



SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

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Because it's been awhile since our last column, let's immediately go to catch-up mode. There's been a number of new and noteworthy DVD releases lately, but that's hardly breaking news. What's especially significant is the continuation of several new series, begun last year and gaining momentum in the first few months of 2006. One of the most notable is the "Under Review" enterprise, DVD offerings that combine rare archival footage with critical commentary. On the surface, this may sound like dry academia – after all, what could be more boring than a bunch of talking heads, primarily U.K. music critics, discussing an artist's attributes and history in dry detail. However, on two recent entries – titles devoted to Queen and Pink Floyd founder and legendary lunatic, Syd Barrett -- this assumption couldn't be further from reality. Each volume provides a generous amount of performance and promotional video that gives intriguing insights into their careers and personal progression. While both sets are fascinating, the disc devoted to Barrett may be of most interest to more scholarly types, if for no other reason than footage of the early Floyd is rarely seen. Knowing that Barrett would eventually self-destruct makes this a fascinating probe, particularly when the discussion turns to his solo efforts post Pink Floyd and his slow descent into madness and isolation.

The Queen DVD, which spotlights the group in their prime from 1973 – 1980, will likely attract interest in light of the group's reformation and current tour in the company of Paul Rogers. While Rogers is reportedly doing an admirable job at the helm of the band, the concert footage of Freddie Mercury, arguably one of Rock's greatest showmen, makes the point that no one, no matter how great their prowess, could ever replace his pomp and presence. In fact, at least two of the critics interviewed make the point that were it not for the flamboyant Mercury, Queen would never have achieved its colossal fame. Ultimately, leaves the viewer with a sense of profound sadness in the realization that this immeasurable talent was taken away far too soon.

– Lee Zimmerman