

DVD REVIEWS

ERIC CLAPTON - *The 1960's Review* (Sexy Intellectual)

I'm a nonbeliever. Among '60s blues-guitar heroes, Mike Bloomfield always seemed to edge closer to the divine than EC did. That said, Clapton contributed to some of the best records of the period—and it's precisely that period under discussion here, which means his work in the Yardbirds, Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Cream and Blind Faith (Derek & the Dominos will have the wait for the *1970s Review*).

The content and chronology of this documentary will be well known to most *Ugly Things* readers. Hence it's the way the familiar tales are told—mostly in great detail—that makes this program interesting. That means guys like the Yardbirds' Chris Dreja and Manfred Mann's Tom McGuinness and Paul Jones recounting the early-'60s birth of London's blues scene that saw Chess-playing combos sprouting, slowly at first, like mushrooms all over town. When Jones first learns of likeminded folks laboring a few tube stops away, he's surprised ("I thought mine was the only blues band in town") and experiences that same wondrous recognition of "There are others!" that would later animate scenes like Frisco psych, punk-rock, even the '90s lounge revival. McGuinness, and pianist Ben Palmer, who played with Clapton in the Roosters, make this section sparkle, as do Dreja's reminiscences of Clapton's tenure in the Yardbirds (replacing the Stones as the Crawdaddy house band).

Mayall handles a not especially in-depth treatment of Clapton's time in his band; some time is given to EC's brief patch with Casey Jones & the Engineers; and there's good but previously seen Yardbirds footage. But it's Cream that, rightly, gets the most face-time here. As *Melody Maker's* Chris Welch and others make clear, that's where Clapton made his mark—not just as a stylist, but as a musician who could instinctively fit his playing into a song, adding color, pinching or letting out the tune's fabric in all the right places. *Disraeli Gears*, and even *Wheels of Fire*, get critically re-evaluated (the latter, more than one scribe opines, is *not* a sprawling, indulgent mess), and concert film from this career period shows Clapton hard at work generating heat.

The show closes with some analysis of Blind Faith, which most everyone agrees represented a leap from frying-pan to fire for a musician who wanted to escape the pressures of superstardom, though here too a case is made that the band's one proper album deserves a better rep than it's gotten.

For once, a DVD whose extras really add something! Yes, there are the usual contributor bios and an entertaining I-was-there producer's moment (Cream producer Bill Halverson's anecdote about "Badge"), but there's also Dreja's first-person account of what it was like to support Sonny Boy, and, even better, Paul Jones' recollection of the formation of the earliest Clapton-Winwood collaboration, the Power-

house, and just how its personnel lineup wound up as it did.

Clapton freaks may take to *The 1960's Review* with even more gusto than I did, but even for this nonbeliever, watching it was time very well spent. (Gene Sculatti)

THE DOORS - *When You're Strange* (Eagle Vision)

It will be 40 years this summer since Jim Morrison, the Lord of Excess, exceeded his limit and expired like some latter-day Marat in a Paris bathtub. But the music he made with the Doors continues to have an active afterlife, selling a million or so copies each year. Concert recordings, re-issues, books and, of course, DVDs keep pumping new plasma into Morrison's legacy.

The latest DVD is *When You're Strange*, a film by Tom DiCillo and narrated by Johnny Depp. DiCillo is best known for a string of indie pictures in the '90s that usually featured Catherine Keener and/or Steve Buscemi (*Double Whammy*, *The Real Blonde*, *Box of Moon Light*, *Living in Oblivion*) and Depp, well, he's Jack Sparrow.

DiCillo isn't about to dish up a tame A&E *Biography* episode or use Depp for a straight voice-over to tie things neatly together. Instead he lets the visuals do much of the heavy lifting. And fortunately he has strong material courtesy of Paul Ferrara, a photographer who shot the *Waiting for the Sun* cover and made the two films with Morrison, *Hwy: An American Pastoral* (1969) and *Feast of Friends* (1970).

The difference between someone with a camera and a good film director comes down to vision, and DiCillo's editing of the restored footage and other contemporary materials (Vietnam, Kennedy and King assassinations) brings a narrative coherence to what were Ferrara and Morrison's post-student film experiments. DiCillo's version now opens with Morrison, barreling along a desert highway in a Ford Mustang, hearing his own obituary on the car radio. It's a bizarre set-up, so much so that at first viewers might well suspect that the driver is a Morrison look-alike, but it's Jimbo (a.k.a. Mr Mojo Risin') at wheel with the broadcast a later dub.

From there, the 96-minute *When You're Strange* backtracks to the beginning of the Doors, when everything Morrison did "seems brilliant or brilliantly calculated." There is good footage of the band playing to small audiences, the leap to national television (*Ed Sullivan Show*, etc), and then the big halls (Hollywood Bowl, the Forum, Madison Square Garden) and festivals, most notably the Isle of Wight in 1970, when an estimated 600,000 turned out to see the Doors, Jimi Hendrix and others. Along the way there are also plenty of examples of "Jimbo," as the other Doors called his dark side, surfacing in the studio and on stage, either drunk, stoned or determined to cause trouble, including riots in New Haven and New York and the indecent exposure bust in Miami.

DiCillo, as he's cut the footage, doesn't play up the strengths or play down the problems that Morrison brought to his long-suffering bandmates, producer Paul Rothchild or Elektra chief Jac Holzman during their 54 months together. It's all there, and even at this late date, despite knowing how the story plays out, there is no denying that Morrison, even at his worst, has charisma to spare. DiCillo and Depp say of him, "You can't burn out if you're not on fire." But Morrison, in one of his poems, perhaps summed himself up best: "I drink so I can talk to assholes. This includes me."

DiCillo also includes an eight-minute bonus inter-

view with Morrison's sister and his father, Rear-Admiral George Morrison (USN-Ret), who speaks for the first time about his son, calling him a "moral man" and a "good citizen." They weren't close. (Bill Wasserzieher)

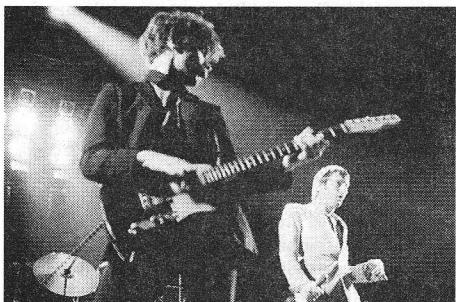
DR FEELGOOD - *Oil City Confidential* (Cadiz Music, UK)

This is a first-class lesson in exactly how a good music documentary should be done. With the Feelgoods, all the ingredients for a great film were already there for the taking: great storyline, interesting characters, exciting music, and all of it taking place against a larger historical, cultural and social backdrop, in this case early to mid '70s England. Director Julien Temple took inspiration from all of those aspects to create *Oil City Confidential*, which he describes as a "prequel" to his previous documentaries, *The Filth and the Fury* (about the Sex Pistols) and *The Future Is Unwritten* (about Joe Strummer). In the dead years before punk, it was Dr Feelgood that set the stage in the UK with their manic high-energy sound and hard-faced, cheap-suited image. They were the shit.

The film's title refers to the band's hometown of Canvey Island, a bleak, reclaimed island in the Thames estuary, dominated by huge fire-belching oil and gas refineries. Canvey becomes the richly atmospheric noir setting for the film, including most of the interview sections, which are dominated by Wilko Johnson, who is as wild-eyed and animated in conversation as he is on stage, by turns hilarious and profound. Temple's smart, fast-paced editing matches the gritty, jittery qualities of the original Feelgoods' sound. He deftly dices up archival and fictive footage, vintage photos, clippings, TV ads, memorabilia and interviews with all the principal characters, including the late Lee Brilleaux. In a clever touch, Temple also splices in scenes from old British crime films from the '40s and '50s to illustrate the group's "smash and grab" style forays out of Canvey and into the London pub scene in the early days.

The footage of the band performing—of which there is plenty—is electrifying, particularly the onstage interaction between Brilleaux and Johnson, who one observer describes as "skittering around the stage on his psychedelic trampoline." Although it can't necessarily be heard in their music, psychedelics played a large part in Wilko's unique world-view, as he explains, and no doubt informed his songwriting and approach to performance. As good as their early records were, the Feelgoods were clearly at their best in front of a live audience—probably better than any band of that era, in fact.

For a few short months they were on top, the biggest band in the country—then the tram slid off the rails. Wilko left in a tangle of personality conflicts,



Wilko Johnson and Lee Brilleaux.