

## DVD and Video

## String Cheese and Reggae Rockers



### Pura Vida (2001)

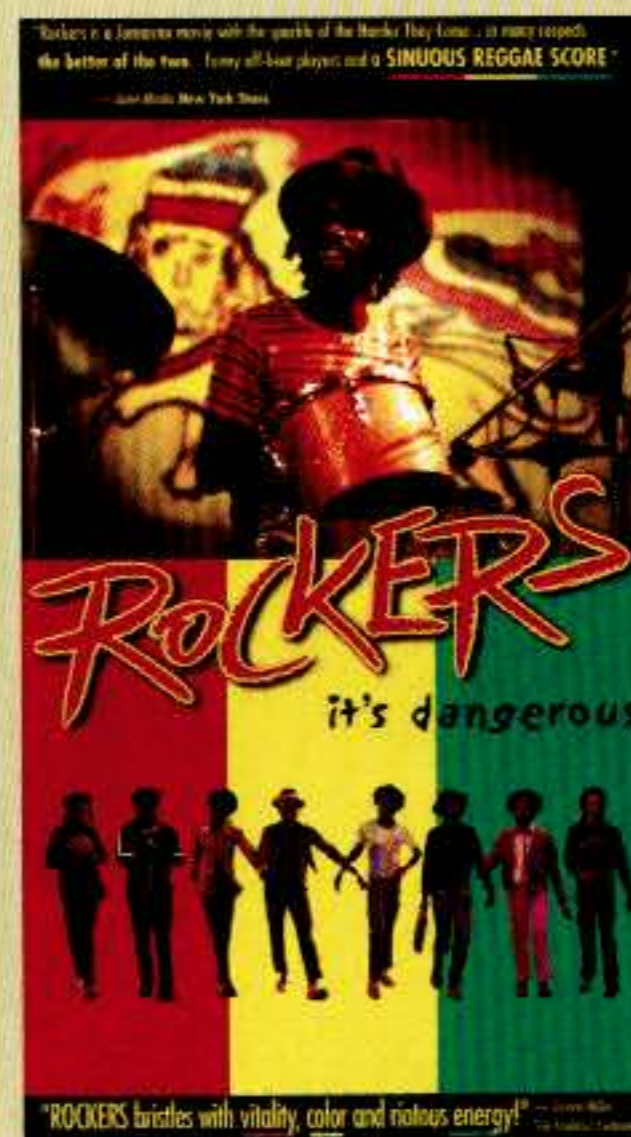
Filmed last May in Costa Rica, String Cheese Incident's first entry into the concert video market is a trippy landscape-bending ride. *Pura Vida*, a 105-minute documentary, covers the band's third annual "International Incident." The video highlights the band's two evening performances before nearly 2,000 fans from all over the planet.

Footage of the concert is solidly with Michael Kang, as expected, receiving the most attention. There are good close-ups of all band members, but surprisingly few shots of the crowd, a huge dynamic at all Cheese shows. Interspersed amongst the concert footage are shots of the Costa Rican countryside and its inhabitants. While often beautiful, there are moments when one feels trapped on a mutant Travel Channel, not entirely surprising, since it turns out that director Rick Ringbakk is known for his work with the *Discovery Channel*.

Rumor has it that Ringbakk did not intend this video to be viewed in a sober state. His editing can be maddening—in "Round the Wheel" when SCI sings, "I am watching the moon as it grows..." there is a shot of a rising moon; when the band says, "sun," there is a sun, and so on. There are poetically flowing underwater images of whales, sharks and rays swimming to the accompaniment of SCI playing "Little Hands" and an abundance of distortions, manipulations and solarizations.

Musically, the video is nearly flawless. In fact, the sound is so crisp and perfect that, at times, it can feel as if it is hovering above the action, not connected to it. There are samplings from each SCI album and fan favorites, including beautiful versions of "Round the Wheel" and "Black Clouds." An acoustic version of "Lester Had a Coconut," recorded at a Quepos, Costa Rica elementary school, is a sweet moment. There are several brief interviews of band members and a segment of Michael Kang repeatedly bailing on a surfboard before declaring that he really wants to be a professional surfer instead of a musician.

This documentary demonstrates SCI's status as an innovator. How many bands do you know who have their own travel agency (the highly competent and innovative Madison House) to whisk fans off to their party in a tropical paradise? *Tyson Schuetze*



### Rockers (1977)

*Rockers*, another word for reggae, is arguably the greatest reggae movie ever made, better and much more varied than its well-known predecessor, *The Harder They Come*. Directed by first-time director Theodore Bafaloukous, this reggae classic film is a vibrant journey through Kingston, Jamaica in its heyday in the late '70's.

Bob Marley best sums up *Rockers* in his song "Roots, Rock, Reggae," when he sings, "dis a Reggae music." Even though the natural mystic hero doesn't make an appearance in this cult favorite, his presence smokes in the background with the burn of each spliff and the bang of each drum.

Made in 1977 with an all-star cast of musicians performing in their prime—Jacob Miller, Gregory Issacs, Burning Spear, the Abyssinians, Kiddus I and Inner Circle—and a soundtrack including songs by Peter Tosh, the Heptones, and Bunny Wailer, this flick boils with talent.

The plot is a Robin Hood-esque tale starring real-life legendary drummer Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace and his sidekick, the famous DJ Richard "Dirty Harry" Hall, who together rise against the island mafia that dictates the local music scene. Most of the movie revolves around Horsemouth's motorbike, which is stolen and reclaimed, only to be stolen again. But the loose narrative is infinitely second to the music, insights into Rasta philosophy and documentary-style depiction of Jamaican life that tourists rarely see.

The storyline moves with a swift nonchalance that would be frustrating if it were the main ingredient, but does serve its purpose. Colors of dress and movements blend beautifully with the sound; Rasta style is an art in its own right, with each strut down the street poignant. But stereotypes abound as a black man wearing gold chains dances with a watermelon in hand and a stiff white couple listening to Jacob Miller expound their confusion that "this is not calypso."

In its essence, this is an exploitation movie and nobody is safe, but more importantly, it is a period piece, a revealing look at a time that can never be recaptured in today's global culture.

Now available for the first time in DVD format, *Rockers* includes seven previously unreleased bonus tracks and a Rasta Patois dictionary, which lends explanation to the encrypted phrasing. Thankfully, both the DVD and VHS versions come with subtitles. *T.S.*