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FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2011

DVD Review: Al Di Meola: *Morocco Fantasia*

Text © Robert Barry Francos/FFanzeen, 2012

Images from the Internet



Al Di Meola: Morocco Fantasia

Cinematography by Francesco Cabras and Alberto Molinari

Produced by Claus Altvater and Al Di Meola

In-akustik, 2011

123 minutes, USD \$19.95

[In-akustik.de](http://in-akustik.de)

MVDvisual.com

Al Di Meola (nee Al Dimeola) certainly has come along way from his native New Jersey to the stage of the Mawazine Festival in Rabat, Morocco, where this DVD was filmed on May 20, 2009. But there's no need to question why.

In modern jazz circles, Di Meola is among the most respected

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guitarists in the world, with lightening speed fingers playing in scale style. Within the first minute, the awe of the viewer is bound to be apparent, as he races around his Conde Hermanos, all the more impressive considering the broad neck and wide space between each string. The thin-body acoustic guitar has a solid flamenco flair.

Di Meola is backed by his band, the World Sinfonia, consisting of accordion (Fausto Beccalossi), second guitar (Peo Alfonsi), bass (Victor Miranda), percussion (Gumbi Oritz), and drum (Peter Kaszas), who dazzle as they sound like sparkles reflecting on the water, dancing around the sounds they produce.

Because of the length of the songs, ranging from 8 to over 21 minutes, they get a chance to all play in ways that each musician is highlighted at different moments. The sound is incredibly crisp and the cinematography is phenomenal, as we see all the musicians intercut with scenes of the immediate surroundings, local nature (e.g., birds, fauna), and all around Rabat. The listener can also just close your eyes and escape in the sounds. Fortunately, there is no interference as musically the concert plays through with no sound interruptions other than rounds of applause between each cut.

If I was to categorize the sound by the style of music they play, I could say adult contemporary jazz. Definitely something you'd hear a lot on the lite jazz station; incredibly well executed, yet light on the ear. All but one of the songs are originals, and all have both intense and soothing variations of rhythms, tempos, and melodies. It seems appropriate that much of the feel is heavily Arabic influenced, and with the thanks to an almost upfront accordion, there is also a French flavor.

For the two encore songs, guest musicians come onstage, including Said Chraibi (oud), Abdellah Meri (violin) and Tarik Ben Ali (Percussion). They give an even more Arabic seasoning to the mix.

In the extras, there are two more pieces with just Di Meola, Chraibi, Meri and Ali, totaling 21 minutes. For one of these, Di Meola plays his multi-colored electric guitar, something he rarely does these days due to a bout with tinnitus.

In all these songs, everyone seems to be mostly having a good time. Mostly?

Here's the thing: I don't know Al Di Meola personally, but my impression here is that he is a demanding and perfectionist taskmaster with an incredibly large ego. Looking a bit like Russell Crowe with his beard, every so often you can see him snatch a look at someone in the Sinfonia as if they did something wrong. I admit I could be misreading this, but that's what is left with me. It's during the extras, though, that I started to get just a little creeped out.

They show some of the rehearsals, and he is snapping at some of the

About Me

[Robert Barry Francos](#)

Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

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[G-Mole: Bruce Farley Mowat](#)

[Suburban Voice: Al Quint](#)

[Blog of Lance Strate of General Semantics/Media Ecology Association](#)

[Who Really Cares blog of Craig Davison](#)

members of his band, and even comments at guest violinist Meri, “Tap your feet! Don’t stop! In your life!” Brrrr. It makes me wonder if there is any room for improvisation during the performance from the rest of the World Sinfonia. After all, what makes jazz great are the jams, not just the orchestration. In another couple of bonus clips, Di Meola plays in a local street bazaar with a couple of street musicians, and he while starts off backing, then seems to take over as if he had to have the last word or take the gathering’s applause for himself.

That all being said, part of the soundcheck is another extra included, of which the best part is the pieces backstage. At one point a staff member makes a jokingly disparaging remark about Mr. Al, not knowing he’s right behind her. Pointed out, she jumps, and he stares at her for a moment and points a finger in a “watch it” tone, but it seems more light than threatening. I liked him at that moment, and wonder if I was wrong...

As with other Inakustik DVDs I’ve seen, the cinematography is stunning beautiful (both the stage work and the extraneous shots around the venue), the sound is incredibly crisp for a live show, and the packaging is lovely with booklet and photos.

Song Listing:

Misterio

Siberiana

Double Concerto

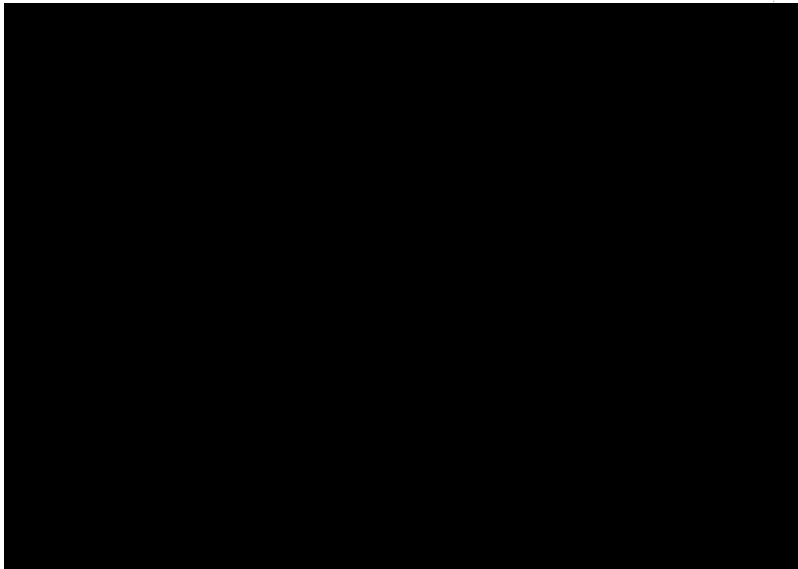
Michelangelo’s 7th Child


Gumbiero

Turquoise

Encore

Egyptian Danza



Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at [12:01 AM](#) [0 comments](#) 

Labels: [acoustic guitar](#), [Adult Contemporary](#), [Al Di Meola](#), [Arabic](#), [Conde Hermanos](#), [DVD review](#), [FFanzeen](#), [In-akustik](#), [jazz](#), [lite jazz](#), [Mawazine Festival](#), [Morocco Fantasia](#), [MVD Visual](#), [oud](#), [Rabat](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#)

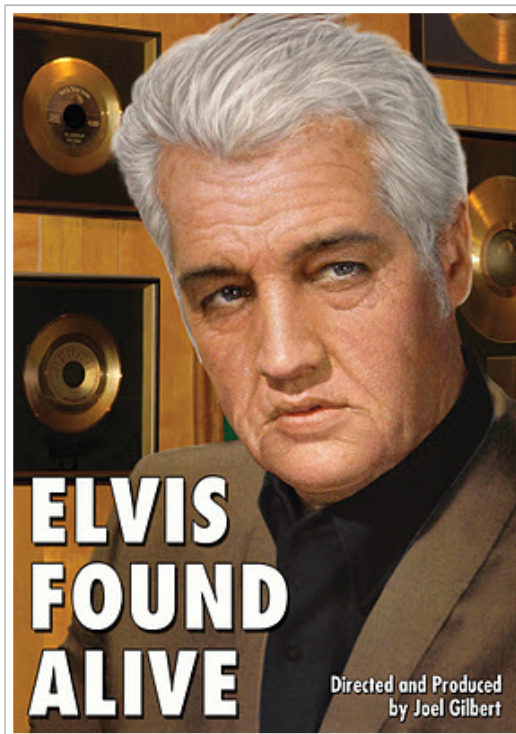
Reactions: interesting (0) cool (0) informative (0)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2011

DVD Review: *Elvis Found Alive*

Text © Robert Barry Francos/FFanzeen, 2012

Images from the Internet



Elvis Found Alive

Directed and Produced by Joel Gilbert

Highway 61 Entertainment, 2012

128 minutes, USD \$14.95

Highway61ent.com

Elvisfoundalive.com

MVDvisual.com

Taking an opposite tack this time, Joel Gilbert, who brought you the amusing yet well researched *Paul McCartney Is Really Dead* is back with *Elvis Found Alive*.

The premise is set up after Gilbert visits Graceland on a vacation, Joel and his audio/video crew (who we meet and act pretty stiffly, obviously not professional actors) send off for Elvis' file from the US government via the Freedom of Information Act. But when the package arrives in 2012 (I received this DVD in 2011, FYI), the ink on the redacted parts are still wet (!) enough for them to clean off some of it, and find out that Elvis is not only alive, but living in the Simi Valley of California, just a few miles away from Gilbert's studio, under witness protection, using his infamous "hotel registry name" of Jon Burrows! (Actually, just about every sentence in this review probably deserves an exclamation point, so just add it wherever you think it's needed.)

Grabbing Elvis co-star [Celeste Yarnall](#) (from his 1968 film, [Live a Little, Love a Little](#)), they go out to pay him a visit. In front of the suspected house is a 1957 Caddy with numerous Republican presidential bumper stickers, including Nixon (is the one), Reagan, Bush (both), and Dole. The back seat has a stack of Elvis 8-Tracks (hahaha). It just gets better and better (not meant sarcastically in any way).

Gilbert talks to someone at the house's front door while mic'd - his crew starts to freak out because they recognize the voice - and ask if it's okay to interview him. Let me say right here and now that whomever mimicked the voice did a truly splendid job, even though "Elvis" (I'm leaving out the quote marks on the name and the pronoun "his" after this) sounds just like he did in the '70s. Elvis agrees, and the crew comes inside, including Yarnall, who is wearing a cap and stands in the background. Elvis is lit so we cannot see his face at all, which is more likely due to adding the vocal in a studio later. He sits and plays with his rings, as Elvis was - er - is known to do.

As with the Paul-is-Dead documentary, what follows is actually a very meticulously detailed history of Elvis, through his own words in 2012. The chapters are broken down into sections by dates and events (listed below). Except for some biting comments about the Colonel, most of the first half of the story is mostly researched knowledge, such as his deep devotion to his mom, his rise to fame, and his career. But there are also some interesting speculations to keep the viewer on her or his toes, such as Elvis being forced into the Army because the government was afraid that [Jailhouse Rock](#) promoted homosexuality (e.g., "No. 47 said to No. 3 / You're the cutest jailbird I ever did see" - Ed.). Another is after the army, Elvis is introduced to the Vegas mob

by Sinatra, and Sammy Davis Jr. privately tells him to *am-scray* for his own good; apparently the only reason Presley would ever play the town is to pay back huge gambling debts owed by the Colonel.

Further, the reason he married Priscilla is because Ann-Margret (“the female *me*,” 2012 Elvis states) turned him down. A fun comment though is “The only thing worse than watching a bad movie is being in one.” And Elvis definitely had his share of them, thank is large part to the Colonel’s misguided direction (though I remember hearing a quote at some time that Elvis wanted to be like Dean Martin).

As the lame - and yes, they were - films drag down his career (though *Jailhouse Rock* and *Viva Las Vegas* - especially for the “female *me*” - are still watchable for me), he tried to resurrect his career with “The Ghetto” and “Suspicious Mind.” However, there was trouble brewing in America that concerned Elvis to the core: the Weathermen Underground and the Mafia were controlling the kids through drugs, and Elvis wanted to put a stop to it, so he famously contacted Prez Nixon and asked to be a officer in the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Rather, Nixon sent him a badge (Elvis collected police badges, which are on display in Graceland) naming him an honorary agent for the “Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.” And here is where this film starts to interestingly invent history (supposedly...). For the purposes of this story, he actually *was* made an undercover Marshall, and with the help of the Memphis Mafia (his ironically named posse), he helped bring down the Weathermen Underground and subsequently the Mafia by using hidden and elaborate stings so that they didn’t connect it to him.

Gilbert asks Elvis, “Are you saying the man who invented cool wanted to be a narc?” Elvis calmly answers, “I felt God wanted to use me in a much more important way.”

Another interesting turn of events has Elvis using Bob Dylan (see, I really should be using a lot more exclamation points) to introduce him to mobster Joey Gallo, leading to the latter’s hit. With wiretaps overhearing of Elvis’ Memphis Mafia being suspect, he fires them all (with their blessing) to protect them; but of course, Presley is also suspect.

Here comes the plan to protect his own life by faking his death, and then going into the witness protection program where he worked as a hotel clerk in Kalamazoo, Michigan (one of the famous “Elvis sightings”).

An amusing side-story is the Mafia telling Dylan he better “find Jesus” after Gallo’s assassination, meaning keeping his nose clean, as it were, Dylan misunderstands and pretends to become a born-again Christian. When he learns what was really meant, he goes back to Judaism. Hahaha, that is such a nice touch!

Gilbert researches this tale well, and includes bits about Gail Brewer-

Giorgio's book *Is Elvis Alive?* and a Bill Bixby-hosted speculative television special on the subject.

Being that 2012 Elvis is a big Reagan fan ("He had strong American principles"), there is a great PhotoShop'd picture of a graying Elvis with Big Ronnie, and also completely gray with Bill Clinton (it is posited here that Chinese spies tapped Bill's phone and learned about Monica, which is why Clinton gave them Most Favored Nations status; oh, and Elvis also states that "everyone killed JFK"). But it stops there, because Elvis apparently is *not* an Obama fan because of his connection to ex-Weather Underground leader Bill Ayres ("Both hate American values"; Little Georgie W. Bush did? But I digress...)

One of the more imaginative aspects to this pseudo-documentary (again, meant kindly) is director Gilbert's use of the *Capt. Marvel Jr.* comic books as a thread throughout the entire film. He uses panels that so closely represents Presley's life, it really is almost like it was based on Presley. It's known Elvis was a fan of the comic (there are photos of him reading it, and there are stacks in Graceland today that were Elvis' property; shame they couldn't work Stan Lee into this...). This theme also used as expressing throughout how much Elvis thought he resembled Marvel Jr., how both Priscilla and Ann-Margret looked like the Marvel's sister, Ann Marvel (*kinda* creepy), and how Elvis' arch-enemy Bill Ayres resembles the villain of the comic, Capt. Nazi.

There is a touching moment as Elvis and Yarnall, someone refers to as "the one that got away," are reunited. Wonder what her husband thinks about that, I ask bemusedly.

So not only is Elvis Presley alive, but he's *back*. There is a [new CD by "Jon Burrows"](#) available with some of his old songs redone and rearranged, and some new tunes as well, such as "Lisa Marie" (which also has a music video on the DVD).

Believe me, I'm only skimming the surface on what is presented here. The stories are incredibly imaginative, and as one who is not engulfed in Elvismania I'm sure there's some stuff I'm missing. And yet, this was a fun ride from beginning to end. Sure, it could have been trimmed probably by about 20 minutes rather than its over two-hour running time, but this is definitely for not just Elvis fans, but anyone who is into rock'n'roll history or just the mysteries of the 1960s counterculture.

I sure do look forward to see what's next for Joel Gilbert and his crew.

Chapters:

Part 1: 1935-1955 - Captain Marvel Jr. Origins

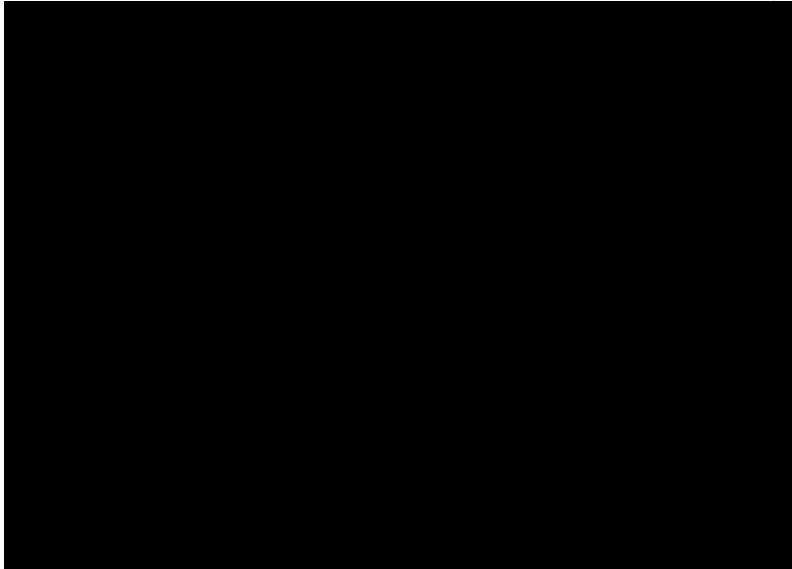
Part 2: 1956-1958 - Elvis the Pelvis

Part 3: 1959-1960 - US Army Intervention

Part 4: 1961-1967 - Hollywood Shlock Formula

Part 5: 1968-1969 - America Under Siege

Part 6: 1970 - Federal Drug Enforcement Agent
Part 7: 1971-1974 - Fighting the Weather Underground
Part 8: 1975-1976 - Battling the Mafia
Part 9: 1977 - Fake Death Plot
Part 10: 1978-1979 - Witness Protection Program
Part 11: 1980-2004 - The Struggle to Return
Part 12: 2005-2001 - The Obama-Weathermen Nexus
Part 12: 2012 - Elvis is Back



Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at [12:01 AM](#) [0 comments](#)

Labels: [Ann-Margret](#), [Bill Ayres](#), [Bob Dylan](#), [Captain Marvel Jr](#), [DVD review](#), [Elvis Found Alive](#), [Elvis Presley](#), [FFanzeen](#), [Graceland](#), [Mafia](#), [Nixon](#), [Obama](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Ronald Reagan](#), [Sinatra](#), [Weather Underground](#)

Reactions: [interesting \(0\)](#) [cool \(0\)](#) [informative \(0\)](#)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2011

Anime DVD Review: *ICE*

Text © Robert Barry Francos/FFanzeen, 2011

Images from the Internet



ICE: Yesterday, Today, and No Future

Created by Yasushi Akimoto

Directed by Makoto Kobayashi

Eleven Arts / Seminal Films, 2007 / 2012

103 minutes, USD \$14.95

Seminalfilms.com

Elevenarts.net

Projectice.com

MVDvisual.com

ICE - also known as *Project ICE* - started out as three-episode anime series in 2007 that has been combined into a full-length feature. I understand there is also a dubbed-in-English version, but I'm happy this is the Japanese one with English subtitles, instead.

As with most of the anime I have seen, this is full of lush visual images with spectacular effects, imaginative events, and a tad of *WTF?*

Here's what I can make out about the basic premise: In 1988, a young woman is in a car accident, and becomes lodged inside the mind of a warrior woman in the future of 2012 (apparently, this is a somewhat common occurrence to the soldier; perhaps it's why she hasn't slept in three years? I'm just askin').

In this dystopic future, all the men have died out due to their violent nature and fiddling with genetics, leaving a world of women who have no way to reproduce, and naturally resent it. This leads the women to

abhor the men's way of violence by staging a world war (I *said* WTF, didn't I?) that leaves central Japan with a population of just 20,000 survivors.

They are broken down into two clans, one a stoic-based group who accept death as inevitability, led by Kisaragi, who is a human-squid mutation (damn, those men!). They display their stoicism by killing and riding around in fast motorcycles. The three main characters among them are said squid-woman and her two pre-pubescent two daughters (not by blood, she notes): Yuki is a symbol of love and hope (despite her whatever attitude about dying), and her sister Satsuki is a miscreant who can't decide whether she loves Yuki or wants to kill her (she varies to both).

The second and foremost clan in the story is lead by the evil and deeeeeep voiced Julia, who wants to control all of Japan no matter what the cost, showing that power corrupts whatever the gender. Leading her guard is Hitomi Landsknecht (no, I don't know why she has a German name), who is the hero protagonist of the story. She is the one who has not slept in three years.

Through all the goings on, including the killing and slaughtering while defaming the men who had done the same (still don't get that), they are searching for a dangerous experiment that will help them reproduce by some volatile means (aka ICE).

The main thrust of the story is the rivalry between the two clans, and the Romea and Juliet story of Hitomi and Yuki. It's well known that many anime (and especially hentai) stories concern older men and young girls, but this is the first I've heard about an older woman and pre-teen. No, there's no fooling around, it's all emotional, but there is talk of an exchange of vows. Just creepy or, if you will, yuki.

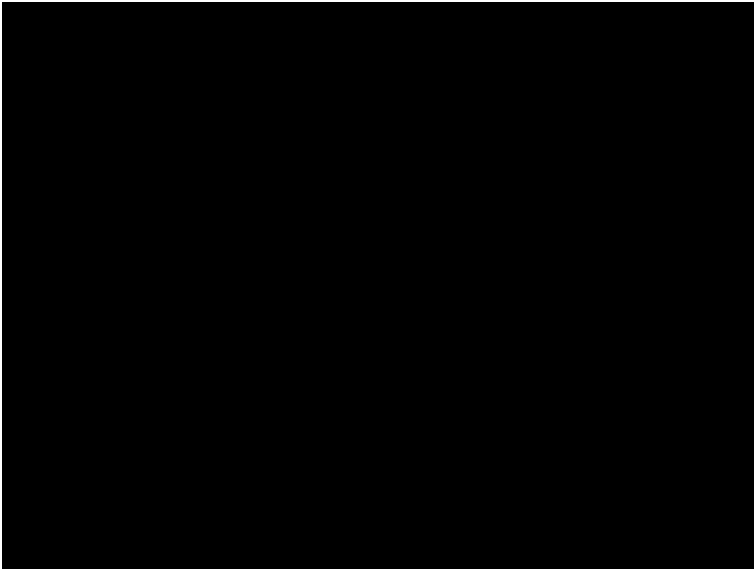
Other standard anime fare that goes on here is ginormous creatures, monsters with many eyes, beheadings, people exploding, voices that are high pitched and highly emotional (some supplied by the Japanese all-girl group AKB 48), and others that are deep, monotonal, and sound exhausted (usually the leaders and head soldiers).


As I said, the effects and art are just stunning and a joy to watch. There is a mixture of hand-drawn and computer graphics (such as flying machines / weapons). The story does seem a bit dense at times, but I truly don't know if that is a cultural aspect that is lost of me, or anime doesn't really care about the details as much as the visuals that it produces. Either way, I accept it for what it is, and even went back and slo-mo'd some parts to see it clearer when the action was too quick for me to pick out details.

There are also many interesting side visuals and touches, such as birds that turn into bushes, and swords that turn into guns (or vice verse, I'm not sure).

As confusing as some of the story is, it's the conclusion that is the real head scratcher for me. In researching this film a bit, I find a lot of people - especially younger females - are big fans of the series; I'm guessing due to the destruction of all men and the strong women who replace them, replicating both their strengths and weaknesses for power and how to achieve it.

There is a lot of music by pop group AKB 48 (another draw for the young-girl audience), especially around the bookend credits (check the trailer, below). For me, other than Shonen Knife and the 5.6.7.8's, I'm not really familiar with Japanese pop, so that factor is not part of what makes this an interesting viewing, but rather the imaginative take on gender, war, greed, and heroism.



Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at [4:54 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

Labels: [AKB48](#), [anime](#), [DVD review](#), [FFanzeen](#), [Japanese animation](#), [Makoto Kobayashi](#), [manga](#), [MVD Visual](#), [Project ICE](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Yasushi Akimoto](#)

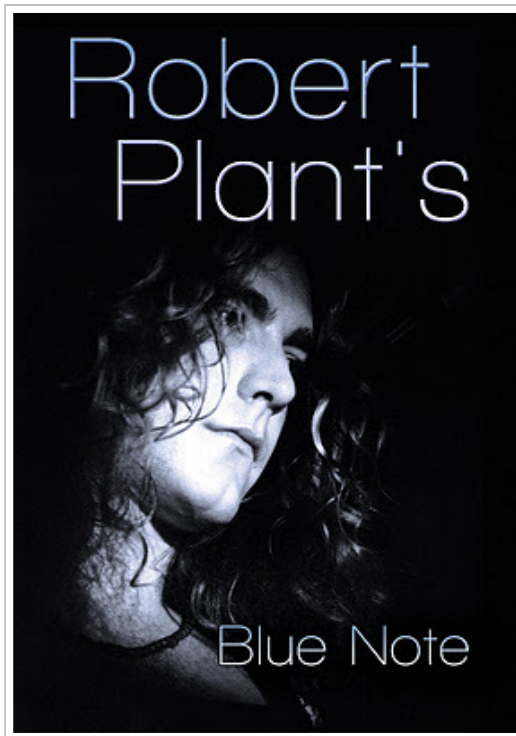
Reactions: [interesting \(0\)](#) [cool \(0\)](#) [informative \(0\)](#)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2011

DVD Reviews: Robert Plant's Blue Note

Text © Robert Barry Francos / FFanzeen, 2011

Images from the Internet

**Robert Plant's Blue Note**

Executive Producer Rob Johnstone

Narrated by Thomas Arnold

Sexy Intellectual, 2010AM

155 minutes, USD \$19.95

Chromedreams.co.uk

MVDvisual.com

Is it possible for *you* to respect a musician, and yet not care much for his output? I've felt this way for some about the likes of Bowie, Brian Ferry, and Robert Plant. The one time I saw Led Zeppelin in concert at Madison Square Garden was the late 1970s (Bonham's last tour), and it was one of the more boring shows I have ever seen, with tepid music and a thunderously lackluster performance (I'm guessing they were as stoned as those in the audience around me).

Yet, I still remember the very first time I heard possibly the most overplayed song in the classic rock era, "[Stairway to Heaven](#)," on the jukebox at the Kingsborough Community College Annex. I also recall thinking, *that's it?* I do still enjoy, however, Little Roger and the Goosebumps' "[Stairway to Gilligan's Island](#)"...

But for some reason, Plant has intrigued me, even though I actually know very little about him, in a similar way that Jimmy "whip-in-my-suitcase" Page did in his pre-Zep days, when he was a studio musician (England's Glen Campbell?) and while in the Yardbirds.

Yet another part of the continuing British series on classic rock by the amazing Chrome Dreams, this documentary doesn't just focus on Robert Plant, but also on the major influences on his musical life.

While overly long at nearly 3 hours, this study actually gets it right: the people who are interviewed discuss *their* particular specialties, such as British writers Nigel Williamson (*The Rough Guide to Led Zeppelin*) and Barney Hoskyns (*Trampled Under Foot: The power and excess of Led Zeppelin*) focus on the general role of the band, Americans Richie Unterberger discusses the '60s San Francisco scene (bet Jeff Tamarkin would have been a good add, too) and Brooklyn-based author and journalist Amanda Petrusich and music historian John Lomax III (*The Country Music Book*) describe the Nashville period.

Even further, and this is what really excited me, is the part that tends to be weakest in this series, and that is musicians who are contemporaries. For this study, there are the likes of Tom McGuinness (Manfred Mann), Dave Kelly (The Blues Band), Chris Dreja (Yardbirds), Hossam Ramzy (Egyptian percussionist and composer), Robbie Blunt (guitarist and songwriter who worked with Plant during his early solo career) and songwriter/producer Phil Johnstone (of the Dangerous Brothers; any relation to the DVD's executive producer, I wonder?). Usually these collections are shy on collaborators of the artist in focus, but here they're thick as, well, musicians.

There are also a plethora of clips, most pretty short, highlighting many points of Plant's musical life, including live and music videos, as well as various interviews. In fact, the opening segment is part of Plant's acceptance speech at the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in 1995, discussing American music, especially the Blues. However, there are nearly as many by the artist that influenced his encyclopedic and broad range of styles as there is of him. A good example is right near the beginning, when a young Plant first discovered rock'n'roll, and we see snippets of Elvis ("That's Alright Mama" and "Hound Dog"). As he then discovers the blues, there are live bits of Big Bill Broonzy ("Worried Man Blues"), Muddy Waters ("Got My Mojo Working"), Son House (one of my faves, "Dead Letter Blues"), Howlin' Wolf ("Smokestack Lightning"; "Don't Laugh at Me"), Sonny Boy Williams ("Getting Out of Town"; "Keep It To Yourself") and of course Robert Johnson ("Preachin' Blues," "Crossroad Blues"), among many others. There are even some Stones ("Not Fade Away"; "Little Red Rooster") and Yardbirds ("I'm a Man").

Plant discusses this early period, and further onto other segments of his career throughout the disk, on the Canadian Q radio program in 2010 (probably interviewed by an unseen Jian Ghomeshi). Most of this pre-musical period of Plant's life is taken up in discussion and description of rock and earlier Blues, so Plant barely shows up in the first 30 minutes of the disk.

Following the Blues history, we catch up on the folk rock movement and San Francisco scene with Buffalo Springfield ("For What It's Worth") and Love ("Love is More Than Words"). As Plant forms Band of Joy with John Bonham (among others; there is a rare sound-bite of their cover of "Hey, Joe"), psychedelic rock also makes an impression

with Moby Grape (“8:05”), Jimi Hendrix (“Purple Haze”), Cream (“Sunshine of Your Love”) and the Yardbirds’ experimentations (“For Your Love,” “Happenings 10 Years Ago,” “Dazed and Confused”).

After Band of Joy dissipate, and the Yardbirds fall apart, Plant - not the first choice of lead singer - joins Jimmy Page and the others to form the New Yardbirds, which, of course, would become Zeppelin. Surprisingly, LZ only constitutes about 10 minutes of the whole story here, though there are a number of quick clips (“Babe I’m Gonna Leave You”; “Whole Lotta Love,” “I Can’t Quit You Baby,” “When the Levee Breaks” and the song that introduced Plant’s interest in Eastern music, “Kashmir.”)

No, I’m not going to relate, in detail, the whole DVD, you’ll have to purchase it on your own, though my guess if you’re reading this you know the story, anyway. But to quickly give an overview, Plant goes solo in the 1980s, focusing at first on Arabian music, focused around Egypt, in part thanks to the influence of singer [Oum Kalthoum](#).

When he formed his next couple of new groups (just known by his name), he released a bunch of LPs with the full electronic nonsense that made the 1980s somewhat unbearable (think drum machine and synths). I remember seeing some of the videos on MTV and just feeling squeamish, thinking “Jeez, this is just horrible” (e.g., “[Little By Little](#)”). Of course, he wasn’t alone as many other British musicians went the same route, such as Phil Collins, Peter Gabriel and Robert Palmer. I blame this, in Plant’s case, on his production team of the Dangerous Brothers. This would be followed by a period of melding the awful ‘80s style with a more rock-oriented feel (e.g., “[Tall Cool One](#)”), as his Led Zeppelin past began to catch up to him. He started doing occasional Zep material in his live shows. Funny, there is no mention about later LZ tours with Bonham’s son filling in on the kit; or is my mind making that up?

Of course, once LZ songs come into the mix again, so would his partner, Jimmy Page, and together they’d form, what else? Jimmy Page and Robert Plant (no resurgence of John Paul Jones though, as the doc mentions in passing; would have loved both Page and Jones to have been interviewed on this doc). Together they would, for a couple of LPs worth at least, delve deep into the Eastern sounds, even covering their own LZ material rearranged to their new focus.

By 2006, after some uninspired string of original songs, Page and Plant were kaput. Forming yet another band, the Strange Sensations, the material Plant focused on was wide ranging, from Blues to SoCal-based. In an interview, he calls it a “quasi-psychedelic North African mish mosh.” This was followed by Mali-inspired material, as this DVD posits that Africa is the actual home of the Blues, so it’s logical that Plant would find solace there. The viewer gets some background of this music, and why it is thought to be wellspring of the American-based style.

This is all very well and good, but it's the next phase that piqued my interest, as he headed for Nashville, hooking up with Americana singer supreme [Alison Krauss](#), who in turn introduced him to her muse, T. Bone Burnett. At this point, we're given yet another history lesson about C&W. Explaining the connection, Lomax quotes Hank Williams Jr. as once stated that "Country music is nothing but white man's blues." Okay, so we're on the same page as the to the Plant link.

For the last phase we see Plant is his formation of another Band of Joy which, as far as I know, is his current situation.

The reason for the length of this DVD is not just that it covers Robert Plant's career, but it also informs the watcher on the history of each of his influences. While each one of these topics actually deserves its own documentary, it's nice to get an encapsulated overview.

One aspect of Plant's life that is completely untouched here is his personal one, outside of the music. But that's okay, because I'm actually happy to learn more about what makes him an artist. Am I any more of a Robert Plant fan having watched this? No, I guess not. However, I feel like I understand a lot more about what drives him, and my respect for him has definitely increased. There was so much I *didn't* know about they guy, and I'm grateful to be caught up a bit. Plus, learning about the Mali-Blues connection, and Plants forays into Eastern sounds did pique my interest, so I may go back and check out some of the artists that influenced him. It's all good.

The extra is a few minute piece connecting Plant, Lomax, and Leadbelly (including some clips of the latter performing, alone making bonus worth a watch).

This review is dedicated to the lovely Miss Pamela, who should have been interviewed as well.

Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at 12:01 AM [0 comments](#) 

Labels: [Arabic](#), [arena rock](#), [Chrome Dreams](#), [classic rock](#), [Egypt](#), [FFanzeen](#), [Jimmy Page](#), [Led Zeppelin](#), [Mali](#), [MVD Visual](#), [Oum Kalthoum](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Robert Plant](#)

Reactions: [interesting \(0\)](#) [cool \(0\)](#) [informative \(0\)](#)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2011

Photo Essay: Hafford, Saskatchewan

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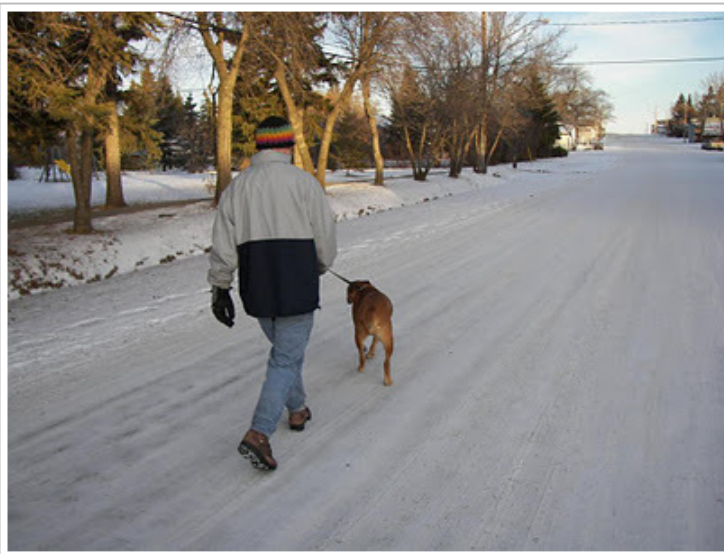
The last weekend of November, 2011, a friend asked if I wanted to join him for a drive to [Hafford, Saskatchewan](#) to visit some of his old work-mates who now live in that area. Sure, why not?

Hafford is northwest of Saskatoon, just about 100 kilometers/62 miles away, taking about an hour and a half driving during this time of year, especially as nearly a third of the way is by a rural road.

I'm a big fan of visiting small towns, and Hafford is just the kind I like. Established nearly 100 years ago, the downtown (Main Street) is wide, and just three blocks long, with no building on the strip higher than two stories, the largest being the hotel at the far (south) end of the street.

But I'm jumping ahead. Here is a representation of the visit.

As one approaches the upward climb towards Main Street, approaching from the north, one of the first things they may notice is that all the street signs in the town are both in English and...French? Nope, it's Ukrainian, representing the large population that settled the town at the turn of the last century.





Starting from the far southern end of town is the hotel and bar (the K-

Bar Inn, est. 1914), which is the tallest building in the business district, as stated above. We entered the premises at some point, and the inside is pretty nice, with a huge pool table and (muted, thankfully) sports on the tele. While my pal was asking a question of the very friendly barkeep, I sauntered over to the jukebox and noticed there was a free play on it. Checking the list, I noticed it had "I Wanna Be Sedated" under the Ramones (only selection of theirs), so I played that. That brought a smile, to have a bit of New York playing in rural Saskatchewan. I gave a small salute to the bros in their memory.



Across the street are these two buildings. The one on the right is the town's grocer, though one would not know from looking at the front. It's the only store of its type I've seen where there are no adverts plastered on it telling of food sales. Perhaps there's no need when you're the only game in town.



We arrived in town right then to try and find someone, so we took a chance and went into the Seven Star Restaurant (the faded sign says “Chinese and Western Food.” I’m guessing that because of the high Ukrainian population, rather than there being a typical Chinese Buffet, instead there is a “Sunday Smorg”; a true blending of cultures), next door to a store that looked to be empty. As we entered the restaurant, there were about a dozen townies there, all sitting facing the same direction (towards us). We asked if the person we were seeking was there, and we received multiple dazed head-shakings. I looked up behind my friend, and saw an electronic Keno betting board on the wall. Ah, I thought, that’s what’s going on: legal gambling. The sign outside *did* clearly say it was a Lotto center. Uh, I mean “centre.”





So, we decided to go to eat, but not there. Directly across the street is the Silver Sword and Chalice Steak House and Knights Inn. It's a long name, but it is also suiting (pun intended) because it is the home of big food. People literally travel from afar to come to this unassuming and clutter-filled diner for their portions. The various styles of hamburgers on the menu, for example, are all half-pound, but the prices are exceptionally reasonable. I had the chicken parma sangwich (that's Staten Island-talk for sandwich), and it was quite yummy. When we entered, the place was full of hunters (obvious from their bright orange clothes) just finishing up. As we ate, looking around, there was plenty to see, from various types of swords on the wall, framed pictures of castles made from jigsaw puzzles, goblets lined up along the counters, used comic books and LPs in a corner (I could have happily spent the whole morning going through them, alone) and a photo of one of their infamous larger burgers that are made to order (10lb, 20lb, or even upwards).





A plot called the Hafford Millennium Park, which is bookended by two buildings with murals, one on the Innovation Credit Union is calming, the other on the Redberry Pharmacy with what may be called a time-binding (in General Semantic-speak) testament to a 2000 town logo contest. The park has a small beacon to represent the Conservation Core of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.



Across the street is an even smaller area which contains a war memorial and the town bulletin board. On the south side is a non-descript wood building that may be empty, and on the north, the brick

town library. In front of the hall were two kids playing on the front steps. Sweet childhood memories are made of these.



Further along the street is Happy Ron's Cozy Corner Café, where one can hear live music; it also doubles as the bus station. The length of the side of the building is a long mural of music, and along the tops on both the side and front are messages written in white. The one on the front is the infamous introduction to *The Twilight Zone*. I wonder if that refers to the music they present, or the wait time for the bus?



Across from that are a few buildings, including the Senior Citizen's Center, established in 1973 (interesting that they use the American spelling), the Hafford Administrative Building (aka City Hall), and what was once obviously a garage.



Towards the edge of the downtown is this house that is a bit worse for

the wear, with boards holding up the awning that supports the balcony. In the upper window (bedroom? attic? bedroom attic?) is what looks like a stained glass window, though I thought perhaps it's a shower curtain, with no actual glass in the frame. In this condition, I wonder if anyone actually lives there.



Jumping back across the street to the west side, is J&P Agencies, which handles insurance, mortgages and drivers' licenses with the Saskatchewan Governmental Insurance (SGI), liquor licenses (though other than the bar in the hotel and the Silver Sword and Chalice Steak House, I'm not certain to whom else it applies), Saskatchewan Mutual Insurance (SMI), etc. Next door is Hafford Plumbing and Heating. Theirs is not the only sign that needs repainting, as can be seen throughout the town.



This house on the east side seems almost anachronistic with its Bob Marley and Judah Lion flag hanging in the window. Perhaps it's my own big city bias, and this is more the norm than I think? Either way, I and I thought it was cool, mon.



Zigzagging a bit, continuing on the east side is an old wooden hardware store with the solid Ukrainian name of Rybryna, across from the west side's more modern looking and sprawling Kuzyk & Son's Lumber Yard. While the building is solid, the rusted sign on the second half tells of its age. On the far end of town, across from the lumber yard, is the boxy and unadorned Hafford Gospel Fellowship church, which looks like it was crafted from a trailer (not meant as disrespectful, it just does).







Just as you're leaving town was this brilliant contraption in someone's front yard. Rather than stringing a cord for the car's block heater across the sidewalk from the house to a tree to the ground, this sculpture keeps the cord high, protected, and dry. Oh, and for those that don't know, a block heater is something put in the car motor that you plug in so your engine stays warm enough to start when it's -40C/F.



Turning the corner and going down an avenue block you reach one of the two Orthodox cathedrals, the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church. It is a beautiful building and the later-day light was just stunning.











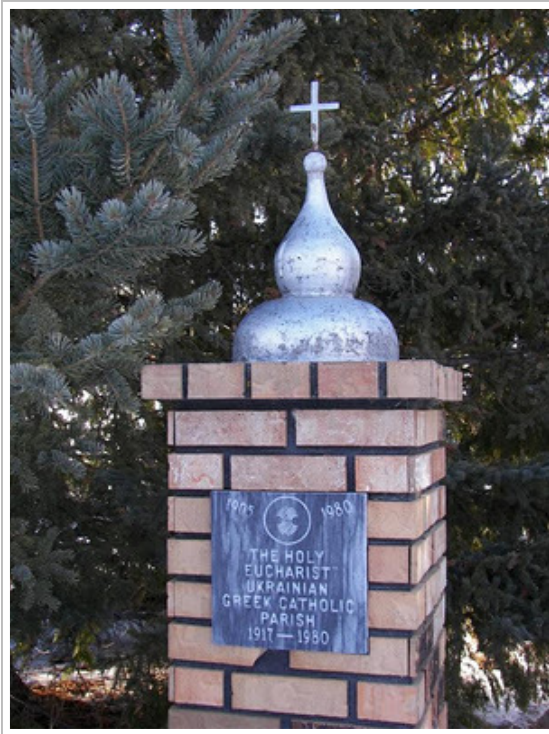
We continued our walk around the town, going up and down streets. One thing I found peculiar is that there are a number of houses with no front steps. While they obviously must go around the back or sides to get in (or perhaps from the garage), having the hanging door seems odd, especially since there seems to be at least one per block. In the one I use for the example below, there was also a curious lamp in the window.



Up another street we saw this pensive looking dog that watched us but did not move off the stoop, even though was unchained. Perhaps it was the sign on the lawn directly across the street that kept him still?



We finally came across the second big church, the Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Greek Catholic Parish. A sign clearly states 1917-1980, though perhaps that is the time in which it was built. Unfortunately, this is also when my camera's battery decided to give up the ghost, as it were, so these photos were the requiem.



The Hafford area is also known for its [twisted trees](#), but we didn't have the time to check them out. Hopefully, I'll get to go back and see for myself at some point.

Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at 12:01 AM [0 comments](#)

Labels: [FFanzeen](#), [Hafford](#), [K-Bar Inn](#), [Photo Essay](#), [Photography](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [rural](#), [Saskatchewan](#), [Silver Sword and Chalice Steak House](#), [small town](#), [Ukrainian](#)

Reactions: interesting (2) cool (1) informative (1)

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