

The Donovan Concert! Live in L.A. (MVD Visual)

Written by Glen Elkins

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In the 1960s, British pop-legend Donovan Leitch was an integral part of the budding folk-rock genre, then in its infancy, with hits like "Mellow Yellow" and "Sunshine Superman." His playfully exuberant folk tunings were adorned with all psychedelic trappings associated with peace signs and tie-dye. Now 61, Donovan is still actively performing across the United States, with dates extending into March of this year.

The Donovan Concert! Live in L.A. captures one such show. Filmed in Hollywood's Kodak Theater, the concert was held to benefit legendary filmmaker David Lynch's Foundation, who teaches Transcendental Meditation to its pupils. As it was a film with Lynch's name attached to it, I hoped for great, albeit off-the-wall, things. Unfortunately, it appears the only contribution Lynch made to this DVD was his onstage introduction, and short message at the night's conclusion.

From there, Donovan takes over, with acoustic guitar in hand, and performs classic after classic. Although his lone guitar is supported by an upright bass (Tom Mansi) and sparse percussion (Stewart Lawrence), these contemporary renditions sound thin and tired. All the psychedelic, orchestral, and otherwise eclectic elements that make his earlier work so successful have vanished in favor of a more straightforward approach. Maybe it's the quiet patience, or lack of exuberance that comes with age, but Donovan looks like he's simply going through the motions throughout the performance. His voice never breaks above a comfortably soft volume, and as he introduces songs with tales of his exploits, his metered delivery seems extremely rehearsed.

Although the concert itself is well shot, the DVD is little more than performance footage. The only "extras" on the disk are a handful of extra songs, including a duet with his daughter, Astrella Celeste, and the newly written tune "The Illusion." Although these songs aren't bad by any means, they're just more of the same. It which makes me wonder why they are deemed "bonus songs" and not simply inserted in the full-length performance. It would have been nice to have a "behind the scenes," an interview, or something about the Lynch Foundation somewhere on the disk, but sadly it lacks any of the little things which make an otherwise mediocre DVD worthwhile.

Depending on your outlook, *The Donovan Concert! Live in L.A.* serves as a welcome reminder of a youthful "flower power" culture, or as a sad display of an aging rock star, still holding on to a dream most of his generation have long abandoned for the almighty dollar. Indeed messages of peace and love are as important now as ever, but personally something seems lost in the translation.

- Glen Elkins