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Level 42 - Live At London's Town & Country Club

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Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted January 12, 2014 | [E-mail the Author](#)

THE FILM:

We all have that band, that beloved musical group that we wish we could have seen live, back in their day. Sure, it's great that Journey travels the country playing a well rehearsed collection of their greatest hits to adoring fans, but how "Journey" is this Journey if only two of the five members are original? The same goes for revamps of noted acts like Styx, Foreigner, and perhaps the worst of all, Thin Lizzy. It's a shame for those growing up long after a famous group has long since disbanded (or, sadly, died off). How many people would love to see The Beatles or The Clash today, even if they were all alive and in the 70s and 60s, respectively? Level 42, that one hit wonder (at least in the US) of "Something About You" fame (you remember the video, where the lead singer was dressed like a combination of John Steed and a harlequin?), has been in this boat since original founding members, brothers Phil and Rowland "Boon" Gould, left in 1987. Yes, there was a one-off quasi-reunion in 1994, but since then, lead singer/bassist Mark King and keyboardist Mike Lindup have made do with a rag tag group of session players and touring musicians to fill in the gaps left by their former bandmates.

So this is the Level 42 we see on the interesting (if irritating - more on this in a moment) live DVD. Performing at London's Town and Country Club sometime in 1992, we get a strong set of 16 songs, most of them established hits with some new material tossed in for good measure. Throughout it all, King is in command, his light-up bass guitar (the frets are festooned with LEDs) providing the slap/thump foundation while Lindup waves his hands and pounds the keys. They are joined by Gary Husband (drums, and someone who many consider a legitimate Level 42 replacement member), Jakko Jakszyk (guitars), Gary Barnacle (saxophone), John Thirkell (trumpet) and Annie McCaig (backing vocals). Out in support of their latest release, *Guaranteed* (they play four songs from this released during the 89 minute show) and electrifying a crowd of complete ingrates, this is the kind of show that can teach those who only know the group via that one hit that there was (and is) much more to Level 42 than a single on MTV. They are a powerful live act, excellent musicians, and when push comes to shove, stellar songwriters.

What they (and this DVD) can't compensate for is the utter lack of respect they are shown by the audience. When King hits the stage and starts into the song "Hot Water," you wonder if the amazingly annoying sports whistling coming from the crowd will continue throughout the entire show. Yes, someone (or, actually, it sounds like several people) decided that a referee's whistle would be a good thing to bring to a show, and they blast it every five seconds. With the beat. Against the beat. In deference to a song's quieter moments and even during King's banter back and forth. It's never fun, always intrusive, and by the time the band finishes "The Chinese Way," you want to find the guilty parties and strangle them with their own sense of entitlement. Imagine sitting through an otherwise excellent movie and having some nimrod use a laser pointer to randomly add a red dot to everything going on. UGH! Back in the days of disco and Studio 54 people would often bring whistles to add their own ill-advised instrumentation to the proceedings. Of course, everyone was too coked up to care. Here, the home audience is obviously not included in the pharmaceutical vibe going on, so the whistle becomes an affront.

As for everything else on this disc, the show is sensational. Level 42 understand the live dynamic and deliver a set that concentrates of keeping the energy up with only the occasional lull into a ballad or slow soulfulness. There's nary a misplaced note or off-key caterwaul to be found. King is quite the accomplished player, a bit too busy on the bass but still offering effective runs and rhythmic routines. Lindup, when featured, is fine as well. There is a bit of a music school education vibe going on here, as if what we have are a group of trained experts who just so happened to have a hit record back in the mid '80s. Still, they can electrify the crowd into jumping along. That being said, King and company don't put on the most flamboyant show. You get songs, often running into each other (this happens with "Lessons in Love" and "Something About You") and minimal banter. The light show consists of turning them up and then down. Thankfully, the quality of the playing trumps such tepid pyrotechnics. This may not be the 'original' version of Level 42, but what's onstage here is fine indeed.

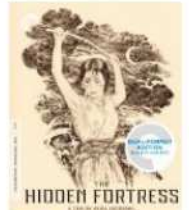
THE DVD:

Now, the downside. Since it was recorded in 1992, this is a pre-digital concert presentation. The image is 1.33:1 full screen and the sound is basic Dolby Digital Stereo. Mind you, the music comes across brilliantly, but the boxy transfer is unusual, especially in our high tech, HD times. At least there's been no post-production transfer to 'film.' Instead, this is a videotape print and it looks it, from the occasional flaring to the obvious oversaturation of colors. Another negative? No bonus features. No discography or liner notes to speak of at all.

For those interested, here is the setlist:

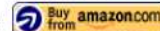
1. Hot Water
2. Her Big Day
3. The Sun Goes Down
4. Children Say
5. The Spirit is free
6. Leaving Me Now
7. Guaranteed
8. Heaven In My Hands
9. She Can't Help Herself
10. If You Were Mine
11. To Be With You Again
12. Running In The Family

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FINAL THOUGHTS:

Like the video that made them world famous, there always seemed to be more to Level 42 than virtuoso musicianship and jazz/fusion leanings. Apparently, the Gould Brothers argued with King over the "pop" direction the group was taking and left to seek their own fortunes. In this case, what was left behind was more than capable of carrying on. Technical and whistle issues aside, this concert DVD deserves a **Recommended** rating for those who want to be adventurous in their sonic appreciate. Otherwise, if all you care about is "Something About You" then *Rent It*. For the diehard, this is a must own. All others should remember that, often, a name is just that. A label. This Level 42 is damn good. It's not *THE* Level 42, however.

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Nice review. I sometimes feel I am the only Level 42 fan in America.

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