



BETTY DAVIS: THEY SAY I'M DIFFERENT

★★★★

WIENERWORLD DVD



With interest in Betty Davis rekindled following *Light In The Attic's* release of *Betty Davis: The Columbia Years 1968-1969* in 2016, this documentary was made the following year and set itself the not inconsiderable challenge of tracking down the stereotype-busting musical pioneer who had apparently walked out on her career and simply disappeared.

Fashion model, songwriter and performer, acquaintance of Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone, wife and muse of Miles Davis during the dawn of his revolutionary electric period when she brought the dual influences of Hendrix and Sly to bear on Miles' rapidly evolving sound while also radically transforming his image in the process, Betty Davis is remembered as a female funk pioneer who was arguably too far ahead of her time given the raw funkiness of her songs combined with the overt raunchiness of her lyrics and her highly sexualised live performances. After recording three studio albums - her 1973 self-titled debut, *They Say I'm Different* ('74) and *Nasty Gal* ('75) - the free-spirited Ms Davis essentially turned her back on the music business and effectively disappeared at the end of the decade.

Inventively combining archive images, eye-catching animation and interviews with friends, band members and music writers, it's Betty's voice that forms the backbone of the film as she narrates her story via a series of audio interviews - she's only fleetingly

glimpsed in her Pittsburg apartment. Cryptically, there's only one partial close up of Betty's face in the entire film, which only adds to the sense of mystery surrounding the enigmatic Ms Davis and her retreat into obscurity.

Grahame Bent

HAIR

★★★★

BFI DVD+BLU-RAY



Gerome Ragni and James Rado's *Hair* was a worldwide sensation in the '60s with stage productions as far flung as Japan and Australia. Featuring memorable music by Galt MacDermot it was ground-breaking in both its content and execution, a countercultural rainbow of drugs, sex, social and political commentary, capturing the dilemma of American youth in the riptide of psychedelic revolution, racial and sexual politics and the shadow of the war in Vietnam.

This 1979 film production was directed by Miloš Forman (*One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*) and shot in New York at the peak of the disco era with a cast featuring Treat Williams, Beverly D'Angelo and John Savage. The film has the feel of *Kids From Fame* with tasteful energetic choreography and a '70s approximation (just 10 years after the fact) of a '60s vibe. More funk and cocaine than freak-out and LSD it's a somewhat frustrating take with major changes to the script and the removal of some songs; a shift in focus that even writers Ragni and Rado found distasteful. However, the funk-ed-up soundtrack has a charm of its own, particularly on the opening

'Aquarius', which sounds like something The Undisputed Truth might have cooked up.

The extras include some psychedelic shorts including *San Francisco* from '68 with Pink Floyd's 'Interstellar Overdrive' and an *Indian Pop Instrumental*, incorrectly credited to an unknown British ensemble (it's Ananda Shankar's 'Snow Flower') plus the tenuously relevant British film *Discomania*.

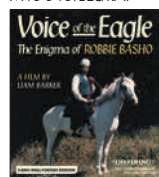
Time has been kinder to this adaptation of *Hair* affording it a kitsch charm.

Richard Allen

VOICE OF THE EAGLE: THE ENIGMA OF ROBBIE BASHO

★★★★★

MVD DVD/BLU-RAY



First appearing in 2015, Liam Barker's masterful labour of love about the late guitar-vocal iconoclast is finally released on DVD, his original 87-minute film bolstered by another 410 of raw interview material.

Beautifully produced in the spirit of Basho's astonishing music, which Pete Townshend says was forged entirely in homage to his Sufi beliefs and the power of love, the film charts a story that is, at different times, moving, inspiring, frustrating and ultimately shockingly tragic when in 1986 he died of a vertebral artery tear. He was 45. There's plenty of Basho's ethereal, raga-infused music, illustrating why he was the only guitarist who could awe his Takoma Records boss John Fahey. Existing archive footage is bolstered by family, friends and contemporaries, including Townshend, Max Ochs, Eugene 'ED' Denson, Country Joe McDonald, William Ackerman, Henry Kaiser, and Glenn Jones.

Often operating as a one-man unit to capture the landscapes that informed Basho's music, Barker infiltrated the Meher Baba group Basho was affiliated with, tracked down his adopted family and unearthed lost artefacts, including guitars, documents and recordings.

Amazing stories abound, such as Fahey's about how Daniel 'Robbie' Robinson transformed into Robbie Basho after spending a peyote-fuelled night on a mountain top, returning to declare himself the reincarnation of 17th century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho.

Nobody has ever sounded like Basho, few guitarists even glimpsing the spiritual catharsis he reached. There are lessons to be learned in this remarkable film; the tricky part is trying to work out what they are. Like his astonishing music or not, it should be compulsory viewing.

Kris Needs

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