



# Laramie Movie Scope: U2: DVD Collector's Box

## Unauthorized U2 and Bono documentaries for fans



by **Robert Roten**, Film Critic



**April 10, 2007**

-- This two-DVD boxed set of documentaries on the great pop band U2 and its lead singer Bono is not a primer on the history of the band. They don't include biographies of the band members, except for Bono. They don't feature any of U2's music, or any in-depth interviews with band members. So if you are looking for live performances of U2's music or lots of U2 interviews, this is not where you will find them. Instead, what you'll find is documentaries catering to U2 fans who already know all about the band and want some additional facts. The DVD set includes "U2: An Unforgettable Journey," about the band's formation and rise to super group status, and "Bono: God's Favorite Son." Each is in region 0 format, two-channel Dolby® Digital and each runs about one hour in length. More on these below.

### U2: An Unforgettable Journey

As with most such unauthorized documentaries, it uses snippets of news footage, previously televised interviews with band members, interviews with music journalists and people familiar with the band to make observations about the music super group. This approach requires people on camera who are very knowledgeable, articulate, and who have a knack for making incisive, sometimes even provocative comments. Otherwise, what you have is a bunch of droning talking heads grasping for ways to express themselves. In this documentary, you have little of the former and a lot of the latter.

The documentary gives a brief overview of the band's history, but you need to already have a good grounding of knowledge about this band, and the country of Ireland, to get the full benefit of this discussion. References are made to a lot of people and music groups that are not explained. Aside from being arguably the greatest rock band in history and a powerful force for humanitarian aid and social justice, the band also is a major financial player in Dublin. The discussion about the band's efforts to pump money into the Dublin economy are among the better tidbits offered by the documentary. There is also an interesting discussion of the religious beliefs of the band members and their solidarity. One interesting discussion focuses on how lead guitarist Edge developed a playing style to cover up the weaknesses of the bass player, Adam Clayton. Other bands, it was noted, would have simply booted Clayton and gotten a better bass player. It is argued the band turned a weakness into a strength.

There is a considerable discussion of how the band's manager, Paul McGuinness, successfully promoted the band through years of tours in America. Bob Geldof, a fellow Irishman, also played a role in U2's success, both as a musical group and in its humanitarian efforts. Geldof organized the Band Aid and Live Aid concerts for Ethiopian relief efforts in 1984 and 1985. U2's performance at the Live Aid concert was a breakthrough and got much-needed publicity for the band. The band's success was not overnight. It took 10 years of touring and recording before it began to make money. The material on the DVD is somewhat dated. Based on comments made during the interviews on the DVD, it appears some the interviews were conducted in 2001, since the yet-to-be released film "In America" (2002) was a topic of discussion. The date on the documentary itself is 2003. It's street date in the US is June 5, 2007.

At any rate, some of those people interviewed for this documentary have a tendency to drone on at length, in a monotone, getting to the point only with difficulty. U2 is a musical group that has been around for 31 years now, and this 60-minute documentary only begins to cover an outline of that span of time. This documentary does not provide much background on the band, but does offer some insights. It is mainly for fans who already know a lot about U2 and are looking to find out a little more. It seemed to me that what this documentary needed was more focus and some extended interviews with members of the band. Others can, and have, speculated on the religious motivations of band members like Bono. Others can and have speculated on the relationships and tensions among band members and their families, but a lot of that stuff really requires more first-hand knowledge. Go to the top. Go to the source. This DVD rates a C. Extras include a U2 discography and a U2 quiz.

### Bono: God's Favorite Son

This documentary is superior to the U2 documentary, if for no other reason that it uses a lot more footage of previously televised Bono interviews. The other commentators are also a little bit better, although there is some footage re-used from the earlier U2 documentary above, which is dated one year earlier. This documentary is dated 2004, but some of the interviews in it are probably several years older than that. It gives a brief biography of Bono, dating back to his childhood. Mostly, however, it sticks to the band's formative years and its breakthrough to super group status. It covers a lot of the same ground as the U2 documentary, including the "Drop the Debt," AIDS and anti-hunger campaigns for African and other third-world countries that the band is famous for supporting. While covering this familiar turf it does manage to keep its focus mainly on Bono, however. There is also a discussion about Bono's evolution as a songwriter over the years. Commentators indicate that the band's lyrics were more haphazard in the early years, gradually becoming more carefully structured. This DVD rates a C+.

The DVD has similar extras to the U2 documentary. There is a Bono quiz and a discography, along with a promo for other Bono material sold by the UK distributor of the boxed set [Chrome Dreams](#). The U.S. distributor is [MVD Entertainment Group](#). The Bono DVD menu is better laid out

than the U2 documentary menu in which the options are spelled out diagonally, rather than horizontally, are smaller and much more difficult to read. The boxed-set packaging is workmanlike, not fancy or heavy duty, with a thin cardboard slip cover with a fold-over tab to keep the DVD's from sliding out of the box. The boxed set rates a C+. The street date on this set is June 5, but should be available for pre-orders around May 1, 2007.

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