

June 3 2006, A&E Arts

In Rotation

There may be better white acoustic blues artists than New York-based troubadour **John Hammond, Jr.**, more fastidious guitar technicians, more adventurous navigators of the genre's divergent currents, more attentive students of the characteristic inflections of the African-American legends who provide the bulk of his vast repertoire, but there are precious few who can demonstrate after four decades on the lonesome folk singer trail the kind of joy and abandonment that Hammond exhibits on the DVD **New Morning: The Paris Concert (Inakustik/MVD)**.

Recorded in 2004 in the Paris boîte that the lanky, craggily handsome American blues master and multi-award winner calls his favourite club, before a hushed and adoring crowd of mostly middle-aged males, the just-released concert DVD is a remarkable testament to Hammond's durability and passion. More than two hours and 26 songs in length, the performance never lacks energy, wit or grit.

In the accompanying documentary featurette, Hammond explains that for most of his career critics and musical peers in the folk world have never understood why a white man with a fortuitous connection to the Big Time would have chosen to immerse himself in a commercially neglected and quintessentially black American art form instead of striking out on the more popular and potentially lucrative singer-songwriter trail with his own compositions. What's clear 40 years on is that no other music moves him.

"All I ever wanted to be is a blues singer, traveling the world with my guitar," he says.

-- Greg Quill