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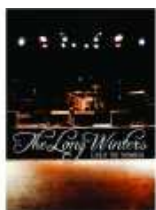
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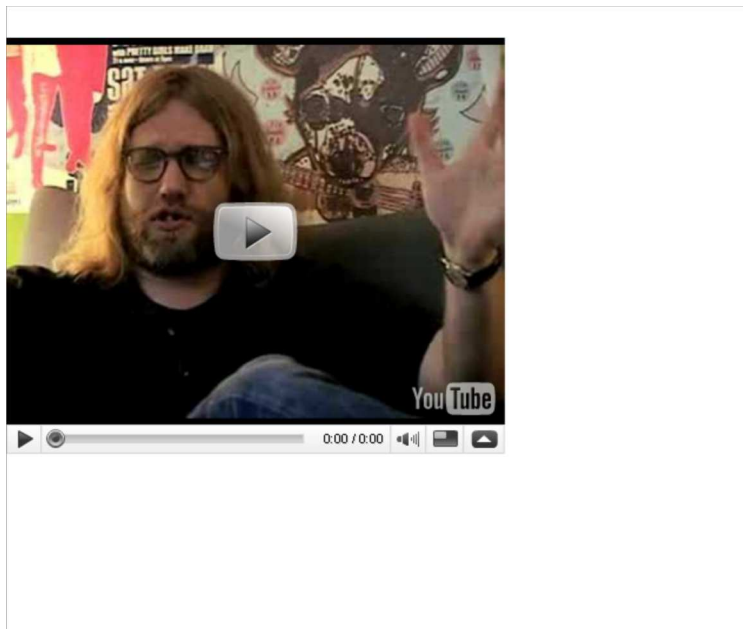
2008's DVDs That Rock

by Chris Estey



[The Long Winters, Live At The Showbox](#)

John Roderick, Nabil Ayers, Eric Corson, and Jonathan Rothman have charm and energy to spare on this document of a full-length set recorded at the Showbox at the Market winding down the most recent TLW's long-ass tour. Also included: Brassy horn section amping "romanthems" like the darling "Teaspoon." Cheap and intimate, well-recorded but spare with BS, the performances of the songs (everything from a warm and wonderful "Stupid" to a somehow chilling yet swinging "The Commander Thinks Aloud") will make true-blood fans happy and get neophytes on board. Roderick is like some confident mutation of English professor, effortless blues-rock guitar basher, and sardonic Muppet throughout, extending to the don't-miss DVD first of a commentary track on the taped show with the rest of his band (save for Ayers, who they good-naturedly make sure to talk shit about in his absence).



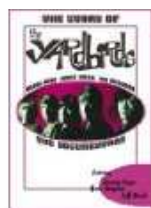
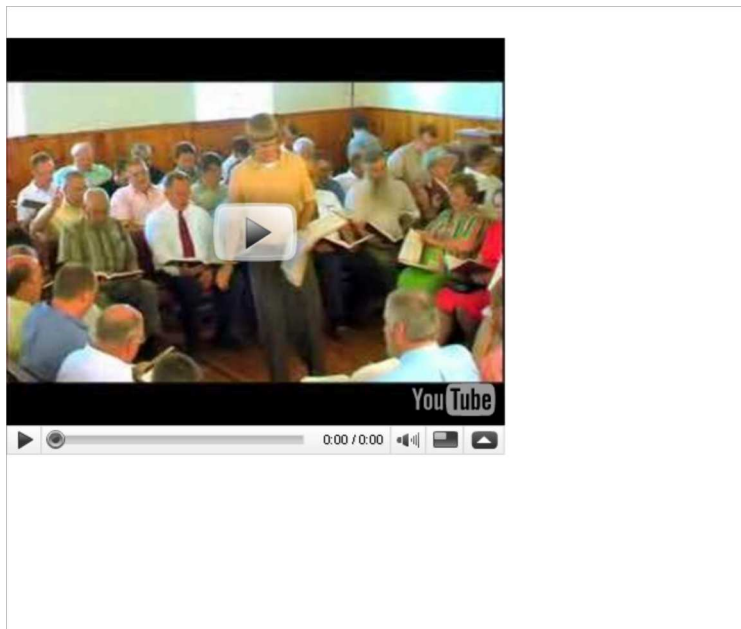
[Metalocalypse, Season II: Black Fire Upon Us](#)

The generous second volume of this well-animated Adult Swim breakout hit about a (really) world-dominating death metal band called Dethclock, one part Metallica and other parts revealed over the course of its blood-spattered black (metal, bile) humorous satirical episode. This volume couldn't get any nastier with the gore towards its fans (a very dedicated and precise nod to the aesthetics of the genre), and yet some running gags (mostly driven by their long-suffering "label guy," whose patience and good humor at their idiocy is either divinely or demonically inspired) flesh out the characters a lot more since the eye-splitting head trauma of the bombastic first season. The music provided for the band rocks harder and darker too, which makes the humor directed at David Lee Roth cocaine clowns and killer cult inverted Internet fanbases that much more enjoyable.



[Awake, My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp](#)

From the really profane to the traditionally sacred, and just as dazzling, we now come to *Awake My Soul*, a full-length documentary that tells the story of a VERY early form of post-Pilgrim a cappella praise music based on a four note (“shape note singing”) concept that was sort of the punk rock, “outsider art” of its day. Filmmakers Matt and Erica Hinton draw in still-living practitioners of “The Lost Tonal Tribe” to explain how a group of church singers rebelliously expressed their passion for God in purely American transcendental form; its tonality will recall the medieval world, as its simplicity and energy foretells the energy of future rock and roll. Alt-country singer Jim Lauderdale does a wonderful job in his voiceover of tying together the strange and often flamboyant coordinators, innovators, and liberators in this uniquely American form of musical expression. (Warning: DON’T listen to this stuff when you have a hangover.)



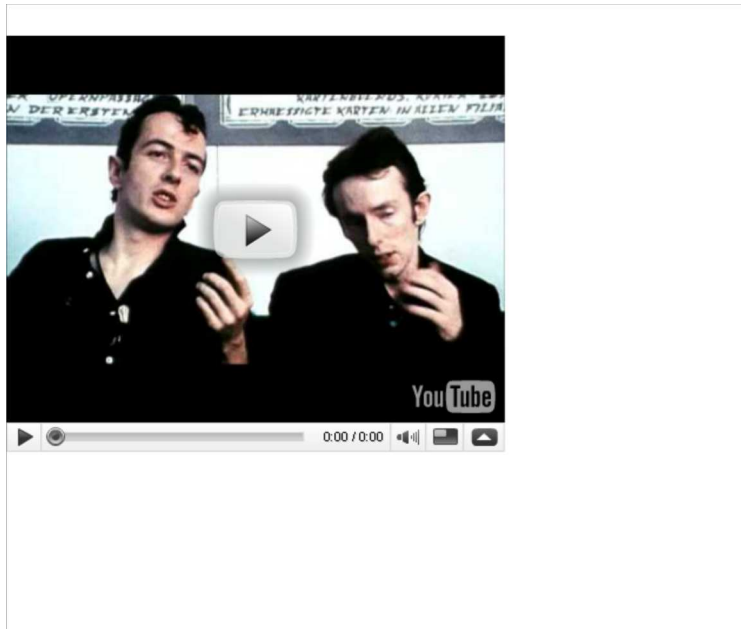
[The Story of The Yardbirds](#)

The sweat-drenched seeds of world-changing hard rock and heavy metal are shown in their gritty, small club soil in this extremely well done documentary on The Yardbirds, a band with a butterfly’s life that at one point (briefly) included both Jimmy Page AND Jeff Beck. Footage of those guys playing from the years 1963 to 1968 is hard to get and most of it is right here (and yes, they really rocked like gods). Like a brilliant reissue with essential music performances but also filled with rare interviews and long-buried secret histories, *The Story of The Yardbirds* fills in so many gaps about popular music in the 60s that the 14 minute segment from German TV “Beat - Beat - Beat” seems like nitro icing on a cake of rock dynamite.



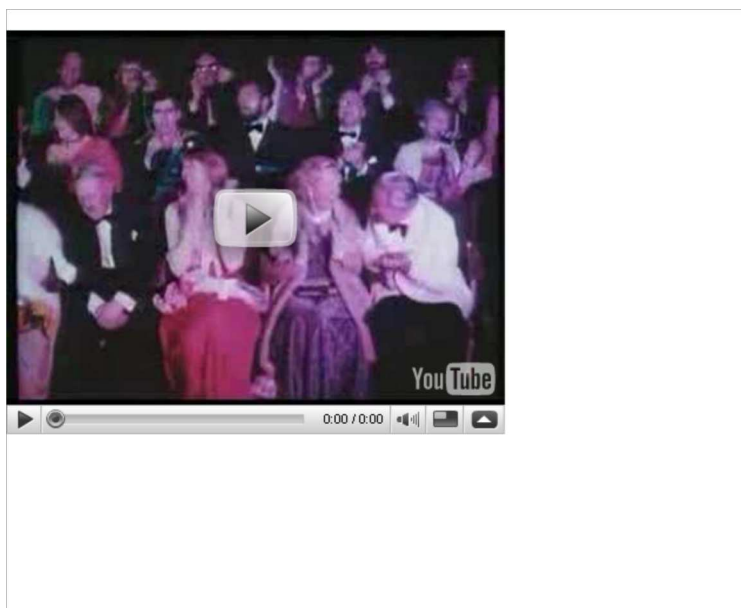
[The Future Is Unwritten](#)

This is arguably the best Joe Strummer biography there is and ever will be, probably because it's made by Julien Temple, who among other great music-inspired movies crafted the Malcolm McLaren's original hoax *Great Rock And Roll Swindle* and then told the truth from the Sex Pistols' POV in *The Filth And The Fury*. Weaving Strummer's own BBC DJ work playing rare music with his own particular urban ju ju aesthetic throughout sometimes damning, sometimes heart-shredding interviews from old friends in The Clash (Topper Headon) and out (John Cooper Clarke), we learn of the suicide of his Nazi-leaning brother, his contention for those not jumping on the punk bandwagon quickly enough, and his born again hippie phase in which he extolled graciousness and community above fashion and art. There are other cinematic portrayals of Strummer a real Clash lover needs to experience, though — the documentary *Let's Rock Again* (2006) shows how tenaciously street-level he was in promoting his vital late-period work at a time in his life when he should have been wealthy and retired; the anxious and angry character he played in Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* (1987) may have said more about him in fiction than a documentary about him can tell.



[The House of the Rising Punk](#)

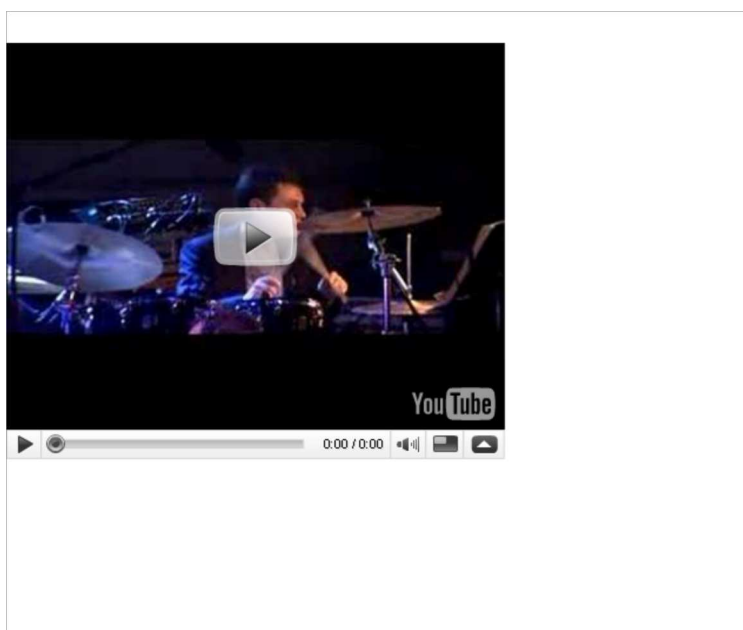
Featuring insider Zeitgeist-experiences with the The Stooges, New York Dolls, Ramones, Blondie, etc., this is a German TV production that takes a loving and lingering view of American punk from its very earliest beginnings. There are shocking clips of Iggy Pop egging on the death of the 60s like a sinewy arena-bucking Charlie Manson; very intimate home movies of Tom Verlaine and Richard Hell raising hell from Kentucky through self-published poetry chapbooks as a combined female persona and infusing that literary fuckery into storm-the-big-city out-of-the-garage rock as Television and The Heartbreakers; and wickedly delightful footage of the last pop band ever, Suicide (with still-buff macho-bohemian co-leader Alan Vega asking/answering the basic but essential question, “How far did we think we were going to go with a name like Suicide? Would radio in the 70s, or even now, want to play a new band with that name?”). An ageless Legs McNeil explains how the name of his zine became the name of the rebirth of rock music for the thousandth time, and I’m captivated as ever.



Sid Vicious - My Way

[David Axelrod Live, Royal Festival Hall](#)

This is a beautiful package of live music CD and DVD featuring the jazz/rock genre-battering seductive singing and orchestral-leading skills of notorious underground Phoenix David Axelrod, rising from the ashes of obscurity. He hasn't lost the suave intuition that guided his sonorous work in the early 70s, and though his extrapolative takes on "Paint It Black" and "Norwegian Wood" get downright rowdy in these performances, unlike Scott Walker, he uses more restraint in raising pop form to avant expression. Axelrod can sound as brittle and transgressive on "The Sick Rose" and "The Human Abstract" as he can heartfelt and faithful on the William Blake-inspired "Song of Innocence" and Jewish prayer "Holy Are You." This is the last few decades of modern rock, reimagined with the sophistication that might have happened en masse if Joe Strummer hadn't gotten so bored with the USA.



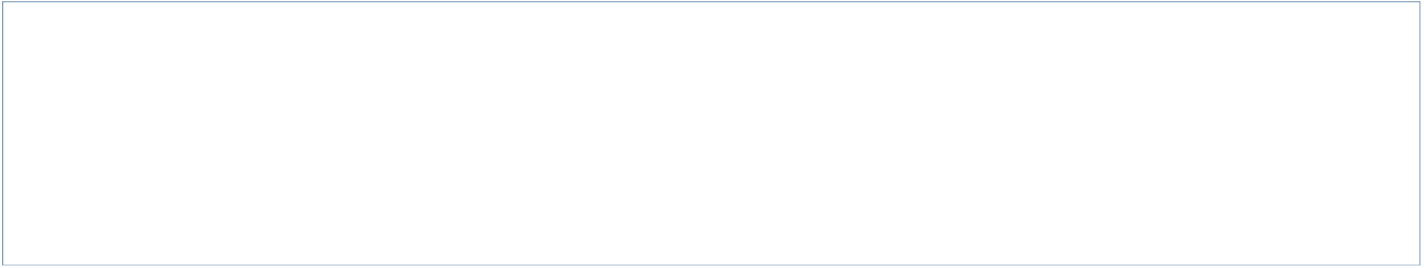
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