



Wilko: six-string sonnets

Michael Jackson From Motown To Off The Wall

★★★★★

Sony/Legacy 88875124472
(CD+DVD)

Definitely startin' somethin'

Part of the *Off The Wall* reissue package reviewed in RC 451's Soul Collector, Spike Lee's rich look at Jackson's formative years is too good to remain a footnote. Through illuminating interviews and stellar archive footage Lee is incredibly successful at pinpointing exactly how Jackson arrived at his critical (if not commercial) peak through a combination of supernatural levels of hard work, ambition and talent.

Lee's keen to underline the insane focus and work-ethic of the pre-teen Jackson with Berry Gordy recalling his presence during marathon mixing sessions, drinking in the secrets of hit-making from some of the best teachers imaginable. It's also apparent just how incredibly driven and competitive the Jacksons were. When discussing a revelatory demo of Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground), Questlove points out that in the background you can hear Jackie say, "I can't wait 'til The Bee Gees hear this shit."

There's plenty of evidence here too of Jackson's talents as an arranger, writer and performer. It's proof of the latter, predictably, that lights

up the documentary – his unfettered glee in treating the stage like a playground is captivating, beautifully illustrating the instinctive nature of Jackson's genius.

In discussing the impact of starring in *The Wiz*, the influence of producers Gamble & Huff on The Jacksons signing to Epic and Michael's headfirst dive into Studio 54 and the scene surrounding it, Lee intelligently chooses lesser discussed but vital moments in Jackson's personal growth. He goes on to take us through each of *Off The Wall*'s tracks with the well-chosen cast of interviewees casting light on some of that remarkable album's less-celebrated moments.

What you won't get here, perhaps surprisingly for a Lee documentary, is any incisive digging into the causes of the personal troubles that would plague Jackson's later years. This is a straight-up celebration and welcome reminder of a stellar talent, perhaps there's nothing wrong with that right now?
Jamie Atkins

The Ecstasy Of Wilko Johnson

★★★★★

Cadiz Music CADIZDVD 139

The agony and the ecstasy

Anyone who saw The Feelgoods in the mid-70s would not have bet the council house on a movie being made about their bug-

eyed gaping guitarist with a title like this. But there is a faint connection with the old pub heroes: Wilko would have been aware of Johnny Kidd's version of Ben E King's Ecstasy. What we didn't know back then was that Wilko is a man with a literary bent and that comes through loud and clear in Julien Temple's portrait of a man on the brink of oblivion somehow escaping death's sickle.

There are the biographical details and the feelings of loyalty and nostalgia he evokes, but much of this slow, cerebral film is Wilko coming to terms with his finite place in an infinite universe: I kid you not. Temple portrays this with some skill; you never lose sympathy for its subject, who somehow sounds down to earth (or mud; he is from Canvey) even when he's musing on cosmic issues. Wilko does sound suitably baffled by what's happening to him, as well he might, and turns to literature to reach for at least some understanding. Death made Wilko somehow more alive, and his eventual reprieve seemed mystifying when it was announced, though it is more a miracle of medicine and logic than divine intervention.

You may have seen this film on BBC TV and you'll doubtless want to revisit it if you were interested enough to watch it: there's no music movie like it. You also get extras amounting to 90-plus minutes. Ecstasy indeed.
Ian McCann

LIVE FROM THE HOUSE OF SOUL



CHARLES BRADLEY AND MENAHAN STREET BAND

Charles Bradley And Menahan Street Band Live From The House Of Soul

★★★★★

Daptone MVD Visual DAPV 101

New daps from Chaz

In the backyard of the label's House Of Soul office in Bushwick, Brooklyn, Charles Bradley and the Menahan Street Band deliver a

30-minute long, seven-song set, that showcases Bradley's incredible vocal power, that in 2016, is second to none.

Like his hero, James Brown, whom he spent years impersonating before he was spotted by Daptone's Gabe Roth, he is capable of the most heart stirring drop-to-his-knees ballads and explosive set-the-house-alight dancers. He also possesses a blood-curdling soul scream – part JB, part Wilson Pickett – but all his own. His backing band, led by Thomas Brenneck, his producer and co-writer, are top notch too, framing each song with, as it demands, chicken scratch guitar, woozy to blaring horns and the tightest of rhythm sections. Highpoints include a poignant Crying In The Chapel, a testifying Where Do We Go From Here?, a crushing Victim Of Love and a desolate The World (Is Going Up In Flames). Bonuses include the promo videos to Where Do We Go From Here?, Strictly Reserved For You, The World (Is Going Up In Flames) and Heartaches & Pain. *Lois Wilson*

The Dicks

The Dicks From Texas

★★★★★

MVD VISUAL MVD 8173 D

Stars of the early Texas punk scene

The Dicks were formed in Austin, Texas, in 1979, by singer Gary Floyd; overweight, with outrageous dress sense and even more wild behaviour.

This film documents the band's history, with plenty of celebrities turning out to sing their praises like Greg Graffin, Henry Rollins and Ian MacKaye, but it also documents the history of the uniquely bohemian Texas punk scene.

The rather shambolic band became tighter and more professional when they moved to San Francisco, turning out some great records, but when the rest of the band elected to return to Austin, Gary stayed on and the band split. However, they've since reformed and were inducted into the Austin Music Hall Of Fame in 2009.

The backbone of the film is footage from a show at On Broadway, San Francisco, in 1982, with good quality sound and multiple camera angles, and another from Akron, Ohio, in 1983, which

is poor quality, but with a truly demented crowd constantly flinging themselves and each other round the small room, while Gary clearly revels in the craziness. All of the existing 30 minutes of this footage is included separately, making this a worthy tribute to a highly influential band.
Shane Baldwin

Around Music/ Ecouter Le Monde

★★★★★

La Huit LH120 (12 DVD)

Rich visual documents of disparate world music traditions

The 12 films presented in this relentlessly fascinating box set, compiled and annotated by France's Ethnomusicology Society, are aimed to give new moving images to arcane musical forms; like a visual field recording, capturing obscure customs, dances and social environments through filming ceremonies, wakes, gatherings and jam sessions.

Breaking away from the TV-friendly form of scripted documentary, the ethnologists who contributed these diverse films (most dating from last decade) all emerge with stunningly intimate accounts, which can be evocative, joyful, harsh or cathartic. These include New York jazz legend Roswell Rudd playing trombone with kora master Toumani Diabete in Mali, Turkish poet-musicians the Ashiks, Kalahari Desert musicians brought to Paris, Albanians visiting the ruined home of exiled ancestors in Greece, Transylvanian gypsies at a funeral, Zaire's motherhood ceremony, Ivory Coast funeral festivities, southern Italy's mountain bagpipe makers, extraordinary Papa New Guinea rituals, Nigerian nomads and a band struggling to make socially conscious music in the repressed Congo ghetto, which is as punk rock as music gets today.

The passions and struggles depicted in these places, where music is part of life itself, hit like a polar opposite to today's pampered music mainstream. Worth seeing to put everything in perspective, but also fascinating and highly entertaining. *Kris Needs*