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The 2005 Hot List: Do Not Ignore These DVDs!

Benjy Eisen
2005-12-13

[Editor's Note: This is the first of our Year in Review pieces, from DVD Review editor Benjy Eisen. More will follow next month...]

As 2005 takes its final bow, here are ten recent DVD releases that should not be overlooked in the year-end rush. Use this list as a holiday shopping guide or for your own wish list. After all, you've been a good little music fan this year, haven't you?

In no particular order — by no means preferential and certainly not alphabetical:

"Festival!"

There was a time when folk music was protest music — really and actually. There was a time when three chords and the truth could call the revolution; when one guitar, one voice, one song could mobilize an entire peace-loving army. "Festival", a 97-minute montage of the Newport Folk Festival (from 1963 to 1966), captures the meaning — and spirituality — of an entire movement as much as it captures the music itself. As such, it is a stirring historical document that is simply fascinating to watch. Featuring significant appearances by Joan Baez, Johnny Cash, and Peter, Paul and Mary, among many others. Oh, I almost forgot: Bob Dylan goes electric! (But shhhh! Don't ruin the surprise!)

Grateful Dead: Dead Ahead

Aw, you know this one already. The classic Grateful Dead film from Radio City Music Hall (Halloween, 1980) that you first watched during a PBS fund drive. You have it on VHS. Now get it on DVD and cash in on the bonus craze that's sweeping the digital nation. Sure, it seems redundant to buy old classics on new media, but fear not, Deadheads — the bonus material makes this well worth it. And yet, nearly an hour of additional material culled from the Radio City run (including "Shakedown Street" and "Truckin'") still stands in the shadows of the feature presentation.

Pink Floyd: London 1966/1967

In the "I had no idea!" department, this rare glimpse at first generation Pink Floyd is simply epic. *London 1966/1967* is an all-too-quick visit to the group's freak-out embryonic stage featuring original acid-soldier Syd Barrett. Considering its length — less than half an hour (including the epic "Interstellar Overdrive") — this could've been used as bonus material for a meatier release. Yes, but it's an incredible artifact all the same. In the "well, that's kinda cool" department, extras include footage of John Lennon attending a theatrical Yoko Ono performance — before he met her. *Get Live at Pompeii* first. Then get this.

Umphrey's McGee: Wrapped Around Chicago

2005 was a big year for the Umph boys, just as 2004 was a big year for them before that. Standing at the momentary pass between these two points, the band's first-class New Year's Eve concert at the Riviera in Chicago was as much a proclamation as a celebration. A genuine spectacle — the way NYE spectacles should be — the show featured everything from wacky guests to serious jams. The band turned in one hell of a great performance and the folks at Emty Bag, who produced Umphrey's previous, Jammy-nominated DVD, have done it again. *Wrapped Around Chicago* is a triumph on all fronts.

Michael Franti & Spearhead: Live In Sydney

Although it is a bit curious why Franti would choose to release a concert video from 2003,



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when the past two years have arguably been his best, this beta-version of Spearhead is still typically engaging. I wrote that sentence in my head before watching this disc, and I maintain it after two full viewings. Franti's contagious energy translates to screen, and his good vibes leap out of your television set just as they do live in concert. Get the DualDisc, with a CD version on the flipside, and double-double your enjoyment.

Frank Zappa: The Dub Room Special

If there is a line between genius and weirdness, Frank Zappa would've cut it with scissors and submitted a review of the cutting to the local inquisition. Who knows, I might've even published it here. *The Dub Room Special* was originally intended for television and contains material from two brilliant jam-heavy live concerts, spliced with characteristic Zappa-delia (both on stage and on screen). Although he chooses to walk on the weird side here, Zappa's musical genius still cuts through. This is thrilling stuff.

The Residents Play Wormwood

If there is a line between genius and weirdness, nobody told the Residents. One of rock music's most fascinating oddities continues to perplex...and delight. *Wormwood* is a 1999 theatrical performance of songs adapted from Bible stories. Even more graphically jarring than many of the Residents' other flicks, these tales are meant to challenge perception and invade notion. Beheadings, vengeance, and monstrosity abound. And the masked band plays on. The Residents remain, as Trey Anastasio once claimed, "the coolest fucking band on the planet."

Cream: Royal Albert Hall, London, May 2005

As evidenced by the band's recent hat trick at Madison Square Garden, Cream's appeal is now a tri-generation spread — you could've taken your parents, or your kids, to the show. Likewise, this DVD is recommended for anyone ages 5 and up. Granted, original witnesses may remember Cream as being a lot more jammy and a lot less Disney — and, granted, the historical value of seeing a resurrected rock dinosaur in the flesh doesn't transfer to your living room TV set — but in lieu of an era-defining archival release, this slickly produced McDisc will have to suffice. With those disclaimers in tact, it lives up to its promise.

Les Claypool: 5 Gallons of Diesel

Everyone has his or her own favorite Les Claypool project, be it Primus, Oysterhead, or the Frog Brigade. *5 Gallons of Diesel* is a pleasant photo album of all of these outlets, and will likewise please the Claypool fan in all of us. For more information, read [this month's full-length review by Jeremy Sanchez](#).

Guided By Voices: The Electrifying Conclusion

Phish wasn't the only group to disband in 2005 after 21 years of service, nor was Umphrey's McGee the only band to offer an adventurous New Year's Eve show in Chicago last year. Guided By Voices pulled off both these birdies with one finger at their farewell concert on 12/31/04. A modern, indie-rock version of *The Last Waltz* (with wistful elements of Coventry), this *Electrifying Conclusion* is an obvious must for GBV fans.

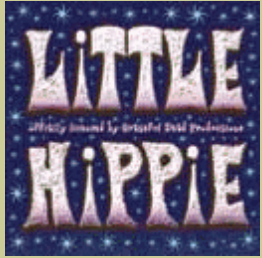
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Lion's Den, NYC

- 12/13 Jake Shimabukuro – Dread Clampitt w/ Chuck Garvey
- 12/14 NOLA Benefit: Russell Batiste, Page McConnell, Adam Deitch, etc.
- 12/23 Wig Jam (Dead tribute)
- 12/28 Revision
- 12/30-Phix (Phish tribute)
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- 2/8 Papa Grows Funk

CODA, NYC

- 12/30 DJ Logic/Licorice
- 12/31 BRAZILIAN GIRLS
- 12/31 Late-night w/ U-Melt
- 1/6 Turkey Bouillon Mafia – Vorcza
- 1/13- Bonerama
- 14
- 1/21 Benevento / Russo / Skerik / Mike D