



John Hammond

New Morning: The Paris Concert
Inakustik

John Hammond was seen by some as a child of privilege and a guy who just parroted those who came before. I, on the other hand, saw him as more of a musicologist. I hadn't heard from him for a long time when his record of Tom Waits material came out several years back. It was the perfect record for him. Great songs and he was given a chance to interpret the material of one of today's finest songwriters.

That said, this 2004 concert works as breakdown of his entire career. The show features 25 songs, including many he admits to not having done in awhile, including a surprisingly fun version of the Chuck Berry classic "Maybelline." There's nothing fake here, folks; just Hammond on his stool, playing guitar (a National on many cuts), and harp on more than a few. His vocals are something of an acquired taste, but here they take on an urgency and maturity most musicians would be afraid to send out unless it were covered by some sort of rock-and-roll smoke. His guitar playing is encyclopedic when it comes to roots music. As you'd expect, Hammond pays tribute to Robert Johnson, the guy from whom he draws the most inspiration.

Fine versions of "Phonograph Blues," "Walking Blues," and "Come On In My Kitchen" are highlights. He covers a lot of ground, but concludes with splendid versions of Waits' "Get Behind the Mule" and "Jockey Full of Bourbon."

The DVD also includes some wonderful conversation with Hammond, who explains how music has been his life. His enthusiasm and love rolls off with every word. In fact, that's true onstage, too, where his asides tell great stories and give fine insight.

Hammond is a lot of things—an ambassador of the blues, a chronicler of styles. He has devoted his life to the blues, and this DVD makes a case for him being one of the music's main conduits for almost 50 years. — **JH**

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