



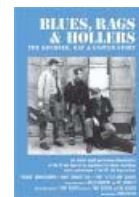
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Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

REVIEW

Music DVD Review: Koerner, Ray, & Glover *Blues, Rags & Hollers: The Koerner, Ray & Glover Story*

Written by [Richard Marcus](#)
Published August 03, 2007
Part of [Blues Bash](#)

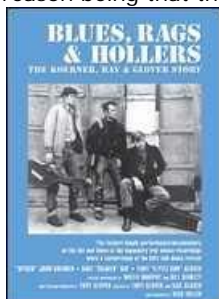


In the early 1960's American pop music underwent its first roots revival with the sudden upsurge in popularity for folk music. Young performers from all over the country came to realize what their idols, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and a handful of others had learned long ago; there wasn't anything quite as effective as a guitar and a song for communicating a message.

It was Joan Baez who brought a skinny guy from Minnesota named Bob Dylan to the Newport Folk Festival in 1963 and national attention. But he was just the tip of the iceberg in the folk revival. Rambling Jack Elliot, Utah Phillips, Phil Ochs, Richard & Mimi Farina, and countless others brought guitars, voices and idealism to American popular culture.

Primarily they all were building on the traditions of the music that had come over with immigrants from the British Isles who modified songs from the old country to fit their new circumstances. "Pretty Saro, "Barbara Allen," "Two Sisters," and others all took on the distinctive sound of the Ozarks and Tennessee to form the backbone of Country and Folk music.

Even though 1963 was the time of the Freedom Riders, young white men and women heading down South in support of Black civil rights activities, there was far less interest expressed by the folk movement for the other major vein of music waiting to be tapped. The Blues, and most Black music, was still primarily uncharted territory for the majority of young white Americans. The primary reason being that there weren't that many opportunities for the general public to listen to it.



Three young men who did get bitten by the Blues bug at the time were [John Koerner](#), [Tony Glover](#), and the late Dave Ray. Brought together through circumstance, location, and a love of the Blues the three formed a loose knit trio, released a couple of albums, toured a bit, and then pretty much went their separate ways for the rest of the sixties and most of the seventies.

It wasn't until the '80s that they started drifting back together again. Although they had kept in touch and worked on a number of projects together, in a variety of capacities, they hadn't really played together. But from the eighties to the time of Dave Ray's death from cancer in 2002, they played together either as duos or in full trio form. They even released their an album in 1996 for the first time in more then thirty years.

[MVD Video](#) has just released on DVD *Blues, Rags, & Hollers: The Koerner, Ray & Glover Story*. It began life as a thirty-minute educational piece for the Midwest school district. Then Tony Glover got to work on it and helped expand it into the full-length feature it is now. The film initially starts out with the story of the three of them getting together in the early part of the sixties, then it follows their individual stories through the sixties and seventies, and brings them back together for the final years of the group's performances.

Interspersed throughout the documentary are outtakes from performances they had given on PBS and other television stations throughout the eighties and nineties showing what it was that made them so unique for their time, and even now. The only other performer I can think who is similar in approach to the old Country Blues songs that typified their performance style is John Hammond Jr.

Some of the most fascinating material on this documentary is the time spent on their individual careers. For Dave Ray it was your classic Turn On, Tune In, and Drop Out scenario as he first took over some land and worked with a forgettable band experimenting with drugs and music in equal doses.

He then decided that he wanted to move into the business side of music and bought up a bunch of recording equipment and engineered Bonnie Raitt's first album. She had actually requested her label at the time to have him work on the album because she had really liked his work. But he kept on playing



lifestyle for most of the sixties, broadening their horizons and expanding their minds. It sounds almost clichéd I know, but some people actually did do things like that during the sixties and came out the other side the better for it.

How significant were these three guys when it came to influencing music? Well according to John Lennon's first wife Cynthia one of the albums that he listened to the most in the early years was their first one *Blues, Rags, & Hollers*. What they did was cross the colour barrier in reverse and played old time Country/Blues like it was meant to be played, with all the rough edges intact.

They didn't make any concessions to popular demands and they introduced a huge number of people to music that might not ever have been heard otherwise. Whether or not they really made that much of a difference is not something we can ever tell, but what I did learn from this DVD, aside from who the hell they were, is that those three white boys from Minnesota could and still can really play the blues.

The picture and sound quality on *Blues, Rags & Hollers* fluctuates to say the least. But of course a lot was dependant on the source material, which was accumulated from old television shows, videos, four and eight track analog recordings from thirty years ago, and some contemporary interviews. An obvious effort has been made to clean up the sound where it can be, but there's not much that can be done with old black & white television footage.

The special feature on this disc is footage taken from the best of their television gigs. This is where you can see how natural and good these three men were at playing the music that first brought them together in the early 1960's. Watching them play is a reminder of how sometimes simple is better, and that the blues are the blues no matter what the colour of your skin.

Blues, Rags & Hollers: The Koerner, Ray & Glover Story is a great tribute to three fine musicians who might have fallen through the cracks of memory without it. For that reason alone it is well worth watching, and their story of them and their love of music will make you doubly glad you did.



Richard Marcus is a long-haired Canadian iconoclast who writes reviews and opines on the world as he sees it at [Leap In The Dark](#) and [Epic India](#).

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