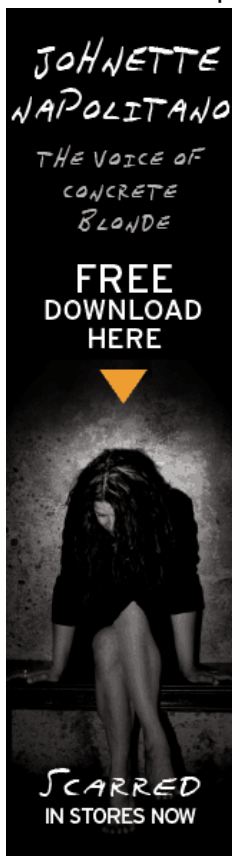




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PopMatters Picks
 CONFEST: PopMatters and *Spring Awakening* want to know your #1 song from your teenage years. What tune hit that right chord?



Tim Buckley

My Fleeting House [DVD]

(MVD Visual) Rated: N/A
 US release date: 15 May 2007
 UK release date: 30 April 2007

by Tom Useted

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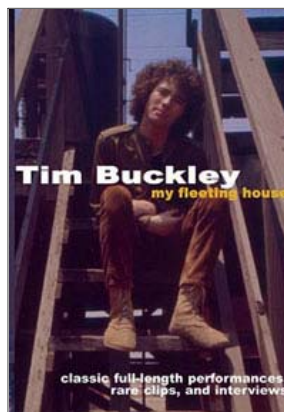
For people who enjoy music, the bounty of long-lost performances circulating on sites like YouTube provides an essential missing component of the careers of any number of musicians. From concert footage taken from Bob Dylan's *Renaldo and Clara* to Neil Young's *Harvest*-era BBC show, from clips of Brill Building stars on local teen programs to outtakes from *Woodstock*, it's evident that the pre-MTV pop music video library hasn't been served all that well by the people who own the rights to the footage. *My Fleeting House* is an attempt to correct this problem, and takes as its subject a performer who wouldn't show up on any *Behind the Music*-style radar: Tim Buckley.

Because the audience for a Tim Buckley DVD is likely very small, one might wonder why anyone even bothered with this project. The proof's on the underside of the shiny disc, folks: these clips vary from acceptable to entrancing, there are a lot of them, and they fill a void that, no matter how tiny, was still dying to be occupied. I mean, we've seen all the "iconic" late-Sixties rock-and-roll footage we can stand, because the only people who were thought to warrant being filmed at length were the biggest of the stars. Everyone else is lucky to have any video evidence of having existed at all. So when someone like Tim Buckley, who is the very definition of a cult figure, turns out to have more than a dozen worthwhile TV performances rotting in archives on multiple continents, by all means let's preserve that stuff!

So what's here? Well, for starters, only two performances previously available on DVD: "Song to the Siren" from *The Monkees* (1967) and "The Dolphins" from *The Old Grey Whistle Test* (1974), the first and last clips on the disc. The former is of surprisingly sub-par video quality, but the musical performance itself is stunning, Buckley seated on an old car with nothing but his twelve-string, and his tenor at his finest. The latter finds the singer older, less beautiful as a vocalist but no less passionate (and still a handsome devil), leading a full band through his favorite Fred Neil song.

Buckley's most adventurous period - which stretched from *Happy Sad* through *Blue Afternoon* and *Lorca* and culminated in his personal favorite (and least classifiable) album *Starsailor* - was amply documented, and it's the performances from this sequence of albums that make *My Fleeting House* a necessity for Buckley fans. Black-and-white clips of "Happy Time" (twice), "Sing a Song for You" and the earlier "Morning Glory" are all outstanding, featuring Buckley in intimate, small-band settings, inching toward the sort of interplay that set Buckley apart from other singer-songwriters of the time. But two songs from '70 will be enough to sell this music to anyone with eyes, ears and an open mind.

"I Woke Up" and "Come Here Woman", both from *Starsailor*, are so radically altered from the album versions that they're practically different songs. (Buckley was heavily into Miles Davis, and *Starsailor* is much closer to jazz than it is to folk-rock. The band here features Buckley plus electric



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guitar, bass, drums and trumpet.) "I Woke Up" is languid and beautiful, with Buckley showing off the lower end of his vocal range. "Come Here Woman", however, is something of a freak-out. Buckley picks out an unusually funky figure on his acoustic twelve-string, which the trumpet follows in an ever-changing melody. The real highlights of this performance come whenever Buckley attacks his guitar and unleashes wordless screams, and everything reaches a boiling point until Buckley cuts it off by returning to the original guitar line. It's not the sort of thing you'd expect from a "rock" performer and, in some ways, the visual element helps make this difficult music more accessible.

The other '70 clips come from a different source, but it's the same band, albeit working in a somewhat calmer fashion. "Blue Melody" finds guitarist Lee Underwood in especially fine form, and although the song is more conventional - it hails from *Blue Afternoon*, which is likely his most consistently strong set of songs - the performance is excellent. "Venice Beach (Music Boats by the Bay)" is a wonderful discovery, as it never appeared on any album. It, too, mines a quieter but still slightly jazzy vibe. Although these songs aren't as fiery as the *Starsailor* cuts, they do amply demonstrate the range of this particular group of collaborators.

The remaining performances are something of a mixed bag. Partial clips ("Pleasant Street", "No Man Can Find the War") are bound to disappoint by virtue of their incompleteness, and "Who Do You Love" is a "video montage" that mostly fails on a visual level, although the audio is good. "Sally Go Round the Roses", from the rock-oriented final stage of Buckley's career, is an interesting revision of the old hit for the Jaynetts, only slightly marred by the video quality. But this stuff is pretty easily forgiven considering that what surrounds it is such a revelation.

The archival footage is intercut with commentary from David Browne, the author of *Dream Brother: The Lives and Music of Jeff and Tim Buckley*; Underwood, Buckley's longtime guitarist; and Larry Beckett, Buckley's on-again-off-again lyricist. Their contributions help put the clips in context, in terms of Buckley's career and the time period. While this is a welcome bonus on first viewing, Buckley fanatics, who will surely want to watch this disc multiple times, will be pleased to know that they have the option of playing only the performances themselves. (There are also some stray snatches of interviews that don't seem as well-integrated into the program, but since Buckley's long dead and we won't hear him speaking again any time soon, they're at least interesting from an historical perspective.)

Hopefully *My Fleeting House* will usher in a period of serious archival releases from performers heretofore relegated to various artists collections, and if that's the case, it would be swell if other DVD producers do such a careful and thorough job. This is a glorious find, further proving the depth of the rock video vault and offering compelling evidence of Tim Buckley's talent in a long-overdue way.

Extras include an album-by-album tour of the Buckley discography, with Underwood and Beckett opining about the relative merits of each. Underwood is far too charitable with the entire catalogue, while Beckett is a bit more critical but cancels it out with every assertion that Buckley was a True Artist, which gets sort of grating. (Not that he's wrong, though.) Additionally, there are two embarrassingly pretentious clips of Beckett reading prose and poetry, as well as Beckett telling the story of Buckley missing out on writing the theme for *Midnight Cowboy*. Not the sort of stuff to watch more than once - if you even make it that far - but better than nothing. And the booklet actually includes notes by Browne and information on the source material.)

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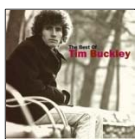
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