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Music DVD Review: Soulive - Bowlive (Live at the Brooklyn Bowl)

By PAUL ROY
BLOGCRITICS.ORG

From the DVD case: "In March of 2010, the members of Soulive hauled their instruments through the doors of a newly-opened warehouse-turned-music venue in Brooklyn that they would call home for the next two weeks. Eric Krasno, Alan Evans, and Neal Evans called on a multitude of their closest friends and musical conspirators to join them over the next fortnight - creating an incredibly broad guest lineup that included some of the pre-eminent guitar virtuosos of our generation (Derek Trucks, Warren Haynes), some of the biggest names in hip-hop (Questlove, Rahzel), and some of the most inventive improvisational players in modern rock n' roll (Robert Randolph, Marco Benevento, Oteil & Kofi Burbridge)."

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I am a little embarrassed to say that I had never heard of Soulive before getting this DVD, although I was very familiar with most of the artists who joined them for this event. Turns out that this funk/jazz trio has been around since 1999 and have churned out no less than eight studio albums during this relatively short period, with the most recent being their 2010 soul-jazz Beatles' covers album, Rubber Soulive. What a perfect title.


I love that the DVD menu offers two choices; "Play Movie (With Interviews)," and "Play Movie (Without Interviews)," but things could have been laid out much better. For instance, the "with interviews" option includes a full performance of "Sunshine," featuring Raul Midon, which was one of the DVD highlights for me, but it was not even included on the

"without interviews" song list. Makes no sense. The "with interviews" option also shows the ending credits about three fourths of the way through, and then follows with five more complete song performances.

Robert Randolph was one of the guests I was most excited about seeing, but although getting some decent behind the scenes interview footage, they only show about one minute's worth of his killer performance of Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Lenny". Other than these minor quibbles, this was a very enjoyable and very unique concert DVD. The Soulive guys, Eric Krasno (guitar), Alan Evans (drums), and Neal Evans (keyboards), are each fabulous musicians and their original material is very impressive, especially the sax-fueled "Cannonball," and the guitar tour-de-force "El Run," but it is when all the guests come out of the woodwork to take on some James Brown other soul classics, that this show really takes off.

Nigel Hall, who had earlier lent his excellent vocal skills to the Soulive track "Too Much," now takes on the two Godfather of Soul classics, "Soul Power," and "Give It Up Or Turnit Loose," as if they were his own. Most impressive, however, was how Neal Evans handles all of the bass parts on his keyboard and really does these masterful grooves justice. The highlight of the whole show for this here guitar-freak was Derek Trucks' amazing performance of "Soul Serenade." Trucks

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first made this old R&B classic his own on his 2003 album of the same name, but with the help of his wife Susan Tedeschi on lead vocals, this version far outshines Trucks' original album version.

The overall production quality of this DVD was respectable, but nothing to get excited about. The only audio track offered is Dolby Digital 2.0 stereo, but it does sound very good. No concert DVD produced within the last ten years should come without at least one 5.1 surround audio option though. The widescreen picture was very clear and sharp and the camera work was outstanding. Most of the views were tight shots of the entire stage, or of one or two of the musicians doing their thing. One of the cameras appeared to be mounted on or near a bass monitor, and it shook violently every time a deep bass note was hit. The director seemed to know the music very well, as he always followed the right musician at the right time, and provided some excellent close-ups during all of the key solos and improvisations.

Any fan of soul, funk, and jazz should not hesitate to check out the music of Soulive as well as this excellent new concert DVD.

Track List (without interviews version)

- 01. Up Right
- 02. Hat Trick
- 03. Tuesday Night Squad
- 04. Too Much
- 05. Cannonball
- 06. El Ron
- 07. Soul Power
- 08. Give It Up Or Turnit A Loose
- 09. Jesus Children Of America
- 10. Butter Biscuit
- 11. Made You Look
- 12. Lucille
- 13. Soul Serenade
- 14. Born Under A Bad Sign
- 15. Everybody Wants To Rule The World
- 16. Credits

Ratings:
Performance - 7/10
Production - 7/10

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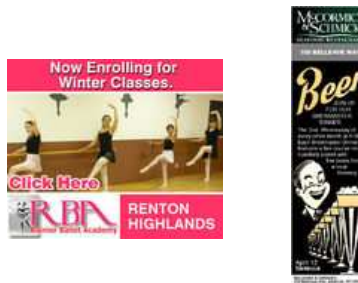
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