



Brighter Days: The Live Concert Film

[JJ Grey & Mofro](#)

[MVD Visual](#) - MVD5729 (DVD)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
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This concert/documentary starts out pensively in North Florida, with JJ Grey playing a bluesy number accompanying himself on an acoustic guitar. But once things get under way, it's more than obvious *Brighter Days: The Live Concert Film* ain't another bayou lost-soul gig 'cause the guy knows how to tear it up when he feels like it, and he very often feels like it. I spent a year in mid-Florida in the mid-70s, an odd time but one of the better years of my life, and still have an affinity for that oven-hot, greenery-choked, rains-a-hell-of-a-lot lower peninsula of the United States, so I think I gained a fairly good feel for the peculiarities of the region ('n it sure as hell ain't represented in the overly transplanted aging NYC bourgeoisie like Randi Rhodes, I can tell ya that much fer damn sure, Jeeter). But every time I see film footage of the bayous, mangroves, alligators and rackitycoons, aningas and hyacinths, kudzu and armadillos, I re-realize it's a place unlike any other part of America. Believe it or not, what comes outen that region represents the truest cross section of the country far far more than shitholes like L.A., mini-paradises like Portland, and psycho depots like, well, the just-mentioned New York City. I've been through a decent patch of the land of election frauds and home of the criminal thieving Upper Class and can pretty well defend that I've figured out a thing 'r two. So has Mr. Grey. Consider the lyrics to *War*:

*There's a war going on
And the ones about to die are safe at home
There's a war going on
And your world stops feeling now*

*No it ain't about the same
I know your mama and your daddy didn't tell you a thing
About the price of fame
And your world she's so deep Lord she's deep in shame*

*Ain't but one thing that's for sure
Everybody want some more
No one gonna do what's "right"
All we'll do is fight*

In a very bedrock way, there's little to argue with alongside a few pools of depth. I took the stanzas off Grey's own Web page, not one of the typo-ridden pilfer sites (love 'em to death, but does no one edit those damn entries?), and the center of the whole sentiment is in the quotation-marked "right". That's a rhetorical I.E.D., but here's a tad more, from *Country Ghetto*:

*I see the look in your eyes I know I'm simple and plain
A country boy can't survive too many ways in your game
So you can say what you will about your helping hand
I know I'll never be more than just your dumb white trash
Life in a country ghetto*

*Love touches us all, yes we're black and we're white
Out here in the cut, still living side by side
So never mind what you've seen, and just forget what you've heard
Another ignorant redneck, just some Hollywood words
Life in a country ghetto*

*No I'm not tame
The only voice that speaks for me speaks from this clay
Little boy, you ain't never take a dime from the man
Starve to death before you live by a government handout
They call us noverts*

*they can be poverty
Life in a country ghetto*

Didja notice the migration of thought processes from the generalizations in *War* to the particulars in *Country Ghetto*? Didja see that damned Libertarian slant, slipped in right there at the end? Whoa!, did I say "damned"? I did, and that's the point. As Grey makes clear: with very similar ends, we human beings sure as hell have very different means. He avers that he isn't in concord with all he hears and sees around him but that it's necessary to understand it. I agree, and that's what makes watching and listening to this cat interesting. He's a driven, self-controlled, multiplex individual who knows what he wants and works hard to keep arriving. That comes out very clearly in his singing, confident and hard-tack. As band members point out, the guy plays many instruments and writes all of them, charting things out before any rehearsing begins, even taking over the art direction for his own releases. That might be called 'anal retentive', but I see it as self-initiated, confident, and unwilling to compromise one's own vision for another's. This marks him as someone who does a lot of thinking.

The sound that emerges from Grey and Mofro is white soul blended with Southern bluesrock and a garnish of jazz in a potpourri so imbued with its own sense of integrity that the gent's released eight albums on the famed Alligator label (two of them reprints of his debut and sophomore independent releases). This rock doc, though, isn't published by Alligator but by the much more eclectic MVD, and it encompasses a full two hours, so you get a very generous assemblage of full-song concert clips amid interviews and documentary commentary. The tunes are infectious and driving, and thus none need guess why Alligator retained the guy for such a long run, and you'll hear from cats like Derek Trucks as to what's what.

Speaking of which, an amusing interlude concerns itself with sweating over whether or not what Grey's doing is really blues infused. Uh...are ya kidding me? What the friggin' hell, OF COURSE it is! It's Chicago dirtywhite boy blues a la Mike Bloomfield that caught the train to Tallahassee and then kept walking further and further into the Florida jungles until it got away from the stench of over-civilization. Like I say, ya hafta have lived there at least for a bit to get it. Florida is often so cross conflicted that it sometimes doesn't know it's ass from a hole in the ground, hence the Libertarian gig so popular down thataways, but that's a damn sight better than, say, Los Angeles and its incredibly venal, small-minded, hypocritical, backstabbing, nauseatingly Pepsodent smiling yuppie lawyers and business swine, isn't it? And don't get me started on Chicago or St. Louis or Memphis or Austin or any of those burgs.

Ultimately, that Floridian still-not-there-yet-and-not-all-that-worried-about-it-but-not-happy-either state of affairs is the undercurrent here, and that's why this is an unusual DVD that has to be felt in its sweltering heat as much as heard in its tough as nails personality. Am I hinting that I agree with Grey on many things in his songs and philosophies or on anything? Well, Josiah, I ain't sayin' one way or t'other, but I do agree with him that it's necessary to understand where The Other is coming from whether he or she is right beside you, is a continent away, waiting in the office while rubbing hands a bit too sadistically, or is holding forth in a video that lets you in on the man more than just the music would. If you ponder what's going on here, I think you'll see what I'm saying...and if ya don't, well, you can check it out for yourself 'cause Florida's a great vacation spot despite the heat, the mosquitos, the love bugs, the flying palmetto bugs (cock-a-roaches by any other name), the fire ants, Jeb Bush, daffy blue hairs, arrogant snow birds, hurricanes, sink holes, gators everywhere, the most dangerous highway in America (Tamiami Trail), high-rise snarled coastlines, throwback interior, and.....

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