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Hearts can be this way

This is a favorable review of what would technically seem like a rather bad concert disc, the MVDvisual release of **Marty Balin Live at the Boston Esplanade June 14, 2008** (UPC#700137485193, \$20). The outdoor set lasts 52 minutes and Balin performs the cream of the hit songs he is associated with from his days in the group known as Jefferson Airplane and later, Jefferson Starship. There are people in attendance at the outdoor concert, and more seem to gather as it goes along, although the brief crowd angle shots suggest that folks weren't exactly scrambling over one another to reach the stage. At one point, Balin attempts to get the audience to sing along with a widely familiar tune and you don't know whether to laugh or cry at the sparseness of the response. The picture is presented in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The image quality is anything but slick; it is a graceless, drab presentation with bland colors and weak contrasts. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a rudimentary dimensionality, and the recording has not been tampered with or upgraded, so that it conveys the acoustical loss inherent in an outdoor performance all too well. Balin is accompanied by a female vocalist and backup musicians, yet he is lucky to achieve even wisps of the purity his recordings once conveyed. But that is the whole point—he's doing it anyway. He's not trying to stage one of these revival sets where the musicians attempt to copy precisely what they used to do and fail miserably because they can't run the mile in 3 minutes any more. He's just out there, playing the music that has been his life, and it is a serendipitous event, captured with a wonderful realism for posterity. If you'd happened to be walking along the Charles River for a pleasant June stroll and came across the set after it had gotten underway, is it any wonder you would have been chained and bound to stay and see it through, as one nostalgic hit after another came wafting across the afternoon air with just enough of its provenance intact to remind you that the past is not lost and will always linger in the present? You don't have to believe in miracles for it to be so.

The DVD is not captioned, and comes with a load of supplements to compensate for the brevity of the main set. There are 17 minutes of even rougher performance footage, and 13 minutes of nicer sounding studio footage, although, be aware, in two of the segments, the program automatically reverts to the menu at the end of the first number and you have to manually scan past that point to reach the other numbers. There are 8 minutes of interviews with authors who have written books about Balin, including one that also features a phone hook up with former Airplane singer Signe Anderson. Finally, there is a great 44-minute interview with Balin himself, in a dreary hotel room or something. He sits on a bed with his guitar and the camera stays on him as an off screen reporter asks him decent questions about his life and career. On the one hand, the segment could be considered a typical sycophantic feeding of an egotistical star, but it goes on long enough and is raw enough (there are no cuts) that it gets past that, to create a true profile of what Balin is like and how he views the world. He also has some great stories about Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, and he has fascinating things to say about his more recent recordings and what he wants to accomplish.