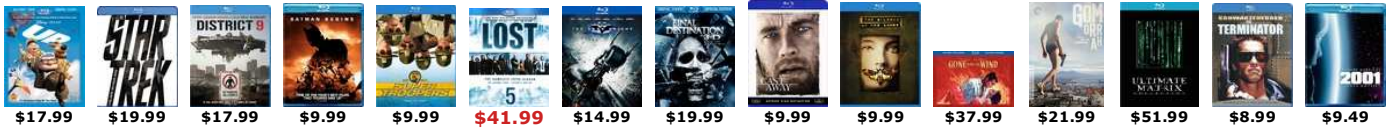


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Yellowjackets: The Paris Concert Blu-ray

in-akustik | 2008 | 98 mins | Not rated | Jul 14, 2009



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Video
Video codec: VC-1
Video resolution: 1080i
Aspect ratio: 1.78:1

Audio
Music: DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1
Music: LPCM 5.1
Music: Dolby Digital 2.0

Subtitles
None

Disc
25GB Blu-ray Disc

Price
List price: \$24.95
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Third party: \$14.99 (Save 40%)
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Blu-ray review
Movie 4.5
Video 3.0
Audio 4.5
Extras 1.5
Overall 4.0

Playback
Region A (B, C untested)

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Yellowjackets: The Paris Concert Blu-ray Review
The Yellowjackets deliver a solid set in a March 2008 concert recorded in Paris.

As anyone who's ever played music professionally will tell you, it's difficult, if not well nigh impossible, to keep a group together for any length of time. That makes the Yellowjackets' achievement something of a singular sensation, as they're rapidly approaching their 30th anniversary of making music together. That deeply nuanced intuitive communication which only comes from years and years of working with other musicians comes through loudly and clearly on this concert filmed in Paris, with the stellar quartet moving fleetly through a broad range of material that highlights both their post-Bop sensibilities as well as their more lyrical melodic side. The quartet, consisting of Russell Ferrante on keys, Jimmy Haslip on bass, Marcus Baylor on drums and percussion, and the inimitable Bob Mintzer on sax and the Akai EWI (Electronic Wind Instrument), proves that jazz-rock fusion doesn't need to be a mediocre m?lange of the worst of both idioms. In fact the Yellowjackets come down firmly on the side of jazz, with just enough driving, propulsive beats to push them ever so slightly into the rock arena.

The Yellowjackets arrived on the scene more or less in 1977, when the original iteration (not yet called Yellowjackets) was formed by guitarist Robben Ford. Ford quickly left to pursue solo opportunities, and the group's first album under their current name came in 1981. By that time the fusion movement had been in full swing for almost a decade, with such famous purveyors as Chick Corea's Return to Forever and Weather Report touring extensively and releasing amazingly good selling albums, considering the perhaps niche market this medley of styles appeals to. The Yellowjackets were an interesting assemblage right off the bat for being guitarless (after Ford's departure, obviously), and for managing to work an unusually diverse musical palette that culled equally from outside soloing to more in the pocket R&B flavored grooves that could almost have come from The Crusaders.

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The Yellowjackets take the stage.

When saxman Bob Mintzer joined the group in the early 1990's their jazz sensibilities were considerably raised. Mintzer is a player and soloist of impeccable sensitivity and musicianship, able to jump quartal structures a la "Freedom Jazz Dance" in one moment and then segueing seamlessly into a fluid, if throaty, lyricism that makes the most of his tenor. Ferrante is also a tasteful and often understated keyboard master whose acoustic work especially is colorful and full of neatly expressive percussive touches, accenting nice jazz inflected harmonies under the other players' solos. When Ferrante himself solos, he works both his Yamaha grand and Korg synth with tact and precision, crafting keen solos that are always sensitive and well constructed. While Haslip only contributes a couple of solos in this set, he's remarkably facile during his solo work and contributes masterfully as support throughout the concert. Baylor's drums are always right on the money, with sometimes unexpected accents on rim shots that perk up listening interest.

There's a kind of interesting dichotomy to a lot of the Yellowjackets' material in this 90 minute or so set. On the one hand, brief phrases are traded between the players, something redolent of Return to Forever, but on the other hand there's some appealing unison work, especially between Ferrante on synth and Mintzer on his EWI. While most of these tunes follow the time honored tradition of head-solos-head, there's enough diversity in the tunes themselves, and the choice of individual soloists, to give an overall variety to the proceedings. It's rather interesting to hear the group go from the outside "hit and run" scattershot "Bop Boy" to something as peacefully melodic as "Cape Town" (something very reminiscent of late Weather Report), but it's testament to the players' virtuosity that they can so easily move from one idiom to the next throughout the twelve numbers included here.

The concert has some slight technical issues from a taping standpoint which may bother some viewers. This March 2008 concert was recorded at Paris' New Morning club, and while the stage is fine and there is certainly adequate multi-camera coverage, the audience surrounds the players and seems packed in like sardines, resulting in some awkward camera moves from time to time. There are also some unfortunate shots where what I'm presuming is a waiter delivering a drink walks directly in front of the camera, leaving a black screen for a moment. Why an alternate take for that moment wasn't utilized is anyone's guess. While coverage of the individual players is typically excellent, as I've complained about before in other reviews, I just don't understand why for example we're treated to a long take of Baylor when Ferrante is the one soloing. In fact coverage of Ferrante is probably the worst all around on this concert. A profile view is most typical, but that obscures his hands. Two alternate views, one from the front of the piano, and another from behind the player, do little to reveal his hands making their magic. I'd love for one of these concert videos to have an overhead shot of the keyboard player so that we could enjoy their fingerwork as much as we do Mintzer's, for example.

In-Akustik is doing an admirable job in bringing some underappreciated artists a wider audience with its series of Blu-ray concert discs. If you haven't experienced the brilliant playing of The Yellowjackets, this BD provides an admirable introduction to one of the longest lived groups in the jazz fusion movement, a longevity that is admirably well deserved by virtue of their complex yet accessible playing.

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I was a little underwhelmed with *The Yellowjackets'* 1080i VC-1 encoded image quality. As you will see from some of the screencaptures I've included, midrange and farshots are hampered by an overall softness. That is countered by an appealing crispness in the closeups, which thankfully outnumber the midrange shots. Colors are good, if not abundantly saturated, and contrast is fine, with good, inky black levels dissolving nicely in the smoke filled backgrounds. Some of the darkened audience shots also exhibit an unappealing softness. Though this was evidently filmed in high definition, at least according to the inlay information, I have to wonder if perhaps different kinds of cameras were used, resulting in this disparity of image quality. All of this said, most people interested in this title are no doubt going to be more interested in the audio than in the video quality, and I doubt there's anything so egregiously bad here that it will bother people too much.

Audio **B B B B B**



Luckily the listener is provided with three admirable soundtracks on this release, a DTS-HD MA 5.1, uncompressed LPCM 5.1 and a standard Dolby Digital 2.0 mix. I was actually somewhat surprised in toggling back and forth between the DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM 5.1 mixes to here a noticeable, if slight, difference, with a beefier midrange in the PCM offering. However, both of the 5.1 mixes provide brilliant fidelity, with Mintzer's gravelly sax coming through distortion free. The many colors Ferrante culls from his Korg are also admirably rendered. Surround channels separate the players extremely well, though rear channels typically spill mostly with audience reaction. There's an appealing clarity to both Ferrante's acoustic work, as well as Haslip and Baylor's contributions. This is a crystal clear recording with impeccable fidelity and dynamic range, mixed well with an overall appealing balance. The 2.0 offering was simply too compressed and narrow sounding for me to spend much time with it.

Supplements **B B B B B**



An almost eight minute featurette shows the band doing their soundcheck.

Final words **BBBBB**



The Yellowjackets may not have attained the worldwide celebrity of Return to Forever or Weather Report, but that's not through any inherent lack of musicianship. This Paris concert will hopefully thrill longtime fans while simultaneously introducing the group to a whole new market.

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