

Nov/Dec 2006

FEATURES: SIGHTS & SOUNDS

Whew...

That, in a word, sums up the amazing onslaught of superb new video releases over the past couple of months as the music biz sharpens its sights on new DVD releases and probes more obscure artists for both vintage footage and original offerings. Consequently, even the most dedicated collector is served with a plethora of new releases that are beginning to rival their CD counterparts in terms of quantity and variety.

Fairport fans will also appreciate *Sandy Denny Under Review* (Sexy Intellectual), a rare video analysis focusing on the woman most consider the queen of British folk rock. Denny's brilliance as a singer was underscored by personal turmoil, ultimately resulting in a life cut short by tragic circumstance. Nevertheless, this disc is a celebration of Denny's accomplishments, featuring precious glimpses of live performances and snippets from classic recordings. Considering the scarcity of archival Denny material, this disc becomes something of a holy grail for any true connoisseur of the British folk rock genre.

The *Under Review* series expands in more predictable, but no less illuminating, directions with discs devoted to several seminal bands. *Led Zeppelin: The Origin of the Species* (Sexy Intellectual) is a fascinating look at the band's formative years, including an expansive look at Jimmy Page's early apprenticeship in the Yardbirds (who get their own retelling in a special bonus feature) and even earlier endeavors (including a clip of a 15-year old Jimmy being interviewed on British television). The Zeppelin story has been recounted countless times, but the *Under Review* penchant for critical analysis – accompanied by the appearance of numerous talking heads (including Brit rock veterans Chris Dreja of the Yardbirds and renowned vocalist Chris Farlowe) adds a new dimension to this critical dissection. An in-depth analysis of the band's early music gets special emphasis, thanks to several clips from the group's first performances.

Queen Under Review 1980 – 1991 (Chrome) follows the same tact, taking up the Queen story at a time when the band were clearly in their creative prime. As always, there's a plethora of dazzling live footage – Queen were nothing if not a spectacular concert act – but the views of some of Britain's leading critics – journalists Paul Gambaccini and Chris Welch among them – add a depth to the discussion that cuts beneath the glitz and glamour that became so much a part of the group's reputation.

Likewise, *The Rolling Stones Under Review 1962 – 1966* (Sexy Intellectual) retraces one of the most familiar trajectories in rock 'n' roll, although this look at the band's early period, from their founding as a strict blues band to what many consider their creative peak in the mid '60s as they freely expanded their sound to a new level of artistic ambition, is especially well crafted. Like its companion sets, there is a plethora of intriguing historical footage, making this disc an essential acquisition even for those who have managed to acquire every other Rolling Stones offering that's come down the pike over the years.