

DVD REVIEWS

BAD BRAINS - Live at CBGB 1982 (Music Video Distributors)

Though neither their punk nor reggae guises were innovative in and of themselves, Bad Brains' combination of the two into one package—not to mention the idea of guys with jazz chops churning out punk at break-neck speed—was what set them apart from most hardcore. So did their explosive early live shows, and excerpts from three of them at the famed New York venue in December 1982 can now be witnessed on *Live at CBGB 1982*.



Given the limitations of early '80s video technology, or at least the technology used to film these shows, the sound quality is commendably restored, and the video is a cut above bootleg quality and generally very good. That said, one gets the impression that something was lost in the translation from hearing this at maximum volume in a small room—with slam dancers flailing about, occasionally grabbing the mike to sing along with lead vocalist HR—to seeing it on the small screen in compromised (though again, not bad) fidelity.

But even if you had to be there to fully appreciate it, there's no denying its historical import. Though it seems to get lost in revisionist history of all sorts, the 1980s were the last time corporations had control over virtually everything you saw and heard—and they were more than happy to sanitize it for you. Simply put, the '80s *sucked*. Hardcore and other forms of underground music were sort of like what happens when you cage a wild animal outside of its natural habitat—it claws, rattles the cage, growsl in protest, and constantly tries to escape. As it turned out, hardcore wasn't the escape; it was barely even a howl in the wilderness against MTV and other '80s shit. But nearly 25 years later, it's still nice to know that bands like Bad Brains carried the torch for alternative sounds long enough to pass it on to the likes of Nirvana—who did manage to undercut mainstream sterility. (Doug Sheppard)

BLIND FAITH - London Hyde Park 1969 (Sanctuary Records)

Heralded as a super group upon its formation, expectations were high when Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker, Ric Grech and Stevie Winwood—collectively known as Blind Faith—made their live debut on June 7, 1969, before a crowd estimated at between 100,000 to 150,000 at Hyde Park. *Blind Faith: London Hyde Park 1969* documents this historical event, presenting the complete concert. Performing nine songs in a set which ran to about 40 minutes, Blind Faith played all six from their forthcoming eponymous album, an unexpected rendition of "Under My Thumb," a cover of Sam Myers' "Sleeping in the Ground" and "Means to an End" from the second Traffic album.

Leading up to the actual concert footage is a fairly superfluous ten-minute introduction which attempts to put the formation of the band into context, segueing into the opening number, "Well All Right." Sadly, it quickly becomes apparent that something



is terribly amiss with the cinematography. Rather than maintaining focus on the musicians while they are playing, the cameras break away from the stage at all too frequent intervals to film the surroundings: trees, the lake, the sky, a lamp post, dancing concert-goers, etc. Equally annoying are the use of such post-production effects as the use of photos of band members superimposed over a photo backdrop of the audience in lieu of concert footage, split-screening, and the use of a kaleidoscope-like effects. A shame because much of the unadulterated film of the band actually playing is pretty good with the camera crew stationed in close proximity to the stage.

Performance-wise, the band's set was rather uninspired, probably due to the fact that they probably had not spent enough time together to properly coalesce, or as Ginger Baker put it, "This is the first rehearsal." Clapton's playing is fairly subdued and he seems content to let Winwood control the proceedings.

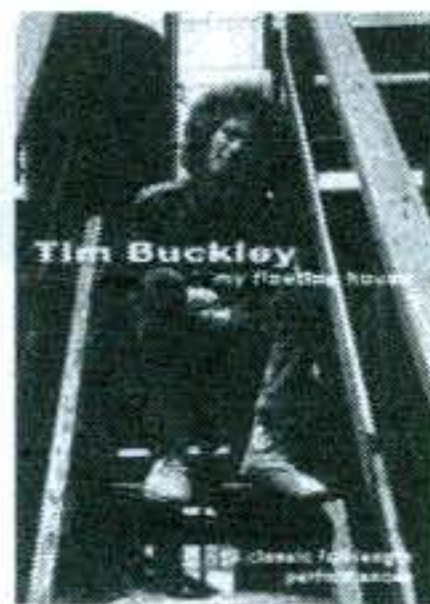
However, when it is all said and done, this is an important document containing the only Blind Faith footage that will probably ever be available, the sound is excellent and the DVD is selling for less than \$15. Recommended with reservations. For more information, see <http://www.blindfaithdvd.com>. (Jeff Watt)

TIM BUCKLEY - My Fleeting House (MVD Visual)

Tim Buckley liked to one-up John Lennon by telling audiences, "All I'm saying is give smack a chance," and that he did until drugs killed him in 1975 at age 28. Initial reports had him overdosing in a Santa Monica alley, though nowadays those who mythologize his career place him dead in his bed, allegedly a victim of having cleaned up to the point that his body couldn't handle the jolt when he decided to fix again (akin to blaming the gun when someone loses at Russian Roulette). Whatever the circumstances, a remarkable talent ended too soon.

Buckley's recording catalog is something of a mosh pit. Those who love the poetic early folk-rock albums on Elektra hate his later folk-collides-with-rock, slams-into-funk, and falls-into-free jazz experiments on Frank Zappa's Straight label. The various compilations from Rhino try to mash the dissimilar parts together, but perhaps, for once, the best access is through the posthumous live releases, especially *Live at the Troubadour 1969* and *Honeyman* (live at WLIR, 1973), where even the experimental stuff seems to work, aided no doubt by having an audience staring at him.

The latest addition to Buckley ephemera is a fine DVD anthology of his appearances on various TV outlets. The 14-song collection—all taken from what appear to be first-generation tapes—catches him on everything from an episode of *The Monkees*, doing



"Song to the Siren," to covering Fred Neil's "Dolphins" on Britain's beloved *Old Grey Whistle Test*.

Additional footage comes from Dutch TV, a short-lived PBS series called *Boboquivari* and such forgotten shows as *Inside Pop*, *Late Night Line Up*, *The Show* and even an obscure film called *The Christian Licorice Store*, where Buckley sings "Pleasant Street" while future Bond girl Maud (Octopussy) Adams walks around looking too beautiful to be real.

Depending on the venue, Tim and his 12-string either go it alone, receive sympathetic backing from a trio featuring Danny Thompson of Pentangle on acoustic bass, or get extra loud voltage from a bigger band featuring long-time sideman Lee Underwood on electric guitar and ex-Mothers of Invention horn player Bunk Gardner. With the last lineup, Buckley even manages tolerable versions of "I Woke Up" and "Come Here Woman" from his critically much-thumped *Starsailor* disc.

As good as these performances are—and the package comes with a booklet and lengthy interviews of Buckley associates—the rub still remains that Buckley could have accomplished more if he had stuck with his art instead of his syringe. His choice, of course, but it came at a price for those he left behind, most obviously Jeff Buckley, the son who kissed a friend goodbye one afternoon in 1997 and then entered the Mississippi river wearing heavy work boots and carrying apparently an even heavier legacy. (Bill Wasserzieher)

THE CLASH - Rude Boy (Epic Legacy)

This "fictional documentary" follows Ray (Ray Gange) in his reincarnation from a gloomy sex shop clerk to a gloomier roadie for the Clash, arguably the best band on the planet in 1978, when this was filmed. The live footage of the band during their "Clash on Patrol" and "Sort It Out" UK tours is some of the most electric ever filmed, as viscerally charged as grainy footage of James Brown at the Apollo.

This is also an underrated dramatic film in its own right, with public housing, riots (black and white), squatters, graffiti (eg, "Pack of Lies") providing the backdrop in the truly Orwellian days before Thatcher drove them all to complete distraction. People shout through megaphones that echo among the decrepit urban crannies, as the National Front and the anti-racism activists, literally, clashed. Cops mill about, dark-skinned migrants look scared, every crowd is one scuffle away from a full-blown riot. Such tension can't be staged, which is why this film has staying power, and goes a long way to explaining without words why punk rock rose with such fury and served as a necessary social force.

To cut to the chase: the Clash are completely captivating here. All four of them give every ounce of their being to every moment of the live performances, sweating profusely, spitting up phlegm, lurching out of songs to stop fights in the crowd at one of the stately old halls where they played during these tours. One second Strummer looks as spastic as Joe Cocker, the next as studly as a young DeNiro. In the film's most effective "staged" scene, he lectures Ray about why the left is better than the right after Ray says he wants to be one of the "few" riding around in black cars. (Joe: "There's nothing at the end of that road. It's all of us or none of us.") A sordid scene of Ray getting a blowjob from a surly Nancy Spungen-lookalike in a lavatory stall is so raw, it fully earns him his name "Rude Boy."

The film also answers the burning question of how a scrawny kid like drummer Topper Headon could

