it was the fact that it felt like a little secret... Honestly, I can't really tell you what made the show so captivating.

I can tell you one thing for sure; legendary local bootlegger Brendan of *Turn It Up To 10* has given me the opportunity to go back to that show time and time again when I feel like it. It sounded far better in the flesh than it does on this recording – it always does – but I feel everything I felt in that New Farm storeroom every time I hear it and that's what matters most.

If you're a taper, thank you. You don't hear it enough. You risk a lot doing this; money, time, effort and probably some empty but still unpleasant legal threats. I don't know why you're do it, but I'm glad that you do.

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