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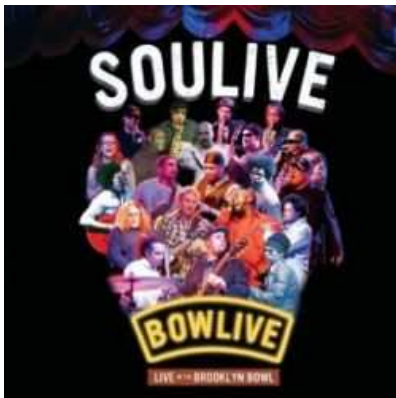
## Movie/DVD Review

### Soulive

*Bowlive*  
By Chad Berndtson  
March 22, 2011

It probably would have been enough to let the cameras roll, do some tight close-ups of Alan Evans, Neal Evans and Eric Krasno getting all funky and dirty as only they know how; pan the sweaty Brooklyn Bowl crowd a few times and let the intensity of the music just carry the thing. But the *Bowlive* DVD is only partly about Soulive in concert; what you're really getting with this abundantly pleasant release is two stories in one.

First, it's a lovingly shot concert document: general enough to appeal to Soulive dilettantes and insidery enough for those who were there for the trio's nascent in 1999 and stuck by it, sometimes frustratingly, through the years. Totally dope. Second, it's an interesting snapshot of what – and it's kind of an intangible “what” – survived from the post-Wetlands NYC jamband scene, stayed alive throughout the 2000s, and eventually found a stable new home at Brooklyn Bowl, Sullivan Hall and other scene-friendly venues in the Big Apple. Call it a community. Or, in other words, yeah, it's a music documentary about Soulive, but by extension, it documents a still-thriving fraternity of musicians from the late 90s jamband scene: one that Soulive, more than any other currently active band, helps propagate and preserve.



The Evans', Kraz and their many, many friends are musicians who associate, who sit-in, who are inextricably tied to either the jam scene, or to New York, or both, and who “get” each other, who explore the idioms of jazz, funk, soul, blues, rock and R&B and who knows what else in endlessly variable combinations. The mission? Make some seriously wonderful improvisational music and draw like-minded players into that orbit.

“It's good. That's the genre,” says Ivan Neville during one of the DVD's many upbeat cutaway interviews. “Good music.”

Bowlive, the event, having just wrapped its second installment this month, is a tasty celebration of how far Soulive has come, and also how far Brooklyn Bowl has come as a scene clubhouse in fewer than two years. So the question becomes: is all that goodness – tangible and intangible – captured in the two-hour Bowlive, the DVD? Absolutely: you feel the warmth and commitment among the musicians first, and that creates an emotional subtext for the film. And at the level of music document, there's definitely primo Soulive and friends on here -- it's a pick-your-favorite highlight kind of grab bag.

Take Krasno, who turns his solo in “El Ron” into a burbling, psychedelic monster that begins piquant and nimble and ends in a paint-peeling, wah-wah squall. Or Royal Family breakout Nigel Hall – probably the film's most memorable presence -- who talks on camera about the visceral impact of getting to play James Brown's “Soul Power,” and then shows it, backed by meaty drumming from the Roots' ?uestlove and the always-reliable (and as it turns out, hilariously bantering) Shady Horns. And there's the parade of marquee guests, from Ivan

Neville, tag-teaming with Hall for the “Jesus Children of America > If You Want Me To Stay” progression, to Warren Haynes sharing lead vocals with Hall -- and shredding something fierce -- on “Born Under a Bad Sign.” Elsewhere, Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi pass through for a wonderfully unhurried “Soul Serenade,” the London Souls' Tash Neal and Krasno dismantle Little Richard's jittery “Lucille.” And best of all there are the sit-ins; Oteil Burbridge and his brother Kofi achieve something like groove nirvana with Oteil's own “Butter Biscuit,” complete with extended scatting. You get the idea.

Sure it's imperfect. One of the strongest and most unique performances – Raul Midon leading the ensemble through his own “Sunshine” -- appears randomly in the “With Interviews” play-through version of the film, but, at least on my review copy, was nowhere to be found in the “Without Interviews” play-through version, and Midon himself isn't introduced. Robert Randolph, for all his history with the band – “We grew up together,” he astutely notes – is granted plenty of talking time, but agonizingly little in-concert footage. And be sure stay through the end, because that's all you're really going to see of Charlie Hunter, who's goofily charming in his interview (over the end credits), but isn't documented performing.

But those are minor quibbles. There's enough music for people who want it, and about enough talking head time for people who want that (and some brief bowling shots of Kraz – a spare! – and Neville – a strike! – that make the montages fun.) You get your funky stuff. You get your smiles and your inside jokes. You get the feeling that these guys all love each other. You really, really, really, want to be at the next Bowlive, and you're right to think that way.

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