

VITAL viewing



CHICK COREA

Rendezvous in New York • Image Entertainment

To celebrate his 60th birthday, master pianist Chick Corea invited nine different artistic manifestations from his 39-year career to play 21 straight nights at the Blue Note. *Rendezvous in New York* is the 10-DVD collection from the ceremonies. Included are spontaneous and skilled performances with Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Miroslav Vitous, Roy Haynes, Avishai Cohen and many more. Outside the obvious capability of each artist, this series merits worth for the hi-definition camera work. The footage and sound quality are astounding. Nine DVDs feature shows and the tenth is a documentary/performance highlighting—as according to various interviewees—the “magic” of each moment. Magical these sets are but more important for Corea comments about his relationship with vocalist Bobby McFerrin (here featured as a duet). These performances are playful, and to any serious student and fan of jazz, playfulness is an essential ingredient. For Corea and friends, mission accomplished. ★ *Derek Beres*



UMPHREY'S MCGEE

**Wrapped Around Chicago—
New Years Eve at The Riviera Theater in
Chicago** • Red Distribution

This artful, two-DVD set is culled from Umphrey's McGee's landmark 2005 New Year's Eve show, capturing the circus-themed event with a slew of judiciously placed shots of the audience revelry. The band, bedecked in classic formal attire and augmented by a horn section, blazes through mostly original material (plus solid covers of “Ophelia” and “Sledgehammer”). Starting with a strikingly moving “Divisions,” and later paying tribute to everyone from Iron Maiden to Mark Twain, UM evidences an unrelenting joyful love of the musical stew they offer. Beautiful trapeze artists enhance a fiery “Plunger.” And the audience returns a nine-month-missing band mascot (Yoda) before a mesmerizing “Sociable Jimmy.” While the bonus tracks include some lame comedy, they also offer a window to the band's explosive improvisational potential during “Padgett's Profile.” ★ *Rob Turner*



GRATEFUL DEAD

Dead Ahead • Monterey Media

Released to video in 1981, *Dead Ahead* is the visual installment of the triptych (with *Reckoning* and *Dead Set*) that immortalized the Dead's 1980 acoustic-electric runs. The fullscreen video, shot at Radio City Music Hall just a year into keyboardist Brent Mydland's tenure, looks dated—but it enhances the strikingly intimate living room vibe, particularly the band's tight formation during the acoustic set. Watching a young, old man Garcia play acoustic guitar on “Bird Song” and “On the Road Again” and swap slide licks with Weir on “Little Red Rooster” is a treat. On the prototypical “Rhythm Devils” and “Space,” we really see Hart and Kreutzmann dance inside The Beast, Weir twiddle the knobs to make whalesong, and Lesh rake his strings to unleash primor-

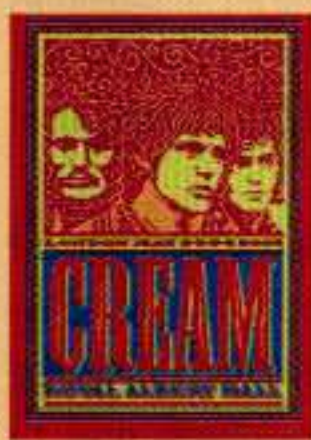
dial chaos. By the end of the electric set, they have established their 1980s incarnation. Archivist David Lemieux and engineer Jeffrey Norman mixed crisp sound in stereo and 5.1 surround—and added five tunes, including Weir's stunning gypsy guitar instrumental “Heaven Help the Fool” and a rip-snorting “Samson and Delilah.” *Richard B. Simon*



MICHAEL FRANTI & SPEARHEAD

Live In Sydney • MVD

Captured two and a half years ago, when Franti was still introducing more guitar-oriented, soul-rock into his repertoire, *Live In Sydney* is a ten-song snapshot of a group in transition. Spending half the set strumming alone or in front of a simmering Spearhead, Franti is seen bravely beginning to evolve his live show. Yet, while deeply endearing when dueting with a fan on the acoustic “Feelin' Free,” he is none more magnetic than when stalking the stage mic in hand, dropping knowledge on *Stay Human* nuggets like “Rock the Nation” and “Sometimes.” While brief, *Live In Sydney* is an overdue document of an important, powerful performer with a big heart, awesome presence and mesmerizing command of an audience. ★ *Wes Orshoski*



CREAM

**Royal Albert Hall—London May 2-3-5-6,
2005** • Rhino

If this two-disc set tells the truth, the only reason to miss Cream's reunion run is its price. Returning to active duty for the first time since 1968, Cream runs through a breadth of classic material, beginning with this performance's unofficial theme, “I'm So Glad.” Rock's quintessential power-trio, Cream has always been a band of equals and, to its credit, this disc allots each musician equal time, using split screen capabilities to capture each performer's persona. For serious fans, it also offers several alternative takes, proving that even Hall of Famers can change things up on a nightly basis. ★ *Mike Greenhaus*



LUCERO

Dreaming in America • WEA

“I fucked it up, I fucked it up,” repeats Lucero lead singer Ben Nichols repeatedly in the film's opening scene, a stumbling, drunken encore that was not to be. While Nichols may have gotten too inebriated to continue that particular night, *America* captures the Memphis-based quartet trying to take the next step toward greater career success amidst poor pay, major label skepticism and relentless small-club touring. Formed in 1998, Lucero is a barebones, ragged glory rock-'n'-roll outfit whose alcohol-fueled gigs place them somewhere in the vicinity of the Drive-By Truckers with a nod to Guided by Voices. While the band succeeds in putting out a new album with a new label with the hope of greater financial success, it can't escape its roots: live to tour, tour to live. ★ *Josh Baron*