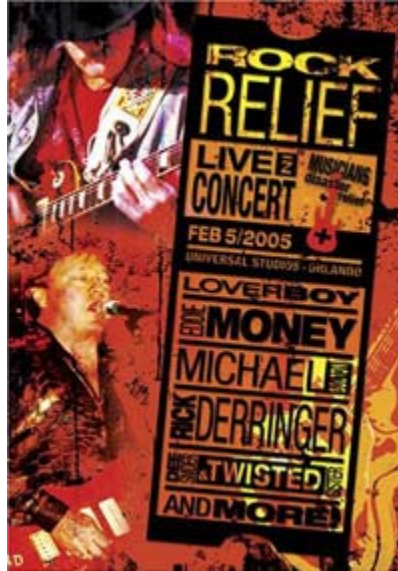


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Rock Relief: Live In Concert Various Artists



Having never been a big fan of the various 'aid' concerts (though I did get more than a little weepy when Pink Floyd reformed for Live 8), I'm a little skeptical when musicians stage concerts to raise money or promote that 80s feel-good, hollow term "awareness." Usually the music suffers from hastily arranged sets (anyone recall Led Zeppelin's reunion at Live Aid?) or the musicians expound at length on the great big cause to the exclusion of playing (how 'bout Bowie's recitation of the Lord's Prayer during his set at the Freddie Mercury concert?). For **Rock Relief**, a concert held at Orlando's Universal Studios in 2005, a host of older dudes got together at the urging of concert organizer/guitar God Rick Derringer to raise money for the Red Cross and Florida's Hurricane Relief Fund. After all the terrible weather anomalies of that year, Florida native Derringer made some calls and enlisted the talents of artists as diverse as Loverboy to Michael Bolton to Dickey Betts to Twisted Sister to raise some much needed bucks.

The resultant DVD is a bit of a hodgepodge, a little light on actual music (Twisted Sister only have one song on this DVD) and pretty heavy on the relief. Not that I mind the cause or the musicians' sincerity, but I would have simply liked more music in the nearly two hours that comprise the DVD. Much to my surprise, however, is that what we do get sounds pretty damn good! Taking into account that everybody ages and nobody should ever really wear leather pants into their 50s, the assembled bands and solo artists perform to a level I didn't even know they were capable of anymore.

One of the stand-outs has to be the DVD's opener, Loverboy. This Canadian quintet is given the luxury of four songs here (no one else on the DVD other than Eddie Money are afforded that many songs) and singer Mike Reno faithfully recreates his vocals of old.. The aforementioned Twisted Sister (the original line-up, thank you very much) were allotted one song so it's hard to tell what more of their performance was like. Betts played his competent guitar on "Ramblin Man" and "Southbound." Eddie Money, his voice sounding a little rough, lumbered through a four-song 'greatest hits' set. Mark Farner of Grand Funk fame followed, fronting Derringer's band for two songs. Derringer himself played what you'd expect — "Hang on Sloopy" and "Rock and Roll Hoochie Koo" — but was more impressive backing Michael Bolton. Next to Loverboy, Bolton is the real surprise on **Rock Relief**.

I'm not and never have been a Michael Bolton fan. I have nothing against the dude; in fact I liked that old "Fool's Game" video of his (anybody recall Bolton the rock star?), so on most days I can take him or leave him — he's just not my cup of tea. But between his interview segment and startling renditions of "When A Man Loves A Woman" and "Rock Me Baby" (the DVD also features him performing "Dock of the Bay" as well, but I can never get behind anyone covering this song as I am too attached to the original), Bolton comes across as a strong stylist in his own right. Derringer provides some tasty guitar work behind Bolton. Sometimes, I think this is where Derringer is best — backing a great singer, augmenting and arranging his artful guitar playing into the overall tapestry of a song. Check out what he does on Cyndi Lauper's second album for more evidence of this.

The camera work for **Rock Relief** is superb. I'm not sure if they have ex-musicians directing these things nowadays, or if people are just starting to come 'round, but I was tickled pink to see the camera stay on the musicians (on this DVD, they are right on stage, up close) and not cutting to audience reactions like so many major network shows do when they show concerts. I don't need to see anyone else's reaction to know how I should react nor do I need to see some sap in the audience playing air guitar — or even a bunch of kids in a cordoned off 'pit' jumping crazily. So my hats off to the production team here for delivering on the visual as well as the sound. Though **Rock Relief** is a little short on the music, it is an entertaining chronicle of a night that hopefully brought a lot of relief to some people in need.

~ Ralph Greco, Jr.

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