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TIM BUCKLEY—MY FLEETING HOUSE

Tim Buckley, with his heart-throb good looks, ethereal soprano range and art song lyrics was in the forefront of the West Coast singer-songwriters. He's usually thought of as an archetypal product of the sixties—but the truth is, he was actually ahead of his time. His musical explorations led him from folk styled solo performances to small combos with afro-Cuban percussion to jazz-like improvisations and free form numbers that lasted for 10 minutes or more. At each step of his evolution he managed to sabotage his career, leaving his present audience behind him. Tho he never had wide ranging success he became a cult figure and this DVD compilation of performance clips shows why.

His professional career spanned nine years—from 1966-75. There were nine albums released during his lifetime (and probably as many more live concert tapes after his death). The clips collected here come from US, UK and Dutch TV shows and span the same period. They are introduced and commented on by three main people: Buckley's long time guitarist (and author of "BLUE MELODY—Tim Buckley Remembered") Lee Underwood, Buckley's lyric writing partner Larry Beckett and David Browne (author of "Dream Brother—The Lives & Music of Jeff & Tim Buckley").

The DVD opens with Tim interacting in a PBS TV studio with writer Joseph Heller and a young Hershey PA audience about various topics; "service" comes up and Tim bashes oil companies and urges that you should "serve people, not a country"--notice any current day parallels?

The tone is set in a performance aired on the last Monkees TV show, in 1968.. Larry Beckett points out that Tim chose to do a song not then available on record, "Song To A Siren" because he was a "troubadour", not a hit maker. Performing before a junked car with smashed windshield, Buckley sings head cocked, eyes closed, his hair a halo of curls. The next clip comes from a Leonard Bernstein narrated special called "The Rock Revolution"—Tim is seen doing a protest song, "No Man Can Find The War". A later 1968 performance sees him with his basic 3 piece backup, on the BBC in arty black and white footage. During "Morning Glory" smoke swirls thru the soft-focus, while. "Happy Time" showcases his effortless falsetto keening.

Dutch TV clips include “Sing A Song For You”, a blending of all the various elements of his styles. His pure, aching vocal can trance a listener out, seeming to alter both time and your breathing. (Beckett rhapsodizes about his amazing “18 year old Irish tenor” vocals.) Another version of “Happy Time” is more band oriented, with conga drums prominent.

By 1970, Tim had moved into more free-form music both vocally and rhythmically, he considered his STAR SAILOR album his masterpiece work. (The only mentions of his better-known son Jeff Buckley are when Browne says that he learned from his fathers records, that STAR SAILOR was his favorite. Underwood points out that Jeff had more commercially success than Tim ever did.) “I Woke Up” has a circular song struture showing the Miles Davis influence, with trumpet and a full drum set, more jazz stylings are explored, in a slow mellow intimacy. The focus shifts on “Come Here Woman”. The song has several sections, beginning with a repeated bass line riff, it moves to rapidly strummed throbbing chords as Tim wails, nearly yodeling ala Pharaoh Sanders, then a section of suspended chord colors before finally returning to the opening riff.

A couple tunes from LA PBS station KCET come next. “Blue Melody” is considered one of the few autobiographical numbers Tim wrote. “Venice Beach”, according to Beckett is a verbatim portrayal of their life there in days of yore---tho he points out the first time he knew Tim had used some of his lyrics in the tune was when he saw the program broadcast.

In a now weird side project Tim appeared as an actor in “Why”.a movie also featuring O J Simpson—having something to do with group therapy sessions. In a clip from another feature movie, “CHRISTIAN LICORICE STORE”, Tim is seen being photographed as he does a solo “Pleasant Street”—which includes the lyric phrase the movie title was taken from. In another interview snippet Tim opines that hospitals ought to make dope freely available—an ominous portent, given his soon to come death by OD. A 1973 promo clip features him with a full band and electric 12 string, doing “Sally Go Round The Roses”. Browne points out that altho Buckley was trying to sell records to support his family—at the same time he was shooting himself in the foot with radio-unfriendly lyrics about whips, chains & lesbianism.

The final tune is from 1974, a UK TV show where Tim and the band do a cover of Fred Neil's “The Dolphins”.

The last line Tim sings is “...this old world will never change..” In June 1975 he died of an accidental heroin overdose, at 28—a sad loss.

The bonus tracks include album-by-album comments from Larry Beckett and Underwood. Mostly they agree, but there are a few wide divergences. They both note the fabled “LSD” found embedded in the moiré pattern of the jacket Tim wears on his first album cover. Some anecdotes are related, Beckett reads his essay on their collaborative piece, “Song To A Siren”

Taken for what it is—a well put together compilation of performance clips, not a biographical dissection—this is a fitting memorial to one of the always interesting artists, who regrettably fell thru the cracks of time and popular tastes.

Tony Glover