

BEN FOLDS AND WASO ★★★½

Live in Perth [EPIC]

Piano rocker performs with his largest backing band to date

It makes perfect sense for Ben Folds to join up with the 83-piece West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Throughout his career, Folds' songs have always showed major dynamic range—soft piano passages frequently segued into crashing drums, pounding keys and thundering fuzz bass. With seven-dozen musicians on stage, he effortlessly achieves the same contrast between calm and cacophony. While *Live in Perth* sounds at times like the soundtrack to *Ben: The Musical*, the local Australian arrangers taking a stab at Folds' portfolio did a fine job, from the predictable but beautiful fleshing out of "Evaporated" to the riskier glorious noise of "Narcolepsy." The footage also captures Folds' gift as an incredibly captivating performer—wait 'til you see him make a symphony orchestra improvise a tune called



"Rock This Bitch." While Folds' music works best in the piano/bass/drums trio format, *Live in Perth* shows that going unplugged can make for an enjoyable break from the tried and truly safe. *Grant Shellen*

EELS ★★★★★

eels with Strings:

Live at Town Hall [VAGRANT]

E strings along fans, shows eels catalog in new light

"Give up all relationships in your life and just play music." This is one of the several quote-worthy moments with which frontman Mark Oliver "E" Everett peppers *eels with Strings*. Hearing the bearded troubadour suggest something so jaded, then watch-

ing him take New York City's Town Hall stage in a suit, supported by a cane and smoking a cigar, one could easily be forgiven for thinking the curmudgeonly singer/songwriter is far older than his 42 years.

A string quartet replaces the usual rock band, while pump organ, saw and suitcase drum-kit back up the gravelly voiced eels singer. Much like Tom Waits, Everett's best performances come from his solitary presence onstage backed by just the right classy accompaniment. Of course, a lights-on, pajama-clad, second-encore jam on Prince's "I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man" sure don't hurt, neither. *Austin L. Ray*



BOB DYLAN ★★

1975-1981 Rolling Thunder and the Gospel Years

[HIGHWAY 61 ENTERTAINMENT]

Ex-insiders speculate about the Bobhead

Joel Gilbert's *Bob Dylan 1975-1981: Rolling Thunder and the Gospel Years* is exactly eight minutes longer than

Dylan's own 232-minute bombed film epic, 1978's *Renaldo and Clara*, which says a lot about both Dylan and his fans. Spanning 26 chapters (with no music by Dylan) the third documentary by professional Jimmy lookalike Gilbert is his most obsessive yet. Gilbert's talking (and talking and talking) heads are fascinating, just-outside-the-inner-circle insiders, like Rolling Thunder Revue bassist Rob Stoner (who never knew if Bob was gonna call back), boxer Rubin Carter (the subject of Dylan's "Hurricane") and legendary producer Jerry Wexler (who shaped *Slow Train Coming*, Dylan's underrated Christian-period debut). Visiting Dylanology's not-so-holiest sites, such as the rehearsal hall for the questionable *Street Legal* tour, Gilbert maxes out his footage with abundant photographs and clip art (music provided by Gilbert's cover band jamming with his interview subjects). No need to set the TiVo, but Gilbert's handiwork could be righteously entertaining on cable at 2 a.m. *Jesse Jarnow*



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