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DVD REVIEW: Tension & Release: Springing the Blues 2003

Posted by [Jon Sobel](#) on February 06, 2005 05:30 PM (See [all posts by Jon Sobel](#))

Filed under: [Music: Blues](#), [Music: Jam Band](#), [Music: Roots Rock](#), [Video](#), [Video: Music](#) - Scroll down to read [comments on this story](#) and/or add one of your own.



[Tension & Release: Springing the Blue](#)

DVD from *Music Video Distribu*
Release date: 25 January, 2005

This DVD documents the 2003 Springing the Blues Festival in Jacksonville, FL. Interspersing performances with artist interviews, it conveys the flavor of what's happening down South on the blues festival scene in the 21st century. The interviewers also elicit from the artists verbal descriptions and private demos of what the blues means to them: how it got into them, and how they perceive their work within the long history of the music.

Enthusiastic young Anthony Gomes sits with his guitar and explains to

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an interviewer the "tension and release" concept in the structure of a blues song. Unfortunately, the less said about this schlock-blues poser's stage performance the better. Roaring blues-rock is represented far more ably and sincerely here by Albert Castiglia and his band and by [Tab Benoit](#) and [Jimmy Thackery](#), who show that you can crunch hard without losing the earthy spirit of the blues. And without singing a word, [Deborah Coleman](#) provides the electric peak of the DVD with her extended minor-key guitar solo. (Her whole number, "The Dream," is present as an "extra," but the sung verses are just an excuse for Coleman's scintillating solo.)

The now venerable [John Hammond](#) talks country-blues history but unfortunately performs only a boring Tom Waits song. Tab Benoit explains the cosmic significance of bending notes. [Michael Burks](#), [Otis Taylor](#), Ben Prestage and the very personable Richard Johnston with his mandolin describe and demonstrate the various styles of blues and related traditional music. Yet Burks's "Don't Let It Be a Dream," which leads off the DVD, isn't structurally a blues song at all. With his passionate vocals Burks demonstrates that while the blues in a narrow sense may be about twelve bars and three chords, more broadly it's a way of singing (both with the voice and with an instrument), and, of course, the way of feeling that brings the music forth.

[Mofro](#) provides another excellent example of the range of what we

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can call blues. With a captivating *capella* rendition of "Seminole Wind" and their own gorgeous song "Lochloosa," singer J. J. Grey and the band lament lost times, indigenous peoples, and the killing of the natural world. It's soul music, deeply rooted in the human spirit and connectedness to nature. Blues music was invented by black musicians in America, but all of us, when we're feeling down, can say that we have the blues. It's no accident. Born out of the worst man can do to man, "the blues" ended up fulfilling a conceptual need - providing tension and release, you might say - for the wider culture.

One thing the DVD shows (and I've observed this myself at other blues festivals) is that the festival scene has little room for artists who work in - rather than just talk about - traditional forms. I guess the promoters know that the mostly white audiences for these shows would be disappointed without a big dose of heavy blues-rock. To see traditional blues you're better off attending a folk festival. But, to quote Woody Guthrie (or was it Louis Armstrong, or Will Rogers, or Sonny Boy Williamson? the attribution seems uncertain) - "It's all folk music. You ever seen a horse play music?" Hmm, well, never mind. J.J. Grey of Mofro sums up blues music nicely: "Sometimes it's sad, sometimes it's scary and sometimes it's happy, but it's always uplifting."

Content: Many good performances, but mostly just excerpts thereof. As if the filmmakers couldn't quite decide whether they were making a concert DVD or an educational

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documentary. B-

Video: Decent. It's a music DVD, mostly for listening to. Doesn't matter much. B

Audio: Pretty good. The performances come through well enough. B+

Extras: Only three extended performances, though they are well chosen. B

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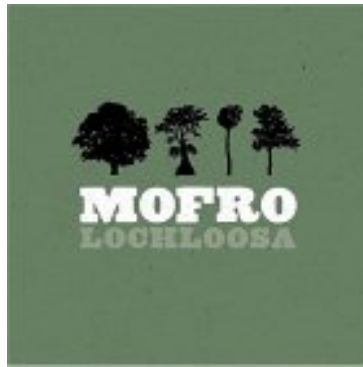


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Deborah Coleman

Music from *Telarc*

Release date: 25 May, 2004



[Lochloosa](#)

Mofro

Music from *Dare Group*

Release date: 27 July, 2004

(Amazon information updated at Sun, 6 Feb 2005 17:34:42 -0500)

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