

From Salon, 1999

SAN FRANCISCO -- Talking Heads reunited here Monday -- but only as talking heads. They faced the press at Dolby Labs, right after unveiling a spanking-new Dolby Digital print of the already great-sounding movie they made with director Jonathan Demme, "Stop Making Sense." The re-release starts Tuesday at the San Francisco Film Festival, where this concert film first burned down the house 15 years ago, and will spread to other cities come September. Did seeing this movie make them want to perform as a group again? Sorry, Heads fans -- Tina Weymouth jumped in with a hearty yes, and Chris Frantz beamed assent, but Jerry Harrison dodged the question by saying he hadn't seen the movie again yet, and David Byrne remained silent.

In the near future, they're certain to keep their musical distance from each other, with Tina and Chris preparing new material for the Tom Tom Club, Jerry producing other people's music and David (among other things) running his own record company. But they share an undiminished pride in a film that juices up the audience honestly, presenting 88 minutes of sizzling music without chopping it to ribbons in the editing or interrupting it with interviews. As David Byrne puts it, there's next to nothing in it that makes you scream, "It's so '80s!" He found himself marveling at the realization that despite being routinely described as, say, New Wave, "We were a funk band."

That may be the main revelation for lovers of the movie now, since the improvements in the audio heighten the ejaculatory quality of the music. While listening to some of the original tracks (for songs not in the movie but on the forthcoming DVD), Jerry says he kept picking up "Yooowww! and Yeah! and Woooowww!" -- courtesy of Alex Weir, one of the five African-American musicians who, as part of the ensemble for Talking Heads' 1983 tour, gave the band resounding thump. Weir, Steven Scales, Bernie Worrell and backup vocalists Enda Holt and Lynn Mabry also expanded the meaning of the movie's song cycle, helping to make it one of the least sappy, most persuasive calls to community ever committed to film, musical or otherwise.

Wisely, the 1999 sound mixers have stayed faithful to Demme's theory that you can best sweep

1999 - Talking Heads Talk Again

Written by Michael Sragow

up moviegoers if you give them the illusion of being in a concert hall rather than a Mixmaster. Tina says that her favorite part of the new mix is that it sends all the sounds of the 1983 audience through a theater's side speakers, making the movie audience feel right in the middle of the floor as it's all happening.

The four agree that Demme's other great contribution was to reveal that the band members were characters -- something that, when lost in their music, they didn't even recognize themselves. Perhaps the biggest news to come out of the press conference was nothing Talking Heads said, but the way their presences confirmed what Demme had caught in the movie. There, on-screen, was Tina looking like a pre-Raphaelite stunner-turned-Kewpie doll, and big, bouncing Chris carrying on like the most genial of Joe Preps and Jerry surprising everybody with healthy dollops of humor beneath the intelligent cool. There they were onstage, like those people except more grown up. And David, still as infinitely malleable as Plastic Man, left the press yearning that he could once again, with or without his Big Suit, stretch far and wide enough to be the Head of this diverse musical family.