

Leap In The Dark

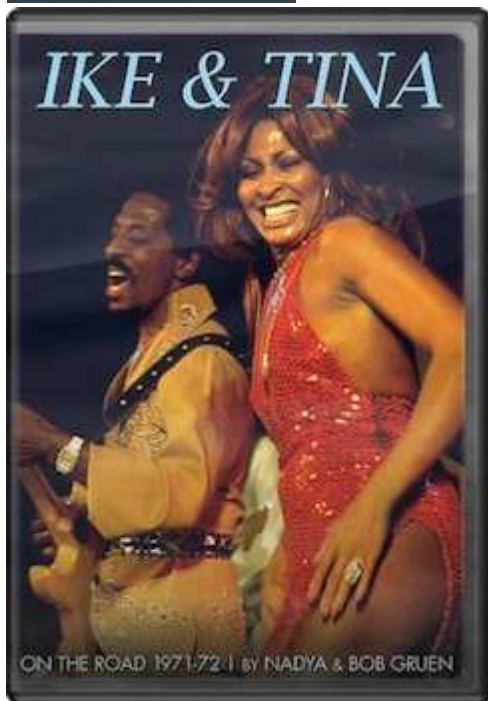
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DVD Review: *Ike & Tina On The Road 1971 - 72*

In these days of the media's attention so focused on the lives of those we consider celebrities it can be hard to believe there was a time when a trip behind the scenes into the life of a pop musician or film star was considered something out of the ordinary. Yet it wasn't too long ago that the idea of a camera crew following a celebrity around was considered a novelty. In those more innocent times it wasn't a matter of media trying to uncover scandals or revealing secrets. In fact the sole purpose of these early reports from backstage seemed more concerned with humanizing larger than life figures.

At least that's the impression one gets watching the footage taken by famous rock and roll photographer [Bob Gruen](#) and his wife Nadya of [Ike and Tina Turner](#). Using one of the first ever portable video cameras, Gruen and his wife joined the Turners and their band on the road and at home for their 1971-72 tour. Now, forty years later, the footage taken during this time has been cut, edited and digitally remastered as [Ike & Tina Turner - On The Road: 1971 - 72](#), and released on DVD by [MVD Entertainment Group](#).



Needless to say video technology was in its infancy in those days. According to Gruen's notes the camera was loaded with tapes similar to those used on old reel to reel audio equipment. The picture quality wasn't the greatest. In low light the image would darken to the point where the screen would almost be black and in bright light it would blanch out. The audio was mono only and would tend to distort if the source was too loud and pick up any and all ambient noise in the surrounding vicinity. If this were filmed today we would just throw it out as garbage. However, as a historical record of a bygone era and for the look it allows us into the lives of one of rock and roll's more controversial husband and wife teams,

its an invaluable document.

The sad demise of Ike and Tina Turner's marriage has been well documented. The abuse she received at his hands and sneaking out of their hotel room with only change in her pocket is all that most think about when their life together is brought up. In his liner notes for the DVD Gruen says the footage he shot shows why they were together for twenty years. While I'm not sure it accomplishes that goal, what this DVD does is remind us of just how incredible the band was at the height of their performing prowess. While I'm sure there's still footage from their periodic television appearances, I can't see any network in the early 1970s airing some of the footage included in this DVD.

If in the 1950s they wouldn't film Elvis below the waist and in the 1960s demanded the Rolling Stones change the line "let's spend the night together" to "let's spend some time together", there's no way they would have allowed the full unbridled sexuality of Ike and Tina on the air in the 1970s. It must have been hard enough to get Tina and the Ike & Tina Turner's dance moves approved for prime time television. This is a band that reminds you of the word funk's origins with almost every note they play. Even considering the poor quality of some of the footage there's no disguising the fact their music wasn't the safe anti-septic stuff being churned out by Motown for mass consumption. They were playing down and dirty funk and R&B which makes even most of today's rappers look tame in comparison.

At least 50% of the film, if not more, was taken off stage. There's footage of Tina at home with the kids making supper and going grocery shopping like any housewife. However, even standing over a stove cooking, out of the slinky costumes and wigs she wore on stage, her natural glamour and presence shine through. Of course not everybody's house in those days has an in ground swimming pool, a sunken living room and a Grammy trophy on the mantle piece. Yet in spite of these things we also see a fairly typical domestic situation for the time period. Wife and kids hanging at the house.

Interestingly enough, Ike never appears in the footage shot at home. We only ever see him in work related situations. Backstage, rehearsing the band, or in the studio Ike's presence is inescapable, but we hardly ever see the two of them alone together. Taciturn to the point of almost hardly ever talking except during rehearsals, I can't recall him saying anything not related to business during the entire DVD. Even then he doesn't say much. However, there's no doubt he's the one running the show musically. Watching him lead the band on stage and in rehearsals he's like a conductor. Even during concerts he would tend to stand facing the audience in profile so he could cue the band when required.



Of course, with Tina out front nobody was going to be paying much attention to anybody else anyway. She could blow the doors off an auditorium with her voice one moment and the next bring you to tears with her gentleness. She's pulling an audience to their feet and getting them dancing in the aisles and then sitting them back down again to break their hearts. Then there's her dancing. While your mind tells you she has to have her feet on the ground, your eyes are telling you a different story. Like some exotic bird she seems to float above the stage all the while twisting and twirling like an ecstatic dervish.

Unlike others who dance with only their arms and their legs, her whole body is involved. It's like every muscle is attuned to the music and responds to what's being played. It might start with her hands or her feet, but soon it can't be contained and her whole body explodes into motion. However it's not an uncontrolled flailing around either. For no matter how fast or involved her movements she's always able to stay centred on a song's rhythm and its that pulse which lies at the base of everything she does.

As an historical record of just how incredible Ike and Tina Turner were at the peak of their career there's no questioning the value of this DVD. However, in spite of

what Gruen says in his liner notes there's no evidence of them having anything in common aside from the music. Nothing of what we see of them together in this movie indicates an emotional bond existed between them. In fact we learn almost nothing about Ike except that he was completely devoted to his music. Maybe he was just a very shy man, or very private, but don't go looking for anything that will give you any insights into their private life, because you won't find it here.

While the majority of the DVD is taken from the black and white footage Gruen shot with his early model video camera, there are a few pieces of colour film spliced into it that were shot at the same time. Unfortunately all they serve to do is make the flaws in the video even more obvious. Some of the times parts of the image on screen is blacked out because of low light, and other times the exposure is off because the ambient light was too bright. However, that doesn't stop this DVD from being something special to watch. The music created by Ike and Tina Turner was some of the most amazing R&B/soul/funk produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Any opportunity to see them perform shouldn't be missed. No matter what happened down the line, it can never be denied what they did together was amazing - it's just too bad it couldn't have lasted.

(Article first published as [DVD Review: Ike & Tina On The Road 1971 - 72](#) on [Blogcritics](#).)

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