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Sonic Youth: Sleeping Nights Awake

(Documentary) A Project Moonlight production. Produced, directed, edited by Michael Albright.

With: Thurston Moore, Kim Gordon, Lee Ranaldo, Steve Shelley, Mark Ibold.

By [ROBERT KOEHLER](#)

Sonic Youth has been documented by a host of filmmakers ranging from Jonas Mekas to Braden King, but the leading band of the No Wave movement has never been quite as expressively and thoroughly captured as by the high school crew behind "Sonic Youth: Sleeping Nights Awake." The Reno-based students, loosed with their vid cameras by director-producer-editor Michael Albright, form a solid unit in lensing the seminal band in top form during a July 4, 2006, gig at Reno's Sierra Casino and Resort. Serious fest noise should resound for the rest of the year, followed by a cultish DVD reverb.

This is one of the most engaging and single-minded film studies of a band since "Instrument," Jem Cohen's 1999 film on Fugazi, and Cohen's influence on the filmmaking is felt in several respects. For one, the cameras -- as well as Albright's choices as editor -- pay far more attention to band members Thurston Moore (lead guitar, vocals), Kim Gordon (lead guitar, vocals), Lee Ranaldo (guitar, vocals), Steve Shelley (drums) and Mark Ibold (bass) than to the enthusiastic Reno audience. For another, the beautifully rendered black-and-white imagery layers the gig with a timeless mood that, like Cohen's best music docs, will give pic a long-lasting impact.

Best of all, the music is uncompromised, full-bore Sonic Youth, a band distinguished by a rare gift for blending pop attitude with avant-garde taste and daring. Albright, having trained under Albert Maysles, shows that he's learned (and imparted to his talented students) Maysles' central documaking lesson, which is to always be ready to cover the moment with one's camera and to do so without visual or narrative trickery.

Brief timeouts away from the stage show Moore, Gordon and Ranaldo, as unassuming and

unpretentious as they've always been, comfortably and casually discussing their act, which combines some song-list planning with minimal preconception. Fortunately, the band and students clearly get along, and this simpatico makes for a smooth yet wide-ranging musical survey.

Albright's editing is consistently intelligent and never ostentatious. Pic marks the second work by Project Moonlight, Albright's ongoing mission to develop high schoolers into filmmakers in his native Reno.

Camera (B&W, DV), Ali Alonso, Noah Conrath, Charlie Hayes, Danielle Hauser, Ben Kolton, Nathan Lower, Allana Noyes; music, Sonic Youth; sound (stereo), Alonso, Conrath, Hayes, Hauser, Kolton, Lower, Noyes; assistant director, Brad Bynum. Reviewed at Cinevegas Film Festival, June 16, 2008. (Also in Milan, AFI Dallas film festivals.) Running time: 84 MIN.

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