



ARTIST DRIVEN: SIGHTS & SOUNDS

SIGHTS & SOUNDS - APRIL 2007

A SURVEY OF THE BEST IN RECENT MUSIC VIDEO OFFERINGS

The stunning array of new DVD releases continues to show that music videos are flourishing, at least when it comes to the ambitions of their manufacturers. Go into any large retailer these days and it's apparent that the inventory levels of DVDs are rivaling those of CDs. More significantly, many of the titles appear to probe even further below the surface in terms of collector interest than their musical counterparts.

MVD Visual has emerged as a leader in the behind-the-scenes exploration of artists who have escaped in-depth exploration in recent years. One such examination is the stunning new disc entitled *My Fleeting House*, the first video offering exclusively devoted to the musical career of Tim Buckley. These days Buckley is perhaps best known as the dark, enigmatic singer/songwriter who fathered the equally enigmatic Jeff Buckley. Indeed, both men died all too young, an unsettling element that weaves its way into their music. It's fascinating then to watch this early performance and interview footage that's rarely been seen in the past 30 years, including clips culled from *The Monkees* TV show, Dutch television and the *Old Grey Whistle Test*. Commentary from his former collaborators offer fascinating insight into this influential but often overlooked tragic troubadour.

MVD does fans a similar service via Leonard Cohen *Under Review 1934 - 1977*, a new addition to their flourishing *Under Review* series, which explores individual artists via rare clips and ongoing commentary from critics and colleagues. Like Buckley, Cohen's a hugely influential artist, often - and rightfully - compared to Dylan in terms of his evocative lyrics and darkly dramatic musical undercurrents. Cohen's contributions have been acknowledged by scores of his peers and admirers and he continues to flourish as a prolific artist, but this view of his formative years shows him at a creative peak during the most prolific point in his career.

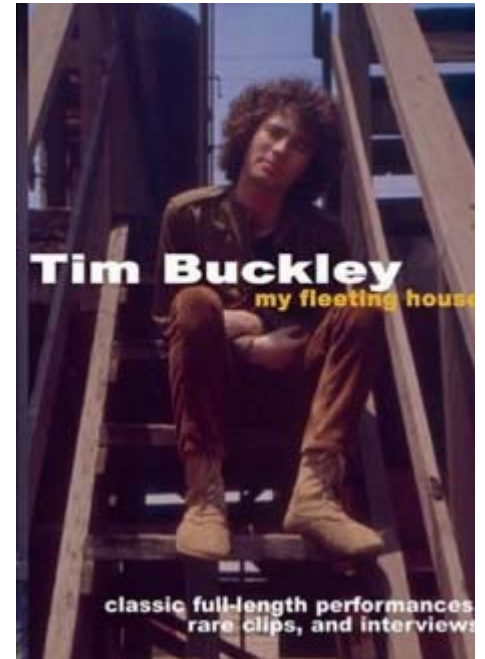
Speaking of Dylan, MVD's past releases devoted to Bob the Bard have offered in-depth examination of various periods of his career, finding specific divides in his various phases. Three of the most fascinating of these volumes - *World Tours 1966-1974*, *1966 World Tour (The Home Movies)* and *1975-1981 Rolling Thunder and The Gospel Years* have been combined into one box set, simply titled *The Unauthorized Documentaries*. Unauthorized they may be - evidenced by the fleeting glimpses of concert footage and uneven quality of the footage - but the behind-the-scenes views, especially in the *Home Movies* disc, is well worth the cost alone. The latter entry features rare glimpses of the infamous 1966 U.K. tour, shot on an 8mm movie camera by Dylan's drummer Mickey Jones, and capturing the uproar and outrage that accompanied the former folkie's unveiling of his new electric image.

Another new multiple-disc set comes courtesy of MVD's *U2: The DVD Collectors Box*, a double DVD that splits its focus between the group itself (*An Unforgettable Journey*) and its very public leader (Bono: *God's Favorite Son*). As with all their volumes, it's rich in unseen and behind-the-scenes footage and an array of talking heads that offer their individual insights into the band's early years. Discourse from the group members themselves helps crank up the credibility factor. As always, Bono steals the show and while there's been no shortage of coverage of his globe-trotting adventures and advocacy of worthy causes, the insights of those who knew him in his formative years help add to the understanding of one of the world's most outspoken musical personalities.

The *Under Review* series continues to expand with a look at the Pink Floyd's *Meddle*, one of the Floyd's more significant outings prior to their worldwide breakthrough with *Dark Side of the Moon*. There have been other discs devoted entirely to the progression of Pink Floyd's career, both with and without Syd Barrett (a Barrett disc appeared shortly before his death in fact) but aside from *Dark Side of the Moon*, this is the first offering to focus entirely on one of their albums. Aside from the amazing array of rarely-seen archival footage, commentators also take center stage. They include the band's legendary producer Norman Smith and such esteemed contemporaries as Soft Machine bassist Hugh Hopper and guitarist Pete Banks, a founding member of Yes. Those insights alone bring the unique perspectives that can't be found anywhere else.

Speaking of classic commentary, MVD's *Thunderfingers* offers an interesting insight into the career of the late Who bassist John Entwistle, a musician many credit as the anchor beneath one of the world's most combustible combos. Anyone who's witnessed the recent tour by Townshend and Daltrey can attest to the band's diminished presence since his passing. While there's a noticeable lack of actual performance video in this disc, Entwistle's droll commentary and the reflections of his friends and colleagues - Rick Wakeman, Motorhead's Lemmy and Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter among them - provide fond memories of a man who was both a huge influence and an undeniably colorful character.

Britain's excellent archival label Angel Air - whose recent reissues of Stackridge, Sailor and other U.K. cult classics have been savored by collectors - now makes a limited foray into the DVD realm by resurrecting one of the greatest vocalists of all time, Maggie Bell. Two new concert discs shine the spotlight on this remarkable Scottish singer, one with her band Stone The Crows - *In Concert, Beat Workshop, Germany, 1973* -- and the other, in her post Crows career with the band *Midnight Flyer - Live Montreux July 1981*. Although these are mostly live performances, interviews with the artist and histories of each outfit are included. Nevertheless, it's the sheer power and verbosity of this remarkable singer that commands attention and brings the realization that indeed, the world of rock has been diminished since her passing.



Speaking of legendary singers, Chris Farlowe never really gained acclaim in the U.S. but he played an intrinsic role in the development of mid '60s British rock, including an early association with the Stones (Mick Jagger produced one of his early albums on the inestimable Immediate label) and fronting roles with such heavy-handed outfits as Atomic Rooster and Coliseum. Chris Farlowe At Rockpalast spotlights the 65-year old singer focusing on his first love, the blues, with a 15-song set taped on the set of this venerable German TV show. It features several memorable covers, including searing renditions of "Out Of Time," "All Or Nothing," "Lovin' Arms," "Stormy Monday Blues" and the incomparable "Handbags and Gladbags," a version more soulful and stirring than any that's come before or since, including that recorded by his better-known rival, Rod Stewart.

Still, when it comes to archival performances, nothing tops the aptly-titled Greatest Ever Performances, a remarkable video anthology from the great Jerry Lee Lewis. Culled from vintage television performances and various live concerts throughout his career, it shows an oftentimes manic performer who was clearly ahead of his time. Even in the first throes of Rock 'n' Roll, Jerry Lee was making his mark, rivaling Elvis for sheer intensity and a crazy sort of charisma that makes these clips still seem mesmerizing 50 years later. Elton John and Keith Emerson clearly owe him a huge debt of gratitude; his stage antics and piano pounding rival anything they did after. Simply stated, this is a must for anyone for whom real rock is still a passion.

Three contemporary offerings round out our survey of new releases. Farewell To The World, a video documentary of Crowded House's farewell concert on November 24, 1996, proves an excellent companion piece to the double CD of the same name, with the addition of interviews with the band members, a 20-minute documentary about the planning of the event and a post-concert commentary filmed for Australian television. A spectacular and emotional performance, its especially poignant in light of the subsequent passing of their colorful drummer Paul Hester.

A recent set from Elvis Costello And The Imposters, Live In Memphis, adds to the immense volume of output Elvis has offered in recent years. Still, there's something especially refreshing about simply seeing him live in concert and cranking out his standards. Indeed, there's a generous assortment represented here - "Radio Radio," "Pump It Up," "Mystery Dance," and of course "Alison" which is bridged with a sultry cover of "Suspicious Minds." Being that the concert takes place in Memphis, it's appropriate that Elvis leans on his more country-oriented material, giving the added bonus of a guest turn from Emmylou Harris. Also included is a pair of road trip documentaries, offering evidence of the wit and rapport the serious and sometimes sullen Mr. Costello evidences all too infrequently.

Elvis also guests on the concert disc Harry Smith Project Live, an alt-country salute to a great collector and compiler of Americana. Other contributors include Todd Rundgren, Nick Cave, Richard Thompson, Lou Reed, Steve Earle, the McGarrigle Sisters and a host of other eccentric artists who add their own unique stamp to their live renditions of traditional folk standards. Although most of the material will seem alien to all but the most dedicated archivists, the chance to view all these great musicians under one collective banner is more than enough reason to scoop up this set.

~ Lee Zimmerman

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