



Curtis Mayfield

Pure & Unfiltered

LEAVE IT TO EUROPEANS to give first-class treatment to American music (performed by Americans and Europeans) that often gets second-class treatment at home.

From 1983 to the end of 2000, "Ohne Filter" (meaning "without filter") aired on German television, presenting live-in-the-studio performances by blues, funk, soul, fusion, and roots rock acts, with meticulous attention to audio and video quality. The show was subtitled "Musik pur," and that's exactly what it was: pure music.

The series hopes to re-launch in 2005, according to executive producer Bernhard Rossle, but in the meantime a steady stream of DVDs is being issued by in-akustik GmbH & Co. KG, distributed stateside by Music Video Distributors (MVD). Each consists of a full show by a different act, approximately 60 minutes in length, plus special features, including an interview about the series with Rossle.

The list of artists who appeared during the show's 18-year run is staggering, running the gamut from mega-acts like Santana, Pat Metheny, and the Allman Brothers Band to fringier, sometimes under-appreciated artists such as Amos Garrett, the Paladins, and Tuck & Patti. In-akustik's plan is

to ultimately release 50 DVDs, and so far it's off to a great start.

Shot at station SWR in Baden-Baden under the direction of Michael Au, the program's look and feel fall somewhere between the casualness of "Austin City Limits" and the somewhat slicker "Sessions On West 54th." All DVDs have titles like *Curtis Mayfield In Concert*, *Joe Louis Walker In Concert*, *Candy Kane In Concert*, etc. That's right—a televised concert devoted to blues seductress Candy Kane; it's hard to imagine American TV doing something that cool.

The installment featuring the late Curtis Mayfield is as good a place to start as any. It was shot in April of 1990, less than four months before he was paralyzed when a lighting rig fell on him onstage. At the time of the "Ohne Filter" taping, he was not quite 48—nine years before his death. The soul master is in top form, performing material from his days with the Impressions ("Gypsy Woman," "It's All Right," "People Get Ready") to '70s hits such as "Superfly," "Move On Up," and "Freddy's Dead." Particularly revealing is the close-up look at Mayfield's under-rated guitar playing—the bare-finger, arpeggiated-chord style that had such an indelible influence on Jimi Hendrix songs like "Little

Wing" and "Have You Ever Been (To Electric Ladyland)."

Focusing on the guitar-oriented titles, one of the biggest surprises is Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings. The 10-piece group may be a vanity project for the ex-Stone, but it's an extremely good one. With guitar ace Albert Lee and keyboardists Gary Brooker and Georgie Fame trading vocals with Janice Hoyte and Beverly Skeete, it's no wonder the bassist seems quite content to hold down the bottom, as usual. The repertoire ranges from rockabilly (The Rock 'N' Roll Trio's "Tear It Up," sung by Lee) to swing (Dan Hicks' "Walking One And Only," with Fame handling the lead) to R&B (Louis Jordan's "Let The Good Times Roll," with everyone taking turns). Terry Taylor shares guitar chores with Lee, and the bopping clip of Louis Prima's "Jump Jive And Wail" is a perfect vehicle for Albert, vocally and instrumentally.

As for Wyman, he's any band's dream bassist—solid, swinging, and unobtrusive.

There's guitar aplenty on the DVD of Rick Vito & The Lucky Devils. Journeyman Vito is a veteran sideman to Bob Seger, Jackson Browne, Roger McGuinn, and Bonnie Raitt, and a member of Fleetwood Mac for four years, but, again, it's hard to fathom American TV turning the spotlight on him. His set of mainly bluesy originals displays his formidable abilities on jump blues ("Blues Town"), big-toned slide ("When The Big One Comes"), and good old rock and roll (Eddy Clearwater's "I Wouldn't Lay My Guitar Down"). The intimate concert's highlight is Vito's tribute to Peter Green, on the Mac founder's "If I Loved Another Woman."

In a show taped in 1995, Vinton, Louisiana's Gatemouth Brown proves yet again that these youngsters don't have anything on him. With a crack backing quartet, the then-septuagenarian breezes through Duke Ellington's "C Jam Blues," takes Billy Strayhorn's "Take The 'A' Train" at a furious pace, and eases into the slow blues "Long Way Home"—always playing in first position, moving his capo accordingly (to the 8th fret for "C Jam," of course). Gate switches to fiddle for "Stop Time" and closes with a funkified "Got My Mojo Working." A typically memorable set.

From the opposite end of Louisiana, Tony Joe White turns in one of the best performances in the series, delivering



eleven originals in soulful fashion. White is so well-known (to those in the know) for his songwriting—with classics like "Rainy Night In Georgia," "Polk Salad Annie," and "Steamy Windows"—his guitar playing is often overlooked. But in this sparse setting, backed by only drums, bass, and keyboards, his simple, melodic approach displays its versatility and effectiveness.

Tony Joe opens solo with "Willie And Laura Mac Jones," one of the most touching glimpses of race relations in the South ever written. Then the band joins in, and things get swampy, with White's liberal use of fuzz and wah-wah (simultaneously on "Bi-Yo Rhythm"). The extended ballad "Closer To The Truth," with throaty, sustaining Strat solo, is the highlight of this 1992 appearance.

Another instrumental talent overshadowed by his own vocal and songwriting abilities is guitarist/keyboardist Bill Champlin, founder of San Francisco's Sons Of Champlin and member of Chicago, and a session musician, sometimes showing up on TV soundtracks. For his soul-based set, Champlin trades guitar solos with Garth Webber (with Huey Lewis & The News' Mario Cippolina on bass) before moving to the keyboards for his remake of Ray Charles' "In The Heat Of The Night."

Also noteworthy are DVDs by Larry Carlton and Robben Ford. The 1984 Carlton segment (with John Patitucci on bass) shows his fusion and blues sides—the former illustrated by the fleet-fingered "Strikes Twice," the latter by "I Gotta Right," with guest Johnny Mars on harmonica. The '93 Ford appearance, with his trio the Blue Line, is harder edged blues-rock, but Robben shines best on the swingy shuffle "Prison Of Love."

Other titles of interest to guitarists and bassists include Albert Collins, Papa Chubby, Steve Lukather, Edgar Winter and Rick Derringer, Asleep At The Wheel, Duke Robillard, Marcus Miller, Incognito, Level 42's Mark King, Ian McLagan & The Bump Band, and the aforementioned Joe Louis Walker. There's also a compilation of "Guitar Heroes," featuring many of the names mentioned here.

Already slated for release in 2005 are episodes featuring Phil Upchurch, Johnny "Guitar" Watson, and who knows what else. Like I said, it's hard to imagine American TV doing anything this cool. *Danke shoen.*

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