

The Phantom's
ROCK DOCS A Go-Go!

BRIAN WILSON SONGWRITER 1962-1969 (2010) ♂♂♂
 D: Uncredited. 190 mins. (Sexy Intellectual/MVD Visual) 11/10

Despite logging many years as a working beach bum with dual Jersey Shore and South Florida citizenship, yours truly has never been what you'd call a Beach Boys buff. True, the Boys, with their bouncy melodies, sprightly harmonies and lively Chuck Berry lifts, proved one of the sunnier spots during rock's dark days of 1962-63, but the band and the generally lightweight surf culture it fronted (which did, to its credit, spawn many great instrumental tracks, like Dick Dale's immortal "Misirlou") were blown out of the water by the Beatles-led British Invasion of 1964. Still, anyone with even a mild interest in the topic will want to tune in to this compelling combo pop history lesson and detailed portrait of the group's increasingly troubled musical mastermind, Brian Wilson. The story at first reflects a whitebread variation on the Jackson Family saga, with pushy patriarch Murry Wilson initially running the show, only to be eventually ousted by upstart son Brian. MVD's double-disc set devotes some three hours to Brian, the Boys and their debut decade, one rich in triumph, tragedy, soap opera histrionics and evolving musical mastery. Talking heads like early bandmate David Marks (an ex-Beach Boy by age 15!), Brian's still-busy touring replacement, bassist/singer Bruce Johnston, studio musicians Hal Blaine and Carol Kaye, *Rolling Stone* critic Anthony DeCurtis and many other experts ably complete the portrait.

THE SACRED TRIANGLE: BOWIE, IGGY & LOU 1971-1973 (2010) ♂♂♂ 1/2
 D: Uncredited. David Bowie, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop. 107 mins. (Sexy Intellectual/MVD) 11/10

Another excellent rock doc from the folks at Sexy Intellectual and MVD Visual, **The Sacred Triangle** explores the intertwined careers of David Bowie, Lou Reed and Iggy Pop, and how the former strip-mined the latter duo for ideas. Iggy unwittingly planted the seeds for Bowie's mega-popular Ziggy Stardust, while Reed inspired musical experimentation and greased Bowie's way into Andy Warhol's influential NYC circle. Not that the deal went entirely one-way; karma chameleon Bowie repaid his role models by producing and promoting them, most notably on his U.K. home turf. In the end, he probably can't be blamed for possessing the acumen to alchemize, or at least commercialize,

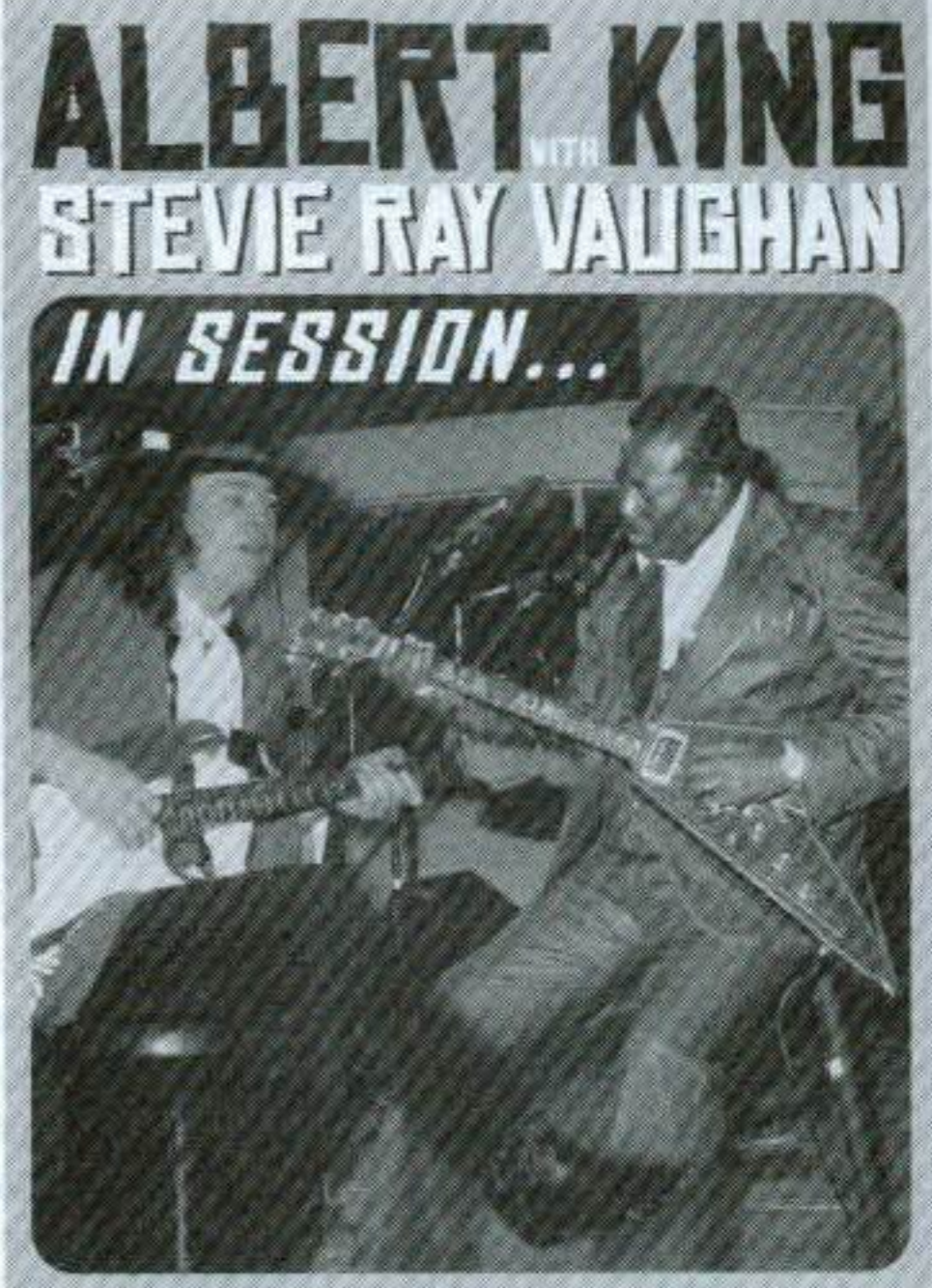
Reed and Iggy's (among others) raw material. The flashily bedecked, stick-figured glam-rock idol freely owns up to his ability to know what works and assimilate those details into his own persona. Scene survivors like ex-wife Angie Bowie, articulate Warhol assistant Billy Name and Fun City gadfly Jayne County all bear expert witness, while several seasoned Brit rock critics supply keen analyses, and terrific archival performance clips provide the beat. Anyone remotely interested in this pivotal crossroads in rock history should pounce on this addictive disc.

WHO IS HARRY NILSSON (AND WHY IS EVERYBODY TALKIN' ABOUT HIM)? (2010) ♂♂♂
 D: John Scheinfeld. 116 mins. (Lorber) 10/10

Brian Wilson pops up as one of many talking heads who gather to pay tribute to another lord of self-destruction, singer/songwriter/pianist Harry Nilsson. Born in poverty in Brooklyn and abandoned by his dad at an early age, young Harry ultimately journeyed west to L.A., where he managed a movie theater and oversaw a bank's nascent computer department before giving music a serious go. Scoring with a string of hit tunes like "One," "Coconut," "Without You" (written by Randy Newman) and *Midnight Cowboy's* iconic theme "Everybody's Talkin'" (penned by Fred Neil), the multi-octaved vocalist found himself a much sought-after commodity and the Beatles' avowed "favorite group" (he later grew tight—quite literally—with John and Ringo). Scheinfeld's doc presents a portrait of an extraordinarily gifted, versatile and contradictory artist determined to blaze his own trails, dabbling in animation (the made-for-TV fable *The Point*), movie musicals (the less-beloved pre-*Rocky Horror* cult bid *Son of Dracula*, costarring Ringo as Merlin the Magician [!]), film scores (Robert Altman's *Popeye*) and, of course, the requisite mass quantities of drink, drugs and cigs that helped erode his voice and induce a fatal heart attack at age 52. While most of the assembled celebs dutifully honor the increasingly Falstaffian genius/wastrel, Eric Idle cheerfully cites Harry as a bad influence, chemical-wise, while the Smothers Brothers still profess resentment re Harry's (and pal Lennon's) ruinous heckling during the siblings' comeback attempt at an L.A. club. In addition to forming a full and complex picture, Scheinfeld's doc should reawaken interest in Nilsson's musical career, one that should have lasted longer than it did. Extras include deleted scenes, additional interviews and more. For doddering boomers, all three rock docs rep the equivalent of the old *Victory at Sea* series that held "Greatest Generation" viewers spellbound decades earlier.

REALITY DVD

Elsewhere on the verite front, we likewise recommend Leon Gast's fun portrait of infamous paparazzo Ron Galella, *Smash His Camera* (Magnolia), and Richard Shepard's actor profile *I Knew It Was You: Rediscovering John Cazale* (Oscilloscope).



BONUS BLUES INFUSION!

ALBERT KING WITH STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN: IN SESSION (1983/2010) ♂♂♂ 1/2
 D: Uncredited. Albert King, Stevie Ray Vaughan. 60 mins. (Stax) 11/10

Yours truly first had the pleasure of experiencing Albert King live and in person during an otherwise largely ill-advised trip to 'Frisco during the fabled Summer of Love (VS #63), either at the Avalon Ballroom or Fillmore West (only Keith Richards professes to remember The Sixties). We caught that blues great on several subsequent occasions in a variety of venues back home in NYC and were never disappointed. The man's likewise in fine form in this informal *In Session* show taped with acolyte Stevie Ray Vaughan in Toronto in 1983. Albert, then 60, looks and sounds terrific, as does SRV, then 28, as they trade riffs, licks and solos backed by King's able tour musicians (who remain mostly off-camera) on King classics like "Born Under a Bad Sign" and "Call It Stormy Monday" and SRV originals like "Don't Lie to Me" and "Pride and Joy." Adding immensely to the fun is the easygoing banter the pair share, with Albert good-naturedly chiding his eager disciple. (At one point the elder bluesman, a thumb and index finger picker who makes frequent use of his handy Emory board, asks the younger to teach him how to play with a pick.) Though the playlist tops out at 10, many of the tunes are lengthy jams; by the end, blues buffs will not only have gotten their money's worth but will likely be begging for more. ♂

—The Phantom