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Walter Trout CD and DVD Reviews

WALTER TROUT

Relentless

Ruf Records (Ruf 1083)

Relentless: The Concert

Ruf Records (Ruf 3003)

In Concert

Inakustik (INAK 6503-1 DVD)

For their sixth German-based Ruf label album, Walter Trout And The Radicals — longtime bassist Jimmy Trapp, keyboardist Sammy Avila, and drummer Joey Pafumi — recorded all-new material in front of a live audience at the Paradiso Theater in Amsterdam. Undiluted by overdubbing or sweetening, the resulting set is potent and bare bones, sizzling with instrumental flash. More important, Trout's songs allow revealing glimpses into his personal life.

Inspired by his son's tearful reaction to a story read in school, "Cry If You Want To," plays like a superior old-school Memphis soul ballad. Observations on his mother's abusive alcoholic boyfriend add a chilling suburban reality to "Collingswood." The New Jersey-born headliner also offers a fresh, heartfelt twist on the by-now standard paean to the road, "This Life I Chose." Also, a recently departed friend is movingly eulogized in the gospel-drenched "Work No

More." Romantic alienation informs the funky "Empty Eyes," along with cyberspace delusions of "Chat Room Girl" and the commanding acoustic-only-backed "Lonely Tonight." Yet Trout, with the inclusion of the up-tempo Chicago blues pledge "My Heart Is True" and garage-rockin' "Helpin' Hand," proves a master of emotional uplift and release as well.

That said, the full-length Ruf concert DVD is probably the greater statement. Not only do Trout's extended jams work better in the context of a complete show, but his interplay with The Radicals — keyboard maestro Avila in particular — is joyously on display. The nearly two-hour set also contains material not included on the CD. Trout's version of Elmore James' "Dust My Broom," is as vibrant as anything done by the former Canned Heat and John Mayall sideman. Further, during the finale, "Serves Me Right To Suffer," stick-twirling Pafumi gives a clinic in the lost art of showmanship drumming, while the "bonus" performance of "Good Enough To Eat" burns with club-rock abandon.

Among the extras is a somewhat comic behind-the-scenes documentary and an interview wherein Trout earnestly discusses his core beliefs and his equipment setup — which is always of interest to fellow guitarists. The "bonus" performance of

"Good Enough To Eat" burns with club-rock abandon. Such goodies add to a DVD's allure, but by documenting Trout at his sweat-stained, musically grimacing best, *Relentless: The Concert* successfully captures what the artist is all about.

Interesting by contrast is the Inakustik DVD, which features a 1993 Trout performance for the German TV program *Ohne Filter*. Younger and thinner, his set features many now familiar elements — the classical music segues into other numbers, the mouth-open expression of sexual amazement during intense note-bends, etc. Doing business as The Walter Trout Band — with bassist Trapp, drummer Bernard Pershey, and German keyboardist Martin Gerschwitz — he lays down an occasionally thrilling eight-song set of jam-oriented material. Singing higher and with less blues authority than he now commands, Trout wrings urban toughness from "Life In The Jungle" and "Prisoner Of A Dream." The best moments, most notably the heartbreaking "Frederica (I Don't Need You)" and the Chicago-style blues "Finally Gotten Over You," provide the strongest indications of what Trout would later accomplish. Long-time fans will find it essential part of his story, but the recommendation here is to get the blissfully superior Ruf DVD first.

— Ken Burke