

pretension and irrelevance. An eternity is spent idling on a joint venture with avant-garde artiste Charles Wilp, with whom the Monks were supposed to collaborate. Said project never materialized; so why are we subjected to a 10-minute interlude about Wilp and a television commercial he made years later? It's like a Yardbirds documentary going off at length on a proposed collaboration with dance troupe Pan's People that also never got off the ground.

Far more pitiful is the way the movie fizzles out at the end. The Monks '99 reunion is not so much covered as gotten over with, and then we move onto their contemporary home lives. Yes, no doubt the members are average late middle-aged Americans, but do we need to know this? Do we need to see Larry Clark square-dancing? Or Roger Johnston cleaning the church where he ended up living? It seems more like European patronization and condescension than insight and poignancy. There's no sense of empathy, just irony.

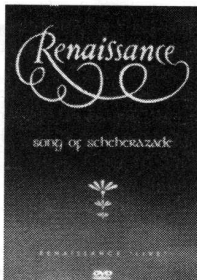
This movie, particularly the conclusion, sucks the mystique out of the Monks. Shame. *Transatlantic Feedback* is a wasted opportunity, and with Dave Day's death in January 2008 (Roger passed away in 2004), the definitive documentary of the Monks cannot be filmed. This isn't the Monks story. It's Dietmar Post's story. 2 1/2 out of 5 stars. (Will Shade)

RENAISSANCE - Song of Scheherazade (Cherry Red)

Former Yardbirds Keith Relf and Jim McCarty formed Renaissance in the late 1960s; however, the symphonic prog band achieved its greatest popularity in the mid-'70s, only after achieving membership stability with the line-up of John Tout, keyboards; Jon Camp, bass pedals/vocals; Michael Dunford, acoustic and electric guitars; Terence Sullivan, drums; and vocalist extraordinaire Annie Haslam.

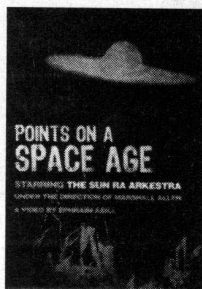
The band's best-loved albums are a trio of studio releases: *Ashes Are Burning* (1973), *Turn of the Cards* (1974), and *Scheherazade and Other Stories* (1975), plus *Live at Carnegie Hall* (1976). The DVD *Song of Scheherazade* captures two New Jersey concerts: one recorded May 21, 1976, at the Capital Theatre in Passaic, and the second filmed on July 28, 1979, at the Convention Hall. Of the two, I found the first the most enjoyable simply because it consists of their best material from 1972-75. Highlights from the first concert include "Running Hard," "Carpet of the Sun" and the three-part title track, preceded by a scene-setting introduction explaining the background of the epic *1001 Arabian Nights*-inspired suite. The nine songs performed at the 1979 show draw from later albums, including four from Renaissance's then-forthcoming LP, *Azure d'Or*, as well as a repeat of "Mother Russia" also performed at the 1976 show.

A couple of caveats are in order. First off, the initial pressings of this DVD contained an embarrassing mastering error that made Annie Haslam's stunning soprano sound something more like "Satchmo," as one posting on the Internet put it. Second, the footage is in black and white and suffers from what the cover acknowledges is "some loss of technical quality," meaning the footage appears a bit washed out. On the up side, the camera angles are pretty good and, thankfully, the audio problem has been corrected. While not perfect, the footage does "capture the essence of the band" (to again steal a phrase from the cover) and, therefore, can be recommended to faithful followers. All others should steer toward the above-cited classic albums. (Jeff Watt)



THE SUN RA ARKESTRA UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MARSHALL ALLEN - Points on a Space Age (MVD Visual)

Before there was psychedelic (or even Funkadelic's) music, there was Sun Ra (1914-1993). Born Herman Poole Blount in Alabama, he cut his teeth as a pianist in swing and blues bands (including Fletcher Henderson's and Wynonie Harris' groups, respectively). At some point in the 1950s, Poole/Ra left the planet musically and set his sights on outer space. He and his large ensemble—the Arkestra, which he fronted for more than 40 years—have been cited as influences on Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, the Grateful Dead (whose concert staple "Dark Star" was partly an homage to Ra) and George Clinton. Sun Ra even made the cover of *Rolling Stone* on April 19, 1969, sporting a yellow pair of imported skier's goggles, looking even more "out there" than Captain Beefheart in his trout mask.



Fittingly, this too-brief, 60-minute documentary by Ephraim Asili opens with President John F Kennedy saying, "I believe we should go to the moon." However, if you are then expecting *Points on a Space Age* to turn into a documentary on Ra's life, you will be disappointed. The best source for that is John F Szwed's exhaustive 1997 biography, *Space Is the Place*. This is more of a tribute to 86-year-old Marshall Allen, Ra's trusted collaborator who has led the Arkestra since his mentor's death.

The film features footage of the Allen-led lineup, decked out in spangled robes and otherworldly head-dresses, performing for a crowd that at first seems to fidget in its collective seats but, by show's end, parades up and down the aisles led Pied-Piper-style by Arkestra members. Though Sun Ra is not on stage, his presence is felt via Asili's narrations, the words taken from Ra's engaging poetry (e.g., "We came from nowhere Here / Why can't we go from somewhere There?"), as well as some soundless archival footage.

Points on a Space Age feels like a swan song, as devotees pay homage to the long-dead Ra and bemoan the inevitable passing of the tireless Allen. Though the sincerity of this film is never in doubt—Arkestra members sound more like religious converts than musicians—*Points on a Space Age* could have used more Sun Ra and less sunset. Still, the film whets one's appetite for vintage Sun Ra recordings. Be forewarned: his 1,000 compositions are spread out over 120 albums. (Alan Bisbort)

FRANK ZAPPA AND THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION - In the 1960s (Chrome Dreams)

File under—what? The modern world, it seems, has even less of a clue than the ancient as to where to place Zappa and the Mothers. There's no room for their music on "classic rock" radio, and it's an infrequent feature on the more esoteric (satellite and online) shows that purport to dig deeper into the sounds of the '60s. A pity, because the band's best (early) work played a crucial role in defining and deflating everything that mid-century rock was and would become.

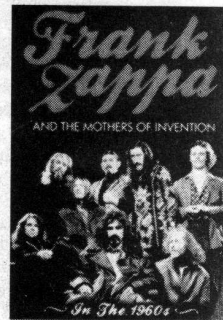
Anyone who still needs convincing of just how creative and adventurous that period was—and therefore how "of their time" the Mothers were—is directed to this exceptional Brit documentary, which recounts the band's history from *Freakout* through *Uncle Meat*. Band members Jimmy Carl Black, Don Preston, Bunk Gardner and Art Tripp provide genuinely illuminating interviews about how the group

worked and played and how Zappa thought (very pragmatically, but with a Dadaist's love of spontaneity). Just as good are biographer/original hipster Billy James, whose comments provide a knowledgeable through-line on the Mothers' evolution, and various rock crits (especially Richie Unterberger), who mostly hit musical-analysis nails on heads.

Kim Fowley discourses on proto-freaks Vito Paulekas and Carl Franzoni and the band's signing with Verve. Label execs whipped out pen and paper upon seeing the Mothers do the Watts-riot song "Trouble Every Day" at a Whisky gig, thinking they'd found a hot new blues band. Once in the studio with the group, producer Tom Wilson had to call his bosses and inform them, "I don't think you bought yourself a blues band."

Vintage footage hammers the point home: There was nothing like these guys before or after them (including post-'60s editions of the group itself). Since this is a doc and not a concert program, you don't get many full performances. But what's here is pretty cool: Zappa playing his bicycle on *The Steve Allen Show* (I know, it's also on YouTube), some (sadly soundless) home movies of the band cutting up and snippets of onstage nonsense (my favorite: bassist Roy Estrada, dressed in Brunhilde-type breastplate, threatens to quit—"You don't like me because I'm Mexican!").

Minor queefs: no Ray Collins or Estrada interviews, and, one presumes, the limited amount of live footage since, as the sleeve states, "This film is not authorized by the estate or family of Frank Zappa." Still: This is a tasty little sucker, one no '60s-intensive home library should be without. Wowie zowie. (Gene Sculatti)



THE ZEROS: Live in Madrid - 30th Anniversary Tour!!! (Munster, Spain)

I often read or hear crap about reunions, as though the idea itself is wrong. It is not! Of course it's often disappointing because of the loss of the initial youthful energy or the many evil influences gathered between then and now. But the Zeros are among those who had proved you can make a comeback without losing your soul. They've made great shows since 1992 (I witnessed two), even made cool new recordings. This DVD presents a live show from April 21, 2007, and finds the band in great shape.

My only real frustration is the absence of Hector Peñalosa. As a substitute, they hired bassist Steve Rodriguez of the Dragons (whose singer is Javier Escovedo's kid bro' Mario), and he does a fine job, but left-handed Hector is just too cool not to be missed. It's usually kind of boring to sit through a whole show on DVD, but the quality of the 19 songs is good enough to make the experience enjoyable here. They do great versions of their classics ("Beat Your Heart Out," "Wimp," "Handgrenade Heart") and cover the Righteous Brothers, the Standells and the Dolls. The shooting was done with five cameras and well edited. Good sound quality too.

Still my favourite part is to be found in the bonus material. It has some super-8 movies from the late

