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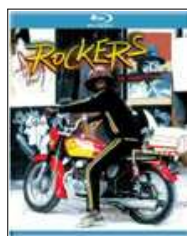


Rockers, Blu-ray (1979/2009)

Will offer a superb amount of insight into the spread of reggae music and culture into the mainstream.

OPPO Blu-ray Disc Player

Published on July 30, 2009



Rockers, Blu-ray (1979/2009)

Starring: Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace, Richard "Dirty Harry" Hall, Jacob Miller, Gregory Isaacs, Burning Spear, Kiddus I, Robbie Shakespeare, Manley "Big Youth" Buchanan
Director: Theodoros Bafaloukos

Studio: MVD Visual MVDBR4826
Video: 1.85:1 for 16:9 color 1080p HD
Audio: Dolby Digital 5.1
Extras: Jamaican Rasta Patois Glossary
Subtitles: French, Spanish, Japanese, Jamaican Patois
Length: 99 minutes
Rating: ***1/2

There are two classic films that chronicle the rise of reggae culture and music in Jamaica, Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers*, starring Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace as himself. Both films employ neo-realist techniques to great effect; however, *Rockers* does a much more convincing job of offering a glimpse of the day-to-day life of the average Jamaican. Originally designed to be a documentary, the film originated as a very loose interpretation of the classic Italian film *The Bicycle Thief*. It was eventually expanded in scope, and became more of a narrative focusing on the antics of Horsemouth, a drummer with such reggae greats as Burning Spear, Gregory Isaacs, the Gladiators and Inner Circle. The film is chock full of appearances by many of reggae's great artists, and includes a ton of footage from the greater Kingston area that not only shows the

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incredible beauty of the island, but the often overwhelming poverty as well. Horsemouth is constantly scheming to help create cash flow for his family (played by his real-life wife and kids, and shot in his actual home) in between gigs, and comes up with the idea that he'll borrow enough money to buy a motorcycle. He uses the bike to shuttle freshly-pressed records between recording studios and sound systems and mom and pop record shops scattered around greater Kingston.

In terms of realism, I don't think anything can come close to touching the level of reality that *Rockers* brings to the table; you really get involved with Horsemouth and his partners and family, and there are moments throughout the film that really help humanize the players. At one point, after his bike has been stolen, Horsemouth and an acquaintance are walking through the outskirts of Kingston, when they come across a Christian baptism going on in a local river. As it turns out, his grandmother is present, and she gives him quite a pranging for his Rasta appearance, and the obviousness that he's turned his back on his Christian upbringing. And his wife is constantly heaping her concerns about money, food, their children and their welfare upon him – which he seems blissfully oblivious to through the dense layers of smoke emanating from an almost ever-present spliff! The film is split pretty evenly between Horsemouth and his constant antics, and a remarkably effective series of either live or live-in-the-studio music clips, featuring many of reggae music's giants, such as Peter Tosh, Gregory Isaacs, Burning Spear and Robbie Shakespeare. Of course, Bob Marley is noticeably absent, but contractual reasons probably prevented his appearance.

The default language choice for the available subtitles is Jamaican Rasta Patois, and trust me – it's an absolutely essential choice, if one's to try and make any sense out of the proceedings. Unless, of course, you're from the islands, which should make for cool runnings for yourself! Even with the subtitles, I'm still not sure I completely got it, and the package thankfully includes a short glossary of Rasta terms that will help you wade through the often obtuse verbal exchanges. At one point, someone present at my screening switched the subtitles to Japanese, commenting that they made just about as much sense to them as the Rasta Patois!

In technical terms, the Blu-ray package is fairly solid. For a decidedly low-budget film, the image quality is pretty good, especially one that's now thirty years old. The color palette is quite natural; if anything, the overall image is a little soft, but at least the producers didn't try to artificially enhance the image sharpness. Of course, that ever-present smoke from somebody's spliff could also be funk' with the image clarity mon! And the Dolby 5.1 surround sound, while decidedly not hi-res, still sounds pretty good overall, although the bass is somewhat lacking and the overall surround presentation is a little less than seamless. For what is essentially archival footage, though, it's more than acceptable, and the classic reggae music runs almost continually in the background.

Lovers of reggae music will not be disappointed – this is essential watching, and will offer a superb amount of insight into

the spread of reggae music and culture into the mainstream.
Recommended.

-- Tom Gibbs

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