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music. politics. progression.

video reviews:

Blackalicious

4/20 Live in Seattle

(Music Video Distributors)

A live DVD is tricky terrain, but Blackalicious tiptoe past the usual landmines on *4/20 Live in Seattle*, which is easy to recommend for newcomers and old fans alike. Combining high-energy concert footage with laid-back interview segments, the film serves as a potent introduction to the music and a charming behind-the-scenes peek at the men responsible for it.

One of the most convincing reasons to watch a film of a band performing is to better appreciate a virtuoso's performance; some things just come

across better in person—even on camera—than on a record. That could be a shredding guitar solo, or, in the case of Gift of Gab, a dexterous MC who seemingly doesn't need to pause for breath. He throws down the gauntlet right off the bat with "Alphabet Aerobics," which is also a testament to the airtight interplay between Gab and Chief Xcel back behind the turntables. The track has a killer build and, as such, is even better experienced in a live setting, as the crowd—not the world's best, but they do alright—pushes the duo even higher. The occasionally shoddy editing is the only thing that distracts.

Viewers can choose to watch the concert straight through, or they can watch interview excerpts in between the tracks; it's strongly advisable to do the latter, at least the first time through. Gift of Gab and Chief Xcel both come across as gracious and likeable, as well as hugely passionate about hip-hop. Their segments are well-chosen and provide some concise but personal biographical information, along with talks about career highlights and crucial influences.

There are 14 tracks in all, with other highlights including "Blazing Arrow" and "Lady Don't Tek No." There are certainly a number of other tracks that Blackalicious fans will be left yearning to hear, but the shorter setlist helps the DVD stay crisp. "Chemical Calisthenics," a later cousin to "Alphabet Aerobics," sounds more vital in the live setting, particularly when Gift of Gab chews into the "Lead, gold, tin, iron...platinum, zinc" section. As a sidenote for those unfamiliar with Blackalicious, it may be worth noting that, yes, "Chemical Calisthenics" is a rap based around the periodic table. This isn't the sort of hip-hop that takes you to the candy shop.

The duo's tourmates comes charging out for the final pair of tracks—a fun-spreading crew that includes Fatlip (ex-Pharcyde) and rising Quannum star Pigeon John, who is a clear fan favorite, and works hard to keep it that way.

— Adam McKibbin

www.myspace.com/blackalicious

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