



Camper Van Beethoven/Cracker

The First Annual Camp Out Live at Pappy and Harriet's Pioneertown Palace

MVD Visual

Camper Van Beethoven and Cracker are first cousins in Rock's family tree with erstwhile leader David Lowery as the common bond the two bands share in common. Over the years, several fellow travelers have shared stints in and out of both bands, musicians like Johnny Hickman, Jonathan Segel, Greg Lisher and Victor Krummenacher in particular. That makes *The First Annual Camp Out Live at Pappy and Harriet's Pioneertown Palace* something of a family reunion, bringing together all the various players and amalgams that hold ties to these two bands. The footage that resulted from the festival, held September 9 and 10, 2005 in California's High Desert, resembles a hippie homecoming of sorts, a chance for the bands' erstwhile followers to exalt in everything related to Camper or Cracker.

For the uninitiated, this co-billed DVD will appear little more than a series of rotating performances by the band members in their various permutations, unembellished aside from the spotlight accorded each individual set. But to a generation raised on the jam band ethos, where instrumental dexterity – no matter how excessive or self-absorbed – is reason enough to revel in the music, this “C-stock” will have its appeal. Sure enough, once the Campers kick things off, the performance takes on a rambling, devil-may-care atmosphere, with the band's extended sojourns spotlighting their overall prowess. “Take The Skinheads Bowling,” possibly their most celebrated sound bite, is the song worth waiting for, an example of the band at its most ebullient and effusive.

Solo sets from Hickman, Segel, Krummenacher, Lisher and the enigmatic Monks of Doom ensure the continuity of this family fest. Hickman takes a solo acoustic route, Segel settles into a lazy sprawl, Lisher opts for some ragged edges, while Krummenacher and the Monks each explore darker musings. Some bonus backstage jams add some decidedly down-home ambiance.

It's then left for Cracker to effectively find a focus and bring some kind of center to the proceedings. Unfortunately, with a catalog that spans six studio albums, their five-song set seems a somewhat abbreviated afterthought. Nevertheless, they remain the real stars of this show, demonstrating that song structure and melodic integrity still assure effortless accessibility. “One Fine Day” starts things slowly with a tattered, deliberative rumbling that builds to anthemic proportions. The punk passion of “Movie Star” builds on the momentum, finding a fine segueway into the brash middle finger cast off by “Teen Angst.” “Big Dipper” retreats into melancholy musings, leaving it to the final send-off, the reverberating refrains of “Low,” to prove it only takes a modest serving of Cracker to provide the proceedings with some crunch.

– Lee Zimmerman

