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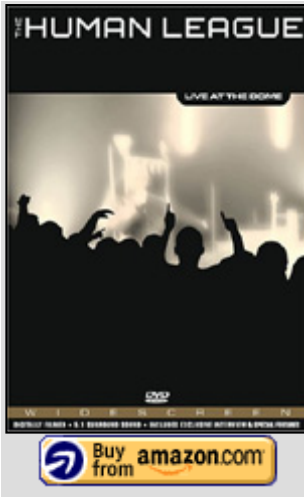
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## DVD REVIEWS



<b>title:</b>	<b>The Human League: Live at the Dome</b>
<b>studio:</b>	Secret Films
<b>MPAA rating:</b>	Not Rated
<b>starring:</b>	The Human League
<b>DVD release year:</b>	2004
<b>film rating:</b>	Three Stars
<b>sound/picture:</b>	Three Stars
<b>reviewed by:</b>	Dan MacIntosh



The Human League has lasted a lot longer than many of the other synthesizer collectives from the '80s, primarily because Philip Oakey, Susan Anne Sulley and Joanne Catherall sing real songs, instead of merely creating ear-catching sounds. This new live release, which was filmed at The Dome in Brighton, England, showcases many of this act's sturdy songs and thus exemplifies its staying power.

If you've lost touch with this trio since, say, *Hysteria* from 1984, the first thing you may notice once you begin to watch this DVD is how little hair Oakey has left. He walks on stage to the beat of "Hard Times," which leads into "Love Action," while wearing a sci-fi looking, big-collared cape thing and dark shades. And his dome is almost completely clean-shaven. But while his voice – which is far more essential than his hair follicle content -- may be a limited instrument at best, there's nevertheless a warmly familiar sound to it.

Oakey lightens up just a little for "Mirror Man," which finds him dressed more casually in a black jacket and white pants. His singing of "Louise" (off of the *Hysteria* release) acts as this disc's first reminder of the group's natural charm. Its simple story about two former romantic partners overflows with a sense of melancholy, especially its refrain of "As if we were still lovers." It may not have been a big hit in the U.S., but if you're a fan of the outfit's smash song "Human," chances are you'll also take a liking to this work's estrangement vibe. In fact, Oakey even has a spoken part on it -- the same way Catherall grabs the spotlight during the aforementioned "Human."

Before it became a hit-making pop group, The Human League was a kind of



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experimental electronic band. Some of that detached, scientific approach comes through during "Snake," where Oakey sings about "going on a journey of the mind," before asking listeners to join him on this trip. The group is more down to Earth with "Darkness," as Oakey introduces it by asking, "I don't know if any of you are afraid of the dark, but I am, somewhat." This song speaks of how some of our greatest fears seem to crystallize during those moments when the lights are out. The group is far better at exploring simpler truths, however, as it does during "The Things That Dreams Are Made Of." This track promotes friendship and travel as a few of life's essentials elements.

This particular show was part of the group's tour of England, and also the last night on that specific jaunt. Oakey says at one point that they were trying to leave out all of the miserable songs during these recent travels. Nevertheless, the act couldn't exclude "The Lebanon," which is both political and tragically sad. It also stands out distinctly, because of the U2-like guitar part on it. Guitars, by the way, are not a big part of The Human League's overall instrumentation. Nonetheless, Nic Burke adds nice six-string parts during those rare times when he's called upon to contribute. Other additional musicians include David Beevers (programming), Neil Sutton (keyboards) and Errol Rollins (electronic drums and percussion).

Speaking of guitars, actual acoustic guitar playing can be heard during "One Man In My Heart," which features the lone lead vocal from Sulley. Sulley and Catherall, by the way, mostly just flank Oakey on either side by providing backing vocals. They're not great singers, however, the way backing singers usually are. But for the purposes of The Human League, these ladies do just fine here.

Even though it's been nearly a half a decade since the last Human League studio album, titled "Secrets," was released, the group is still brave enough to perform three songs from it on this live project. These new ones include "Love Me Madly?," "All I Ever Wanted" and "The Snake." Unless you're a Human League diehard, you may have trouble telling these new songs apart from the group's older material. In other words, this is water obviously drawn from a well-established and familiar musical pool.

You might expect "Human" to come at the very end of the set, but here it is presented as just the tenth song in. And when The Human League performs it, you can clearly hear how this tour has taken its toll on Oakey's voice as he struggles mightily to hit its high notes. The group's other big hits include "(Keep Feeling) Fascination," which has a keyboard groove that never gets old, and "Don't You Want Me," which is a song strongly synonymous with '80s radio.

The extras on this set include an interview segment, where all three members sit down and talk about the group's overall career. The All Access Area is nothing more than a tour film, which shows the group in various cities around the world – including one scene where the group plays "Don't You Want Me" at Mardi Gras in New Orleans. It's really eerie to see the packed crowd in Louisiana watching a show in this future disaster location. Furthermore, there's a picture gallery slide show. Lastly, there's a written biography. But reading this bio won't do you much good unless you have a big screen to follow the print. Clearly, DVDs aren't meant to be books on film.

For those who believe pop music is strictly a guitar, bass and drum art form, The Human League is living proof that such a statement is most certainly not true. The band is not the most musical, nor the flashiest act on the planet, but this English group has stayed around a good long time and still sounds

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relevant. And unlike disco, The Human League may sound dated, but it never comes off cheesy or dull. Although it had a unique instrumental arrangement at the time, this outfit nevertheless mostly wrote straightforward love songs, driven by memorable melodies. So what has worked with The Brill Building, Motown and even with the boy bands has also worked well for The Human League. Fine songs always have an appeal, no matter how they're dressed.

In the hit "Human," this song's main character's humanity is ultimately his fatal flaw. But in the case of The Human League's career, its humanity has, in fact, been its salvation. It's not perfect, and it's made a few mistakes along the way, but it's nevertheless a difficult group not to like. It also didn't hurt that the trio worked with the soulful production team of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis (the actual writers of the song "Human"), either.

Instead of being just another nostalgic video document, "The Human League: Live at the Dome" finds the very human The Human League to be very much alive and well.



more details	
sound format:	Digital 5.1 Surround and 2.0 Stereo Dolby Digital
aspect ratio(s):	16x9 (widescreen)
special features:	Interview; All-Access Area; Biography; Gallery
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DVD player:	Kenwood DV-403
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