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Rick Danko Band  
Live on Breeze Hill  
Breeze Hill (1999)

Although live projects may be exempt from any expectations of new material, with Live On Breeze Hill, even the bonus studio track — a revisit to 1978's "Drink the Wine" — is a swim through familiar waters. Not that it's not worthwhile: faithful to the original, it's a fine version, full of inspiration and sensitively executed with flawless vocals from Danko and fine fretwork from Jim Wieder. It is still, however... a revisit to 1978's "Drink the Wine."

Fortunately his shortcomings in the new material department are compensated by his strengths as a performer. Backed by a full horn section and what is essentially the modern-day lineup of The Band minus Levon Helm, he runs through live warhorses past and present. J.J. Cale's "Crazy Mama" is given the opportunity to fully shuffle and "Twilight," an outtake from Northern Lights, Southern Cross, shines through with all the sepia-tinged glory of "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down."

Breeze Hill also reminds the listener of Danko's strength at making songs his own, like "Blaze of Glory," which sounds like a Rick Danko song, though originally sung by Kenny Rogers. Newcomers (if there is such a thing) and completists won't have anything to complain about, but some of the material — through no fault of the performance — suffers from the misfortune of having already appeared on two of the finest live albums in the history of recorded music. Those with well-worn copies of The Last Waltz and Rock of Ages may not be too thrilled at sitting through another version of "Shape I'm In" and "Stage Fright" even though a portion of the proceeds does go to Greenpeace.

- Gianluca Tramontana (New York, NY)