

F I L M R E V I E W

By Pete Roche

Cleveland Rocks on Ian Hunter 'Rockpalast' DVD

Ian Hunter returned to the North Coast last October to rock a sold-out Beachland Ballroom. After a ninety-minute set featuring stellar tributes to John Lennon ("Isolation"), Ben E. King ("Stand By Me"), and Lou Reed ("Sweet Jane"), the sun-glassed English songsmith encored not once but twice, his Rant Band affirming what we always knew: "Cleveland Rocks."

Our fair city couldn't want for a better anthem, really. Hailing from Hunter's album *You're Never Alone With a Schizophrenic*, the irresistibly upbeat cut celebrated the importance of music to "all the little kids growing up on the skids" and packed such "crude attitude" that many assumed it was a concert recording. Kid Leo's WMMS played it every Friday night at 6:00 pm upon its 1979 release. Cleveland sports teams adopted it as a victory song. Then-mayor Dennis Kucinich gave Hunter a key to the city... which the Brit apparently used to help Steve Popovich unlock Cleveland International Records, launching (or furthering) the careers of Meatloaf, Southside Johnny, and The Rovers.

Columbia Records refused to issue "Cleveland Rocks" as a single, citing the regional appeal of its now-familiar refrain. Not a little annoyed, Hunter offered "England Rocks" up for marketability in his native Britain. But the Cleveland edition is the one Hunter still performs today in clubs the world over; German, French, and Japanese-speaking fans know the chorus by heart even if they couldn't find our town on a map. The Drew Carey Show used an updated "Cleveland Rocks" (by Presidents of the United States) as its theme in the 90s; Hunter even guested on the sitcom. More recently, hair-metal goofballs Steel Panther covered the song. Trans-Siberian orchestra routinely wraps up its C-town gigs with a pyrotechnics-enhanced version. Plenty of YouTube clips show Hunter performing the guitars-and-synth driven shout-out to his adopted home, including some incendiary (if grainy) footage taken from the old Agora Ballroom in '79.

But a new DVD from Made-in-Germany Music will render such Super-8 reels



obsolete for all intents and purposes (save historical curiosity). Shot live in 1980 for WDR television, *Ian Hunter: Live at Rockpalast Featuring Mick Ronson* is 74 minutes of classic rock eye (and ear) candy that showcases the shaggy-maned Mott the Hoople alumnus at his creative crest, jamming onstage and shoulder-to-shoulder with collaborator-friend (and former Mott/Bowie guitarist) Ronson. Indeed, it's Ronson who first engages the audience—rocking out on Shadows instrumental "FBI" with his Gibson Les Paul Custom and five band mates—before Hunter even appears.

The main set is a survey of left-hook Hunter hits and Hoople uppercuts spanning the decade from 1969-80. Touring behind Ian's then-new *Welcome to the Club* LP, the band makes good on bawdy barroom numbers like "Bastard" and "All the Way From Memphis" while accommodating solo spots for Hunter—who plays piano for "Irene Wilde"—and Ronson, who's "Slaughter on 10th Avenue" closes the show. And while his ever-present shades become a sort of prophylactic against any intimate connection with the crowd, Hunter (clad in jacket and tie) is nonetheless engaging and in control. The feather-haired Ronson is content to let hang back and let his fret board fingers do the talking. But Mick's serious demeanor ebbs while bashing through "Cleveland Rocks," smiles breaking over the Spider From Mars guitarist as his partner in crime urges the those in attendance at Grugahalle to sing along.

Hunter plays a mean harmonica on "Angeline." Later, during "Wish I Was Your Mother," he noodles on 12-string guitar to complement Ronson's electric mandolin motif. Jailhouse barnburner "Just Another Night" segues into an urgent "We Gotta Get Out of Here," whose bass throb and quirky keyboards veer perilously close to disco territory before Ronson rescues it with his fuzzy Les Paul tone. Then of course there's "Once Bitten Twice Shy," the bluesy coming-of-age teaser that would be revisited later by Great White for the MTV generation. Other highlights include Bowie-penned Hoople hit "All the Young Dudes" and a twist on Sonny Bono backtrack "Laugh at Me" that finds a Stratocaster-strumming Hunter sharing his mic

with Mick. Other musicians featured are Eric Parker (drums), Tom Morrongiello (guitar), Tom Mindel (keys), George Meyer (keys and sax), and Martin "Salt in My Tears" Briley (bass).

The disc lacks bonus material, save a few trailers plugging other WDR-produced Rockpalast concerts (by Michael Schenker, UFO, John Cale, etc.). That's alright, given that the sound and picture quality for the main event are crisp and clear, surpassing one's expectations of surviving music-orientated TV production from that era. Shot from at least a half-dozen camera angles, the Hunter / Ronson concert is a stellar example of what no-frills rock and roll is all about.

www.ianhunter.com www.mvdb2b.com

Now on DVD: Mr. Bean Goes 007 for Johnny English Reborn

British funnyman Rowan Atkinson returns as the titular intelligence-challenged superspy in *JOHNNY ENGLISH REBORN*, a follow-up to the 2003 Studio Canal / Working Title James Bond parody. The royal crown's answer to Inspector Jacques Clouseau of the French Surete (PINK PANTHER) or Frank Drebin of America's Police Squad (*THE NAKED GUN*), English is a determined but catastrophically clumsy crime-fighter whose sleuthing successes are typically manifested by way of accident or third-party intervention.

The sequel is packed with more nods to iconic stunts and gizmo-gadgets from the celebrated Albert Broccoli 007 series: English spars with a villain while dangling from a cable car tram, a la *MOONRAKER*. He parachute jumps from a snowy promontory, paying homage to Roger Moore's opening gambit from *THE SPY WHO LOVED ME*. And Johnny's principal antagonist owns a well-guarded mountaintop fortress, a la *ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE*. There's also a boat pursuit, an unorthodox helicopter flight, a camera whose lens launches missiles, and a voice-activated Rolls Royce.

Trouble is, the target audience for director Oliver Parker's lighthearted espionage imitation isn't old enough to appreciate the 007 allusions—and teens who are will find that the laughs aren't quite frequent or funny enough. You don't have to have seen *GOLD-*

FINGER and *FOR YOUR EYES ONLY* to appreciate the gags, but it helps; *AIRPLANE's* funnier if you've already seen *AIRPORT* and its follow-ups.

It's been five years since English botched an assignment in Mozambique, where an African official was killed on his watch. Guilt-ridden, he's exiled himself to a Tibetan monastery for some mind-and-body reconditioning under the tutelage of a martial arts sage. But our reclusive hero is pressed back into service when the Chinese premier is targeted by an international bad-guy consortium called Vortex. It's a shot at redemption for Johnny—and possibly payback. A shave, haircut, and tuxedo-fitting later, and he's back on duty.

English displays remarkable poise during the first half, besting a foe in hand-to-hand combat on a pier and evading a lethal (if elderly) hit-woman whose arsenal includes a machine-gun vacuum cleaner. He's even charged with mentoring young agent Tucker (Daniel Kaluuya), a by-the-numbers rookie

who lives with his mum and technically isn't old enough to enter the casino they must scope. But Johnny and Tucker are booted from the investigation by frustrated lady boss Pamela "Pegasus" Thornton (*THE X-FILE's* Gillian Anderson) after a couple embarrassing mishaps. Fortunately, sexy behavioral psychologist Kate Sumner has a soft spot for English—and she's played by someone with actual Bond Girl experience (Rosamund Pike from *DIE ANOTHER DAY*). Sumner helps the boys ferret the baddies, who have moles in the KGB,

CIA and MI7—and who may have been the real culprits in Mozambique.

Atkinson makes *ENGLISH's* 100 minutes tolerable with his malleable face and physical slapstick. He's athletic, possessed of great comic timing for his 56 years, and can give as well as he takes when it comes to groin kicks. Johnny maintains composure even when knocking a cat from a window ledge, attacking his employer's family with a dinner tray, or eluding the authorities on a tricked-out, motorized wheelchair. Indeed, the accident-prone agent is best when he's over-the-top, which will tickle tots—who should be knighted if they manage to keep track of the multiple villains, double-agents, and their agendas.

