

Cool band collections help make summer bearable

If the 90-something temps are still driving you indoors, here are a few more cool audio-visual treats to take your mind off the heat:

How about a trip to the breezy isle of Jamaica, where the music's jumpin' and the players are high — on life as well as ganja — in the upbeat **"Rockers — 25th Anniversary Edition"** (Music Video Distributors), an engagingly laid-back comedy/drama from writer-director **Ted Bafaloukos** about a Rastafarian drummer (**Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace** as himself) trying to scare up enough cash to break into a recording business controlled by an unscrupulous music "mafia."

Follow the lanky, sly-witted Horsemouth as he winds his way through the sun-drenched streets of Kingston and the scenic Blue Mountain countryside on his motorcycle with the "Lion of Judah" emblazoned on the gas tank, wheeling and dealing, sharing spliffs and Rasta wisdom with his brother musicians and doing battle with "Babylon" (which, in the Rasta patois, can mean either the corrupt establishment or the police).

The plot's a bit predictable, but the heavily-accented English and Jamaican creole patter (clarified with subtitles) is always entertaining, often hilarious ("Rasta, me vexed, you know? Them thief the bike."), and almost as musical as the incredible all-star performances from **Burning Spear**, **Bunny Wailer**, **Third World**, **Peter Tosh**, **Jacob Miller**, **Gregory Isaacs**, **Kiddus I**, **Junior Marvin**, **Inner Circle**, the **Heptones** and **Abyssinians**.

Even lukewarm reggae fans — of which I am one — will likely succumb to the soulful Carribean charm, hip humor and spiritual sincerity of the players and the overall peace-loving fun of "Rockers," which compares favorably to its groundbreaking Jamaican predecessor, the cult-classic "The Harder They Come." Remastered in 5.1 Surround, it's a dreadlocks-flipping good time, mon, although the 25th anniversary DVD of this 1978 film is a couple of years late. Maybe someone just now remembered to put it

out.

And for the diehard punks in the audience, yet another **Ramones** repackaging hits the streets Tuesday in a box tricked out to look like one of the old EC horror comics of the early '50s. **"Weird Tales of the Ramones"** (Rhino) contains three CDs loaded with 85 tracks from 16 albums — running from the band's earliest Sire releases through the late-'90s Radioactive catalog — plus a DVD containing **"Lifestyles of the Ramones,"** the complete Sire Records video collection, with all six of the Radioactive-era videos thrown in as a bonus.

Basically it's nothing you haven't seen or heard before if you're a Ramones enthusiast, but if you're a bona fide member of the Ramones Fan Club, Rabid Division, how can you resist this \$64.98 deluxe bundle, *especially* when you know there's a 50-page comic book inside, containing the work of 25 top graphic artists including **Rick Altergott**

("Doofus"), **Sergio Aragones** (**Mad Magazine**), **Bill Griffiths** ("**Zippy the Pinhead**"), **Matt Groening** ("**The Simpsons**"), **Xaime Hernandez** ("**Love and Rockets**"), **John Holmstrom**, **Carol Lay**, **John Pound** ("**Garbage Pail Kids**"), **Scott Shaw** and **William Woodring**.

Stories and artwork are hilarious, and there's even a 3-D section complete with glasses, plus the story boards for an animated "Blitzkrieg Bop" video that was never filmed because the Ramones had broken up (temporarily) and the production company went out of business before the band reunited. Gabba-gabba-hey! You'll wanna be sedated.

Of course, there was nothing sedate about **MC5**, especially if you're a diehard hippie radical still yearning for the days of anti-establishment/anti-war protest and bloody riots in the street. The Motor City fivesome was the house band for the angrier side of the the late-'60s, Vietnam-era upheaval, a loud, primitive, proto-punk counterpoint to the flower-powered Woodstock Nation.

"Creem Presents MC5: Kick Out the Jams" (MVD) — a patchwork of grainy, home-movie-quality footage taken

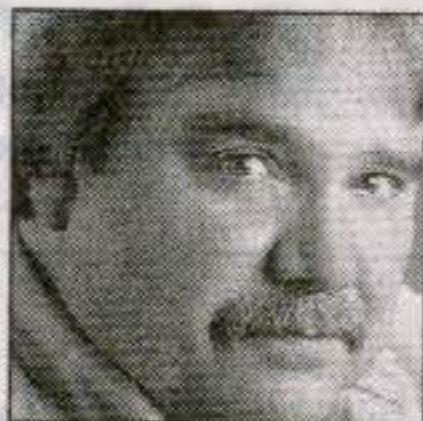
from various shows and synched with muddy live audio from various *other* shows — is not the best evidence of this band's punch and power in live performance. Stitched together by **Cory Loren** from film shot by **Lemi Sinclair**, the amateur-night production includes rough, sometimes out-of-tune renditions of "Kick Out the Jams," "I Want You Right Now" and the painfully cacophonous "Starship" that only the band's mothers — or a true fan — could love. A dirty electric blues reading of "Motor City Is Burning" is a bright spot, as is the bonus 2003 interview with the band's former manager and svengali, **White Panther Party** founder **John Sinclair**, who offers entertaining anecdotes, including the night the MC5 blew British supergroup **Cream** off the stage with a show-stopping opening performance.

But if your fondest musical memories lie in the more recent past — and your bank account can take the heat — **"Whatever: The '90s Pop Culture Box"** offers a very cool pool- or dock-side sound track of 130 songs from the bottled water/Starbucks decade. The seven-disc overview of the '90s Top 40 charts tries to cover everything it can from **M.C. Hammer's** pop-rapping "U Can't Touch This" to **Moby's** sample-dappled, atmospheric "Natural Blues."

In between, the hits just keep on coming from several pop genres, represented by **Queen Latifah** ("Ladies First"), **Soul Asylum** ("Runaway Train"), **Busta Rhymes** ("Woo Hah! Got You All in Check"), **Dinosaur Jr.** ("Start Choppin'"), **Sinead O'Connor** ("Nothing Compares 2 U") and the **Flaming Lips** ("She Don't Use Jelly"), to name a very few.

In keeping with the weird packaging of past Rhino "Culture" boxes, "Whatever" has a clear plastic bag of aromatic coffee beans laminated to the cover. Inside is a colorful 84-page book with cultural essays from The Chicago Sun-Times' **Jim DeRogatis**, Time Magazine's **Joel Stein** and others. All this for only — take a swig of iced tea and brace yourself — \$105.98.

Maybe it's a little early to get nostalgic about the '90s.



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