

Roy Orbison (LEFT) and Bruce Pearson during "The Last Concert" on December 4, 1988 at the Front Row Theatre Heights, Ohio.



**Roy Orbison**  
**The Last Concert**  
**25th Anniversary**  
**Edition**

Roy Orbison waxed optimistic about life and music on December 4, 1988, the day he played a concert near Cleveland and did a video interview discussing his dramatically revived career. Two days later, he suffered a fatal heart attack at his mother's home outside Nashville.

This CD/DVD package includes a CD of the final show (previously issued in 2009) and a DVD with the final interview and seven performances (all Orbison standards), four from a 1981 California concert and three from a never-seen 1986 Texas show.

Never recorded to be released, the Ohio concert is mainly a historical document with notable fluctuation in vocal levels. One upside: compared with earlier versions, you can now hear what the band is doing.

Son Alex Orbison's essay notes that his

dad used his custom black Gibson ES-335 onstage while guitarist Bruce Pearson used Roy's backup 335, having broken a string before the show. Vocals aside, Roy's capable picking emerges on the other tunes.

Orbison used the 335 on the Texas material, a black Strat on the earlier California tunes.

This is not the fabulous *Black and White Night* (which Legacy also recently reissued), but an interesting footnote for true fans.

— **Rich Kienzle**

**Books**



**John Thomas**  
**Kalamazoo Gals: A Story of**  
**Extraordinary Women and**  
**Gibson's Banner Guitars of**  
**WWII**

Intrigued by that "Only A Gibson Is Good Enough" decal on the headstock of his World War II-era Gibson Southern Jumbo, musician and writer John Thomas began delving into the story behind the famed Banner

guitars. What he discovered is part thrilling mystery, part pure Americana history.

The legend long upheld by Gibson's own historians is that the war yanked the Kalamazoo factory's workers away to fight, leaving only master craftsmen behind to build some of the best-sounding Gibson flattops of all time. The truth, Thomas discovered, is that Gibson hired a stand-in female workforce and taught them to be replacement "Rosie the Luthiers," laboring alongside a tiny remaining prewar workforce. It was these women – newly trained but detail-focused – that were largely responsible for the great Banner guitars.

Thomas tracks down and interviews many of the surviving "Kalamazoo gals," offering insight into the crafting of the guitars as well as the working of Gibson at the time. He examines the material shortages and limits put on Gibson's production by the federal government and how that likely played into the factory's "cover-up" of the women workers as well as the small number of Banner guitars built.

Thomas also dives deep into the Banner guitars themselves, x-raying the bracing and neck joints, making sense of parts and detail changes, wood choices, and build vintages.

If you're a Banner fan, you'll want this book. — **Michael Dregni**

**DVDs**



**The Gourds**  
**All the Labor**

In October 2013, a mere month after releasing their 10th LP (and 19 years after forming), the Gourds announced that they were taking a hiatus. With the Austin, Texas, alt-country quintet's new album (produced by Larry Campbell) barely a month old, the timing was curious.

*All the Labor* reveals some possible reasons for the band's sabbatical (though filming ended a year and a half before their break was announced). Shot over the course of eight months by Doug Hawes-

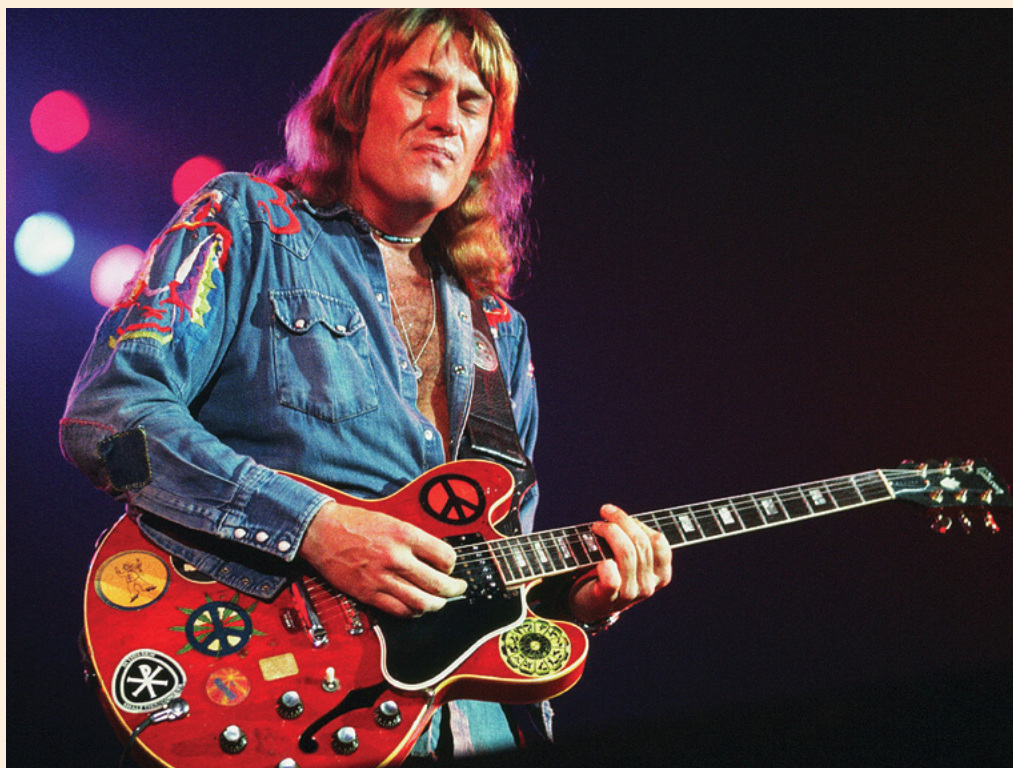
Orbison photo: Janet Macoska.

Davis, this documentary hints at friction between the Gourds' dynamic principle songwriters, Kevin Russell and Jimmy Smith, and reveals the challenges of balancing growing families with touring. There's even discussion of the band's Napster-era cover of Snoop Dogg's "Gin And Juice,"

a proto-meme that became a millstone around the band's neck. Meanwhile, archival VHS footage provides fantastic historical context.

If *Labor* suffers at all, it's from a lapsing narrative that sometimes threatens to sour the works with an infomercial vibe.

Hawes-Davis does a fine job rescuing it, however, by capturing the Gourds' obtuse lyricism, hell-raising live act, and music that is (we'll refrain from the past tense) equally steeped in the Band's musicianship, Doug Sahm's cosmic weirdness, and '80s punk energy. — **Dennis Pernu**



## FOREVER ROCKING

It's unfortunate that Alvin Lee was stereotyped as merely a speed demon on guitar — though he gave that image plenty of fuel, so to speak. But, quite the contrary, the Ten Years After leader was one of the most versatile guitarists of the late-'60s British blues revival, with a vocabulary that allowed him to swing into jazz territory with greater ease than any of his contemporaries.

In 1973, Lee and his cohorts released a live double-LP, now remastered with seven previously unreleased tracks from the same tour. This is pre-punk

or pub rock — blues with a psychedelic hangover, feeling the effects of heavy metal's dawn — so long solos are the order of the day. With songs clocking in at eight, 12, and even 18 minutes, it's a credit to Lee (although keyboardist Chick Churchill gets ample space as well, and Ric Lee takes the obligatory drum solo) that he still holds the interest of listeners with "New Millennium" ears.

Besides the band's signature closer, "I'm Going Home," immortalized at the '69 Woodstock festival, TYA specialized in heavy versions of blues standards like "Help Me" and "Good

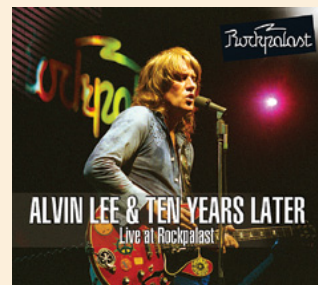
Morning Little Schoolgirl." But their 16-minute excursion on Al Kooper's adaptation of Blind Willie Johnson's "I Can't Keep From Crying Sometimes" displays strong jazz sensibilities and chops, some self-indulgence aside.

The group broke up a year after these performances, with 10 albums in eight years. In '76, Lee's Ten Years Later played the "Rockpalast" TV show in Germany — finally seeing the light of day as part of Repertoire's series of CD/DVD packages.

Still wielding his iconic red '58 ES-335 (highly modified and adorned with flowers and a peace symbol), Lee



**Ten Years After**  
Recorded Live



**Alvin Lee and Ten Years Later**  
Live At Rockpalast

fronts a power trio through a set of rock and roll, his first love. Originals like "Gonna Turn You On" and TYA's 1972 hit "Choo Choo Mama" mingle with incandescent Chuck Berry and Little Richard covers. Lee adds some credible harmonica and slide to Sonny Boy Williamson's "Help Me" and tears it up in typical fashion on "Going Home." It's a less adventurous side of Lee, showing the shift in public tastes in just three years.

Ten Years After were true rock stars, with Lee their instant guitar hero. But at bottom, he was a blue-collar blues and rock guitarist, right up until his death in March of last year. — **Dan Forte VG**