

New music DVDs shed light on U2, Rock Relief and Fifties icons



U2 — Achtung Baby: A Classic Album Under Review (Sexy Intellectual/MVD Visuals) ★★☆☆ out of five — Another in an outstanding series of documentaries examining the impact of some of music's best-known albums, this DVD takes an in-depth look at the 1991 album that sent U2's music in a new direction. After striking the mother lode with 1987's "The Joshua Tree" (which was released 20 years ago this Friday), the Irish quartet experienced their first critical backlash a year later with the over-the-top pomposity of the "Rattle and Hum" album and concert film. Bono and his bandmates retreated from the spotlight and made their way to Germany, which was going through a transformation of its own with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Through a series of interviews with a host of respected music journalists, the film dissects "Achtung Baby" on a song-by-song basis. Of particular interest is the almost universal incredulity that so many people continue to treat "One," the album's signature tune, as a love anthem. A look at the lyrics reveals a song nowhere near appropriate for couples walking down the aisle. Extras include extended interviews, complete biographies of the panelists and a U2 interactive quiz. (Jeffrey Sisk)



Rock Relief: Live In Concert (Icon Entertainment/MVD Visuals) ★☆☆ — In the aftermath of a series of devastating hurricanes that caused millions of dollars in damage in Florida in 2004, rocker Rick Derringer organized this concert to raise funds for the Red Cross. A collection of B-list artists gathered at Universal Studios in Orlando on Feb. 5, 2005, for a concert sponsored by Derringer's Musicians 4 Disaster Relief organization. Performers include Loverboy (with portly frontman Mike Reno making the unfortunate decision to squeeze into leather pants), Twisted Sister, Derringer, former Grand Funk Railroad frontman Mark Farner (sporting a killer mullet), Dickey Betts of the Allman Brothers, Michael Bolton and Eddie Money. That we were just a few months away from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina when the concert took place underscores the importance of such an event, but also makes it pale in comparison to the outpouring of support from better-known artists in Katrina's wake. Though Twisted Sister and Bolton seem slightly out of place on the bill, both acquit themselves nicely. Dee Snider offers a heartfelt rendition of "The Price," while Bolton performs "When a Man Loves a Woman," "Sittin' On the Dock of the Bay" and a surprisingly rocking rendition of "Rock Me Baby." A strange aspect is the lack of crowd shots. It made me wonder if attendance was sparse or the audience just wasn't into the show. Interspersed with the performances are the obligatory "we just wanted to help" soundbites from the performers. Kudos to Derringer for his efforts, but Rock Relief was a better in concept than execution. (JS)



The Platters & The Coasters — Rock & Roll Legends (MVD Visuals) ★☆☆ — If you're longing for a trip down memory lane, check out this too-short concert DVD featuring the Platters and the Coasters, two of the most famous musical acts of the 1950s. Both groups feature solid (though not spectacular) renditions of their most famous tunes. From the Platters there's "Only You," "The Great Pretender" and "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," while the Coasters offer up "Yakety Yak," "Poison Ivy" and "Charlie Brown," among others. Too bad they left out my favorite song from their catalog, "Smokey Joe's Cafe." The show was recorded at the Rock 'n Roll Palace in Orlando, Fla., though there is no mention of when it took place. Based on the clothing worn by the enthusiastic audience members, I'm guessing late-1980s, early-1990s.

The performance has a sock-hop feel, with couples dancing along to the groups' hits. Sadly, there are no extras and the DVD loses points for its 45-minute running time. Surely, there was more material that could have been included. (JS)