



The English Beat - In Concert at the Royal Festival Hall - MVD (4463)

Bad Manners - Don't Knock the Bald Heads - MVD (4462)

The Selecter - Live from London - MVD (4464)

Thunders, Kane & Nolan - You Can't Put Your Arms Around a Memory - MVD (4456)

Murphy's Law - Up With Us...Down With Them - MVD (4468)

Michael Franti and Spearhead - Live in Sydney - MVD (502)

Of all the Two Tone bands, it was The English Beat who sold the most singles in the UK, and came closest to checker-boarding America, and thus the group skankers desired most desperately to reform. That wish was finally granted in 2003, when five of the group, including singer Dave Wakelin took to the London Royal Festival Stage. The DVD captures their two hour concert in full, as the group joyously run through their old hits and fan faves, and while seeing Ranking Roger and Wakelin together again at last is a thrill, it's Jamaican legend Saxa who steals the show.

The previous year, The Selecter opened for another Jamaican hero, Desmond Dekker, unleashing a superb set drawn exclusively from the Two Tone. The group reformed in the early '90s, initially in a poppier vein, but their new guitar driven arrangements do wonders for these well-loved songs.

Although Bad Manners also emerged from the Two Tone scene, they have more in common with NYC hardcore heroes Murphy's Law. Both bands appealed to the skinhead, maintaining fervid fanbases across the decades through continual touring.

Today, Manner's fat bald bastard of a frontman, Buster Blood Vessel elicits total devotion, his younger band admiration for their musical skills. Law's Jimmy Gestapo, in contrast, is just one of the lads, deliberately so, and his rapport with the crowd is a wonder to behold, as is the band's cracking rhythm section and Epic's indeed epic lead guitar licks. Clubland is both bands abode, and neither would have it any other way.

Law's DVD is stuffed with extra concert footage, while the Two Toners boast intensive interviews with the groups. With Thunders, Kane & Nolan you get neither, the music speaks for itself. Capturing in full the band's 1987 gig at LA's Roxy club, the trio plus second guitarist Barry Jones, run through a set of New York Dolls, Heartbreakers, solo Thunders, and cover songs.

Thunders was at his awe-inspiring best, driven to new heights but the equally mouth watering Jones, with Kane and Nolan laying down rock solid rhythms behind them. Their set brings to the fore the band's R&B roots, with the covers some of the greatest highlights of a crescendo filled night.

This trio was the godfather of punk, and punk the mother of Two Tone; its father, of course, was reggae, whose dancehalls gave birth to rap, and the likes of the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy. Former Hero Michael Franti shifted tactics from angry bile to good vibrations via his band Spearhead, their sound an inspired gumbo of bouncy rock, sultry R&B, hip-hop lite, and world rhythms, all tinged with a Latino styling.

The music is fantastic, the show an absolute delight, but it's Franti's insightful, intelligent, politically aware raps and lyrics that truly mesmerize the crowd, even when its arena sized, as it was in Sydney in 2003. Ripping a page from the socially conscious Jamaican artists, Franti delivers his positive messages with a musical punch. This disc puts the DVD on one side, and CD audio on the flip, allowing you to carry the tunes and vibes with you wherever you go.

- Jo-Ann Greene