

## The Donovan Concert: Live in Los Angeles

**Director:** Armstrong, Doug

**Cast:** Donovan, David Lynch, Astrella Celeste, Mike Love

(2008) Rated: Unrated

US DVD release date: 22 January 2008 (Raven Productions)

UK DVD release date: 8 October 2007

by **Gavin Williamson**

During the mid-'60s Donovan emerged from the Scottish psychedelic-folk scene to international fame. With Brit-pop exports like "What's Bin Did and What's Bin Hid" aka "Catch the Wind", his music defied generic conventions, bridging rock, pop, blues, folk, and world music styles. This sensibility quickly put him in contact with other movers and shakers including John Renbourn, Bert Jansch, Fairport Convention and The Incredible String Band, in addition to The Rolling Stones' Brian Jones and The Beatles. In fact, legend has it that it was Donovan who taught George Harrison how to finger pick while he and the Fab Four were studying under the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in India, a trip that would eventually yield the quintessential hit "Hurdy Gurdy Man", and Donovan's proliferating infatuation with meditation.

As a result, *The Donovan Concert: Live in LA DVD* serves as a testament to the singer-song writer's legacy by revisiting many of the songs that made him an icon including, among others, the two above. The event, which took place at the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles on January 21, 2007, was sponsored by the cult director David Lynch (*Blue Velvet*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Lost Highway*, *Inland Empire*), and his Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, an organization that promotes self-improvement and awareness through the Transcendental Meditation techniques of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (an organization with which both the director and the musician are both well established).

As such, the nearly hour and a half performance recounts 13 of Donovan's classics, including the LSD affiliated "Mellow Yellow", and the raga "There Is A Mountain". It's Flower Power all the way. Donovan's first DVD also provides several bonus tracks, including the unreleased "Illusion" from his forthcoming CD *Ritual Groove*. Other extras include special appearances by his daughter, Astrella Celeste and by Mike Love, the lead singer of The Beach Boys, though these were not the highlights of the performance by any means.

Donovan's acoustic sounds necessitate proximity, and this DVD aptly decreases the spatial alienation harbored in the vast proscenium at the 3,500 seat Kodak Theatre. Accordingly, the singer/songwriter begins each song anecdotally; telling where he was, whom he was with, what he was thinking when he wrote (or co-opted in folk-faith, as with Buffy Sainte-Marie's "Universal Soldier") these ballads. Correspondingly, the concert acquires an unwavering sense of honesty, and personal investment on Donovan's part. The 61-year-old *folker* never comes off as pretentious or ironic as he strums his guitar crossed legged. He is still as unwaveringly sincere as he was when busking the streets of Glasgow and Manchester with fellow bohemian Gypsy Dave, and he especially shines on "Season of the Witch", and "Happiness Runs".

This is a similar dedication that seems to run through surging revival of several of his contemporary psych-folk cohorts, most notably the repressing (on vinyl no less...but also on CD) of discographies from The Incredible String Band and Vashti Bunyan and Nick Drake. However, although this resurgence of popular folk music has reinvigorated its forerunners, it's also produced some unfortunate derivatives. So leave Espers and Devendra Banhart alone, and if you must go with the "It" kids of today, then check out The Super Furry Animals, The Decembrists or Elliot Smith, but don't short change the O.G.'s, at least not yet.

**RATING:**  8

**EXTRAS:**  8

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