

“Pequines e Pitbull” to the gutbucket country *forro* stomp of Jacinto Silva & Silverio Pessoa’s duet of “Carreiro Novo,” the soundtrack offers up all the musical highlights that made the film such a treasure. Best of all, it doesn’t skimp on the lesser-known talents, so while superstar Margereth Menezes gets her due with one of the film’s standout tracks (the very funky “Alegria da Cidade”), smaller acts like Farofa Carioca and Grupo Cultural Baguncaco receive equal representation. Best of all, is the inclusion of the truly obscure genres like “coco” and “baile funk,” represented here by the legendary Ze Nequinho do Coco and Ivo Meirelles. While the soundtrack offers few surprises not found in the film, it’s still a pure listening pleasure – and, by collecting the musical performances all in one place – may save some wear and tear on your DVD’s “skip” button. — TP

VARIOUS
Mande Music and Dance
Lyrichord 2001 (DVD)

Although a two-disc set, only one of them is a DVD (the other is all the notes relating to the film). Captured by ethnomusicologist Roderic Knight in The Gambia in 1970 and 1982, this DVD now has the sheen of an almost historical artifact. Certainly, some of the first pieces are fascinating. Like the four-string balon, or a man playing a hunter’s harp. The problem (if it’s even really a problem) is that too many of the pieces are snippets that offer a taste and a tease, but don’t go into great depth. Curiously, one of the most intriguing is about the making of a kora, the 21-string harp that’s such a beautiful traditional instrument. There’s plenty of fine detail about preparing the neck (from the cutting of the rosewood on) and preparation of the gourd and the leather tuners. But then it cops out at the end before the pieces are all put together and the strings added – a waste of a great opportunity. Ceremonies are documented, such as shaving the head of a baby and naming him, and the hulling of rice, but at times you wonder quite whether this is ethnomusicology or anthropology (granted, the two overlap). If you’re not an aficionado of drumming, the last section definitely isn’t for you. Fascinating as it is, it tends to dominate the rest of the DVD, especially the lengthy final section of drumming that accompanies wrestling. This is a great item to have available on DVD, because of its age and highly unvarnished work (it’s very, very much a field recording, unstaged and raw). But it’s probably one for the academics rather than being of general interest. — CN



SANDY DENNY
Under Review
Sexy Intellectual 507 (DVD)

BOB DYLAN
After the Crash: Bob Dylan, 1966-78
Chrome Dreams 390 (DVD)

Both of these documentaries are from the British Chrome Dreams series. Both are quite good. The Sandy Denny piece is likely to have more in the way of revelation for American fans since Sandy spent most of her career in England. The Dylan piece will still have some fresh insight for even the rabid Dylan fan or student. Both follow roughly the same template. They tell their stories chronologically peppered with as much period footage and photos as the producers could clear. Both sport commentary by English pop pundits Nigel Williamson and Patrick Humphries plus Colin Irwin in the Denny film and Clinton Heylin and Derek Barker in the Dylan film. Each also has interview footage with many who worked with the subjects. Dave Swarbrick, Martin Carthy, Dave Mattacks, Gerry Conway and John Renbourn appear in the Denny film. The Dylan film has musicians Bruce Langhorne, Ron Cornelius, Eric Weissberg, Kevin Odegard, Rob Stoner and Scarlet Rivera plus journalist Al Aronowitz, Isle of Wight Festival organizer Ray Foulk, the infamous A.J. Weberman and the final interview of Jacques Levy who collaborated on the lyrics of Dylan’s *Desire* album. One irksome shortcoming is neither film nor the attached bonus features offer any complete performances by the subjects. Still I found both DVDs totally absorbing. When all was done I felt each one enhanced my appreciation and understanding of the artists. And that is precisely their intent. — MT

VARIOUS
Blues Houseparty
Multicultural Media 1011 (DVD)

While blues genres can sometimes be subjective at best, the rhythmically finger-picked / alternative thumb-bass beat style known as Piedmont or East Coast

blues – that had its origins in the foothills of the Appalachians and was heavily influenced by black and white country string bands, medicine show performers, the ragtime craze and early 20th century pop songs – is one of the most distinctive. This remarkable, hour-long documentary, featuring plenty of impromptu outdoor performance footage by John Cephas, Phil Wiggins, Archie Edwards, John Jackson, James Jackson, Cora Jackson, Flora Molton, Larry Wise, John Dee Holeman and Quentin “Fris” Holloway, captures some of the idiom’s greatest latter-day practitioners at one of the occasional house parties hosted throughout the 1980s by John and Cora at their rural Fairfax Station, Virginia, home.

In addition to some delightfully animated singing and playing, the musicians are also filmed conversing around a picnic table, sharing their anecdote-rich recollections of the days when the “house party” was all the rage – the only real weekend entertainment option most rural, Southern communities had in the era of segregation. The numerous musical interludes, however, are the heart and soul of the gathering as all the musicians obviously enjoy picking, singing and dancing for each others amusement.

Particular treats include the dynamic harmonica/guitar duo of Cephas and Wiggins on a lively recall of Memphis Minnie’s “Black Rat Blues,” watching young James Jackson’s finger-pick and slide guitar prowess on a fiery version of Elmore James’ “Dust My Broom,” the multi-talented Holeman delivering a moonshine-inspired talking blues and demonstrating his inspired tap-dance talents and singing the blues with Edwards, host John Jackson, Holloway (who also adds electric piano on two songs) and others. Flora Molton also impresses with a pair of Gospel-flavored blues, backed by Wise’s astringent harmonica playing.

Even though the heyday of the Piedmont blues sound was over by the 1940s and none of the musicians here ever achieved the notoriety of early headliners like Reverend Gary Davis, Blind Boy Fuller or Brownie McGhee, you’d never know it by the ebullient music they deliver — the result of a fascinating intertwining of culture and community. Very well photographed, recorded (lots of fretboard close-ups) and edited. — GvonT

MINTON PARKS
Open Casket
Ruckus Films

I was really looking forward to watching this DVD since I had reviewed one of Minton Spark’s CDs earlier and was en-