



MUSIC
 "A SINISTER CABAL OF SUPERIOR WRITERS"

Blogcritics is an online magazine, a community of writers and readers from around the globe.

Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

REVIEW

Music DVD Review: Donovan - *The Donovan Concert: Live In L.A.*

Written by [Glen Boyd](#)

Published December 09, 2007



There's a funny scene in *Don't Look Back*, D.A. Pennebaker's great documentary film of Bob Dylan's 1965 tour of England, where Dylan reacts to a newspaper headline about English folk-rock musician [Donovan](#) — who at the time was being called by some England's own Dylan.

"Who's this Donovan?" Dylan asks with mock indignation.

In retrospect the comparisons are particularly humorous, as Dylan's social and political lyrical content — they labeled it protest music at the time — really had very little in common with Donovan's brand of trippy-hippie mysticism. They both played acoustic guitar and harmonica, but that was really where the comparisons ended. Dylan's songs became the anthems of a generation, while Donovan's are used today in television commercials (Donovan himself humorously refers to this as "selling in" rather than "selling out" on this DVD).

But at the time, Donovan's popularity — at least as evidenced by his record sales — did actually rival Dylan's. During the mid-sixties especially, his songs like "Sunshine Superman," "Mellow Yellow," and "Hurdy Gurdy Man" regularly topped the charts on both sides of the Atlantic. He also frequently drew headlines by hob-nobbing with the rock royalty of the time. Donovan even went with the Beatles to India for their now infamous meeting with the Maharishi.

Yes, that Donovan. Now you remember, right?

Watching this DVD recorded in L.A. earlier this year at a benefit concert for the [David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness Based Education and World Peace](#), the most striking thing you notice is how little Donovan has changed all these years later. He looks the same. He sounds the same. And apparently, he also still holds the same basic hippie philosophy he did back then — embracing the same transcendental meditation today that he learned with the Beatles in the sixties.

Speaking of Lynch, the filmmaker introduces Donovan on this DVD — which only made me wonder to myself what it would have been like if this film had been directed by him. The peace and love of Donovan's trippy lyrics juxtaposed against the darker visions of most of Lynch's films would certainly make for an interesting combination if nothing else.

That said, I was pleasantly surprised by just how good the performance captured on this DVD actually is. Donovan largely goes it alone here, backed only by his acoustic guitar and harmonica, as well as stand-up bassist Tom Mansi and percussionist (congas mostly) Stewart Lawrence. Donovan's daughter Astrella Celeste and Beach Boy Mike Love also make guest appearances.

Playing before a packed house of adoring fans at L.A.'s Kodak Theatre, Donovan and this small trio effortlessly pull off the task of recreating some of his biggest hits.

Donovan himself weaves songs like "Catch The Wind" and "Happiness Runs" together with the touch of a master storyteller, in a running narrative recalling his various sixties adventures with someone named Gypsy Dave in some sort of bohemian utopia. He drops all the names you'd expect in some of these stories — from the Beatles to the Stones to Dylan. But all of this is done with such charm, it never once comes off as being gratuitous or self-serving.

Say what you will about Donovan continuing to cling to the hippie ideals of the sixties, but there is no denying that the guy is genuine. He even does part of the set seated cross-legged on the floor with his guitar. Now is that some sixties hippie authenticity or what?

In one of these stories, Donovan introduces the song "Hurdy Gurdy Man" by telling how he wrote the song while in India, and that George Harrison actually contributed a verse that never made it to the record. In addition to recreating the famous vibrato voice on the record, Donovan then ends the song by singing the previously never-heard verse written by Harrison.

In addition to the songs already mentioned, Donovan also turns in letter perfect versions of "Colours," "Lalena," and most impressively "Season Of The Witch" (the original version is decidedly more electric). Although I was a little disappointed that two of my personal favorite Donovan songs — "Wear Your Love Like Heaven" and "Atlantis" — are not performed here, I found the overall performance



[Wide Glen: Welcome To My Thoughtmare](#). Like most music writers, Glen is also a frustrated rock star who by night masquerades as the singer, songwriter, and all around resident genius for the world's greatest undiscovered rock band, the mighty Aruigius G

Comments

