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**Various Artists**

**Rock Relief: Live in Concert [DVD]**

(VSC)  
 US release date: 20 February 2007  
 UK release date: 20 February 2007

by **Tom Useted**  
**Comments (0)**

It feels wrong to rag on a charity concert DVD, but I'm gonna do it anyway. *Rock Relief* is the pits, and should never have been preserved on commercial video. It's a cliché-ridden, awkwardly edited display of fat old farts well past their already dubious prime. The music, which could've been humorously enjoyable, is instead an almost unmitigated embarrassment. Some of these guys are actually sad to watch. And when Michael Bolton turns in the most restrained performance of the program, something has gone dreadfully wrong.

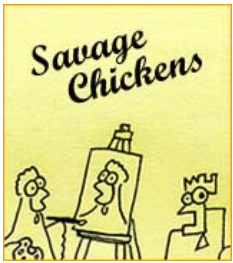
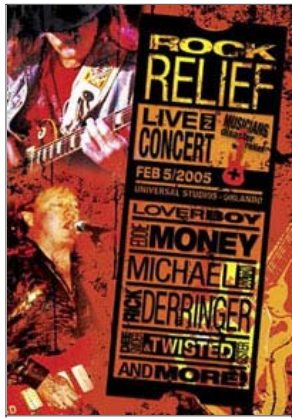
A bit of history: *Rock Relief* is the product of Musicians for Disaster Relief, a loose organization fronted by former boy-wonder Rick Derringer, who wanted to raise money to help hurricane victims in Florida in 2005. He enlisted Canadian rockers Loverboy, Dee Snider, Grand Funk Railroad's Mark Farner, Allman Brothers guitarist Dickey Betts, Bolton, and Eddie Money, and put on a concert at Universal Studios in Orlando.

According to the back cover of the DVD, the aforementioned performed "fiery renditions of legendary hits". Not so! You can't start a fire without a spark, as someone once said, and *Rock Relief* proves that truism as definitively as any science experiment. For ninety minutes, these musicians search in vain for a match. Maybe they should've checked Dickey Betts' pockets.

Loverboy are the first to take the stage, and they provide the template followed by the rest of their comrades in relief: crowd participation, bad clothing decisions, and hits hits hits. They open with an interminable "Turn Me Loose", their plump, leather-pantsed lead singer making his way around the stage and not doing an entirely bad job. As voices go, his will not be the evening's worst. "Hot Girls in Love" and especially "Workin' for the Weekend" are crowd-pleasers, but where is "Lovin' Every Minute of It"? It's listed on the back cover--there's no suspense to this packaging, and in fact there's not even an insert, but I guess keeping production costs down equals more money for hurricane victims--but they sure don't play it. Loverboy will turn out to be a highlight of *Rock Relief*.

Dee Snider--"of Twisted Sister", according to the oh-so-informative cover--is up next, and he points out that all five original members of Twisted Sister are now on stage together, which is apparently some kind of minor miracle. "The Price" is a bland power ballad, accorded importance by virtue of being dedicated to the people of Florida. "We're Not Gonna Take It" would've been a hell of a statement--take *that*, hurricane!--but sadly Twisted Sister only get one song. It's a missed opportunity.

Rick Derringer himself does his old McCoys hit "Hang On Sloopy", complete with a verse that the record company excised from the recording. Derringer points this out after the first verse, builds up the closest thing to suspense as this concert achieves... and then sings this totally innocuous "lost" verse. Between that and his mid-chorus questioning of the crowd ("Do you remember it?"), it's a real eye-roller, but even this leaden performance can't totally destroy "Sloopy". Just as crucial to the collective memory of this crowd is "Rock and Roll Hoochie Koo", which affords Derringer the opportunity to indulge in some guitar wankery. His first solo, however, gets



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literally pushed aside by the sudden appearance of an interview clip of Derringer plugging the Red Cross, which intrudes in box form on roughly a third of the screen. It's a very strange editing choice, especially considering the Musicians for Disaster Relief logo takes up space in the lower right-hand corner of the screen for the duration of the program. The other pesky problem with Derringer's segment is that the camera angle most favored by the filmmakers results in the recurring obstruction of Derringer's mouth by an unused microphone.

Derringer's shirt is pretty ugly, but at least he's not Mark Farner, who sports nothing on top but a glittery purple vest. "Bad Time" and "Some Kind of Wonderful" seem mercifully short, but I also spent his screen time debating with myself--as *no one* would watch this with me--whether his haircut constitutes a mullet. It's certainly a party-in-the-back sort of 'do, which flows and swings as Farner sashays across the stage, but the more conservative top of the haircut seems to be influenced more by male-pattern baldness than by the barber's blades. So the mullet-or-not debate comes down to the sides, which look intentionally close-cropped and slowly morph into a glorious mane. Congratulations, Mullet Mark!

All joking aside, Dickey Betts sounds like a craggy old codger as he destroys "Ramblin' Man" and "Southbound". Anyone who says Bob Dylan sounds awful is not only wrong, but they have also not heard Dickey Betts sing recently. Absolutely awful. His guitar playing is considerably better than his croaking vocals, but its backwoods flavor is compromised, particularly on "Southbound", by some horribly out-of-place keyboards.

With the appearance of Michael Bolton, we go from one lousy voice to probably the best voice in the whole show. Seriously. I never thought I'd hear Michael Bolton alongside half a dozen other singers and give him the award for Most Convincing Performance. Although his "When a Man Loves a Woman" is a travesty under any other circumstances, in *Rock Relief* it's unquestionably the musical highlight of the show. For the first time, the band plays with something approaching subtlety. There are no ridiculous solos, nothing gets in Bolton's way, and the song just plain works. "Dock of the Bay" brings the whole thing back to the pits of hell, and "Rock Me Baby"--featuring Bolton on guitar, doing his best Carlos Santana agonized-face impression--goes on much too long, but it's good to know that Bolton screwed with his recording schedule (according to Derringer) to be present at this event and made three minutes of it worthwhile. But why is he all bundled up?

This just leaves Eddie Money, and what a sad, sad note to go out on. The lovable lug sounds out of breath the whole time, and generally butchers his four songs. "Two Tickets to Paradise", "Take Me Home Tonight", "Wanna Go Back" and "Baby Hold On" all fall under Money's sagging jowls, flop around like the singer's loose necktie, and bring *Rock Relief* to an unbelievably disappointing close. And it's not that Money's band sucks--they don't. They actually do a mostly decent job, but even they can't carry their washed-up waste of a singer. I dreaded the moment Money would go "unhh... hold on" in his final number, and it turns out I was right to be scared. He just sounds like he's totally out of energy and unable to summon up any more. What a depressing finale.

Thank god there are no extras.

RATING: **2** 1 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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