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## Cracker & Camper Van Beethoven

This entry was posted on 1/19/2007 4:48 PM and is filed under [DVD](#) [Reviews](#).

Set both amidst an outdoor Old West movie set and the surrounding prickly cacti, as well as the adjacent "Pappy and Harriet's Pioneertown Palace" watering hole, this DVD release offers up **a musical celebration of two bands that have used the desert and their own headstrong dedication to forge a musical family and an artistic homestead** lasting almost two decades.

Famed **alt-rock godfathers Cracker** burst into the mainstream courtesy of their 1994 funky-grunge hit "Low," with its evocative slide response. I'll always associate them most with *Kerosene Hat* hidden track "Euro Trash Girl," however, since that was the funky ditty one of my apartment mates at the time dropped on repeat for his marathon Nintendo sessions. I learned of the group's forerunner, cult-status **indie rock innovators Camper Van Beethoven**, then, in reverse — and was certainly glad when I did.

Billed as a first annual "Campout" gathering at the aforementioned site in the high desert of Southern California, near Joshua Tree Monument, this disc was filmed and recorded in September 2005. Captured in all of its raw, live purity and joyous fervor, it features not only sets from Cracker and Camper Van Beethoven (in a rare reunion with CVB's original drummer, Chris Pedersen) but also several rare, live performances from side projects and interrelated spin-offs: groups and solo acts like the Monks of Doom, Johnny Hickman, Victor Krummenacher, Jonathan Segel and Greg Lisher, plus bootlegged excerpt footage from a late-night, impromptu "Porchstock"

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jam.

**Forthrightly presented in 1.33:1 full-frame, the two-plus hours of music here is top-notch stuff, and very small crowds gives it a backyard BBQ-type feel.** CVB's two-part "Eye of Fatima" holds serve, as does "Take the Skinheads Bowling." Cracker's aforementioned "Low" is given a nice treatment — with the frontman of both groups, David Lowery, holding forth in a UVA t-shirt and pinched ranch-hand hat — and the rest of their outdoor, nighttime, 25-minute set includes "Movie Star," "Teen" and "Big Dipper Cracker." (No "Get Off This," unfortunately...) **Johnny Hickman's unbilled contributions, meanwhile (consisting of "The Great Decline" and "Little Tom") are a wonderful evocation and empowerment of those that have slipped through the cracks, and rank as some of the best of the material here.** Monks of Doom's outdoor offerings include "Poison" and "Riverbed," as dusk quickly bleeds out into night, and Krummenacher presents "Not Coming Back," "Bittersweet" and "Questa Sunset."

Presented in 5.1 surround sound and 2.0 stereo, *Cracker and Camper Van Beethoven* sounds great, and is nicely photographed, with blends and fades that showcase a light artistic hand but don't become too heavy on the directorial interjection. Some of the interior footage suffers in comparison to the outdoor sets due to its lighting, but the disc comes up with ways to get around this — rendering Lisher's set in a heavy sepia tone, for instance. **The bummer of the release is that there really isn't a fuller explication of the genesis of the event, or any interviews, commentaries or even biographies** that would shine a light on the cooperative and celebratory nature of these musicians for lapsed fans or newcomers. As is, it'll just have to settle for being great, and hope an appreciative and nostalgic alt-rock audience finds it. **A- (Concert) C- (Disc)**

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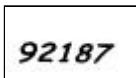
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