

Fans of Roy Buchanan (1939-1988) will certainly celebrate the release of "Live at Rockpalast" (MVD), a 1985 television concert, which MVD has issued in the US at the same time as three other classic concert DVD's which will meet with great approval among veteran rock fans (Michael Schenker Group, "Hardrock Legends, Vol. 2"; Ian Hunter Band with Mick Ronson, "Live at Rockpalast"; and Public Image Limited, "Live At Rockpalast 1983").

Buchanan was hardly in the same musical territory as Schenker, Hunter, and PiL, but neither was he strictly a hard-core bluesman, much the same way that the other three artists featured in this review are prone to mix rock and other genres into a base of blues. Unfortunately, as with nearly all of Buchanan's recorded output under his own name, this is very definitely a good-new-bad-news affair. But the bad news is not particularly unexpected, and is - as always - overwhelmed by the good news.

The sad fact of the matter is that Roy Buchanan could not sing and should not have sung, ever. Those Buchanan albums featuring other people singing never quite offered fully satisfactory vocal performances, either, so I guess having Buchanan sing all but one song is a bit of a wash in the long run. What's more, he hardly ever hired musicians who were anywhere near his level of musicianship and originality - few musicians are, to be sure. But his bands often had to struggle up to the level of mediocrity, and this band is no better. Drummer Martin Yule (who would go on to bigger things with Toy Dolls) is, in particular, a stiff, awkward pounder who seems to fall out of rhythm every so often.

But no one would even consider buying a Roy Buchanan concert DVD for the vocals or the backing band. It's the unique Roy Buchanan guitar style we want to hear, and there's tons of masterfully mind-boggling guitar work here, with Buchanan reaching high levels of intensity throughout, fully drawing the listener's attention away from the sub-par backing. Just as fortuitously, there is a large percentage of instrumentals on this disc, thus keeping his vocal inadequacies from turning the proceedings toward the direction of tedium. He invigorates a number of old instrumental warhorses - "Green Onions", "Walk Don't Run", "Peter Gunn", "Night Train" - by giving them the special Roy Buchanan interpretive treatment, and does an awe-inspiring version of one of his signature pieces, "Sweet Dreams", as well as a decent "Messiah".

The concert is 71 minutes in length, and the disc comes with an 8-page booklet. The songwriting credits contain a couple curiosities - Henry Mancini's "Peter Gunn" is credited simply to "Hank", Both Jimmy Forrest's "Night Train" and Ray Sharpe's "Linda Lu" are credited to Buchanan. In the case of "Night Train", Jimmy Forrest plagiarized the tune from Duke Ellington, so he probably doesn't deserve the credit anyway. But in the case of the still-living (and, I believe, still-active at age 74) Ray Sharpe, he not only deserves the credit, but could probably use the royalties as well. Perhaps the misspelling of "Linda Lu" as "Linda Lou" complicated the search for the copyright holder.

Guitarists will welcome the opportunity to study Buchanan's technique (thumb picking, pinch harmonics, bent notes, et. al.) in close-ups and distance shots alike. Fans will love this, despite the flaws. And Buchanan neophytes should check this out as well, flaws and all, because this is one spectacular musician, whose like we may never see again.

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