



Charlie Daniels Band: Live at Rockpalast (1980/2012)

Director: Christian Wagner

Studio: Made In Germany-Music/MVD Entertainment Group MIG 90467 [6/19/12]

Video: 4:3 color

Audio: English PCM stereo

Subtitles: none

Extras: 8-page insert booklet; 30-second trailers for seven other Rockpalast titles

Length: 76 minutes

TrackList: Funky Junky, Trudy, Jitterbug, Legend of Wooley Swamp, Blind Man, Reflections, El Toreador, No Potion for the Pain, In America, Long Haired Country Boy, Uneasy Rider, Cumberland Mountain No. 9, The Devil Went Down to Georgia, The South's Gonna Do It Again, Orange Blossom Special

Rating: ****

Charlie Daniels' brand of Southern rock and rock-oriented country comes to the forefront on the never-before-seen or heard 1980 concert document, *Charlie Daniels Band: Live at Rockpalast*, a 76-minute stage show recorded November 28, 1980 at the Westfalenhalle in Dortmund, Germany. This live presentation is available separately on CD and DVD and this review refers to the DVD.

The Charlie Daniels Band (Daniels on vocals, guitar and violin; Tom Crain on guitar and vocals; William Joel "Taz" Di Gregorio on keyboards and vocals; bassist Charlie Hayward; and drummers Fred Edwards and James W. Marshall) was a well-liked act in America at the start of the Me Decade when this concert was filmed. In 1979 the group had become popular with the number-one country smash "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" (which was also a huge pop sensation); "In America" was a top-20 country hit, from their then-current release, *Full Moon*, which was a certified gold album. By the time of this concert, the band had logged more than a million miles on the road. The Charlie Daniels Band's success in Europe might not have been as high as it was stateside, but the showmanship and pure-bred musicality certainly won over audiences, including the one for this performance.

The 15 tracks offer a prime lineup of songs which cover diverse aspects of Daniels' material, from counter-culture humor (early winner "Uneasy Rider") to Southern pride ("The South's Gonna Do It Again") to respect for fellow artists who have been lost ("Reflections," a tribute to Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin and Ronnie Van Zant). After warming up the crowd with Southern rocker "Funky Junky," which showcases Daniels' fine slide guitar skills; and the similarly structured gambler's lament "Trudy," Daniels and his cowboy hat-wearing cohorts whip up the energy level with the Southern boogie number, "Jitterbug," which features the vocals and fast fingers of pianist Di Gregorio. While this genial but generic cut could have been done by anyone from the Allman Brothers Band to Elvin Bishop, "The Legend of Wooley Swamp," off then-new LP *Full Moon*, presents Daniels' patented sing-speak style and one of his distinctive country character sketches (in this case, the tale of an old man, his hidden lair of money and ghostly revenge). The no-frills set list turns thoughtful with the aforementioned "Reflections," which begins with a classical meets country intro and moves into a multi-decades rumination on '50s rock and roll (Presley), the Woodstock era (Joplin) and '70s Southern rock (Lynyrd Skynyrd vocalist Ronnie Van Zant, who died in a 1977 plane crash).

Throughout his life, Daniels has been a pointed social and cultural critic and that facet of his personality arises on the country rocker "In America," which was Daniels' rejoinder to various issues which confronted the U.S. during the late 1970s and into 1980, including the aftermath of Watergate, inflation, unemployment and the Iran hostage crisis (which

was still a year away from resolution). The conservative-laced, Southern rocker “Long-Haired Country Boy” continues in the same vein, with gibes at televangelists, politicians and rich folk. Although Daniels is a potent fiddle player (he worked as a session musician for Bob Dylan, Ringo Starr, Leonard Cohen and others before commencing his solo career), his violin does not enter until late in the program. He and the group switch to almost straight-up country on “Cumberland Mountain No. 9,” where Daniels’ sweet tone contrasts nicely with guitar and electric piano. Of course the peak is the upbeat “The Devil Went Down to Georgia,” the famous narrative about a fiddle contest involving Beelzebub and a boy named Johnny. The band really kicks up some dust during the instrumental bridges which correlate the musical duel between the devil and Johnny. The concert’s encore consists of a rousing rendition of the self-referential “The South’s Gonna Do It Again” and a lengthy, nearly nine-minute jam on the standard “Orange Blossom Special,” which has come to be known as “the fiddle player’s national anthem,” where the resin flies off Daniels’ bow and there are numerous build-ups to the finale and final crescendo.

The visuals and audio are superb considering this was made with TV cameras in 1980. While there is a bit of video streaking in spots, it is minimal and for the most part the multi-camera wide, medium and close-up shots are all great. The sound quality is also excellent: the stereo separation is managed well by the sound crew and the technical merits are eminent (there is only one moment of slight feedback, and the mix between instruments is well handled). Lighting adds to the visual component and helps emphasize the band or individual soloists without being overdone. While this DVD will appeal mostly to Charlie Daniels’ fans, it’s recommended for anyone who is a Southern rock or country rock listener.

—Doug Simpson



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