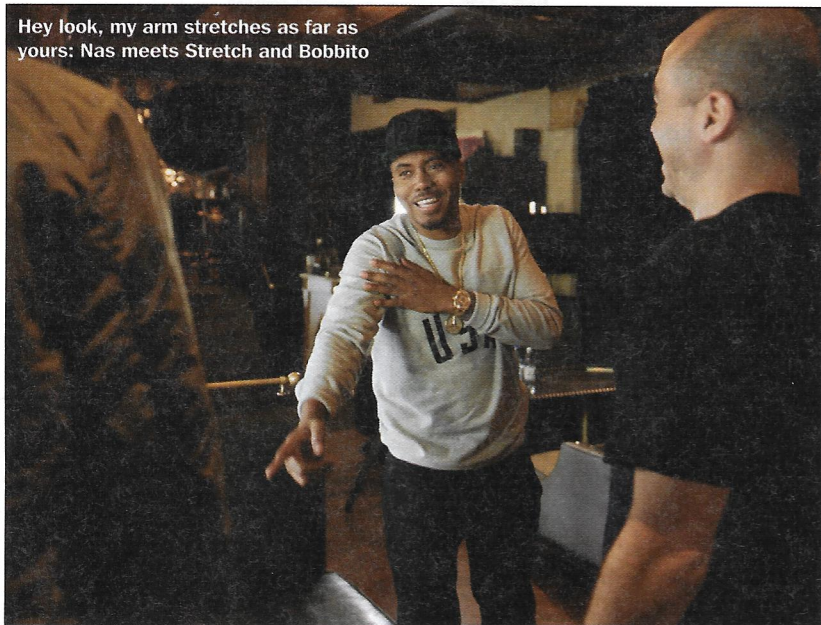


Hey look, my arm stretches as far as yours: Nas meets Stretch and Bobbito



Stretch and Bobbito: Radio That Changed Lives

★★★★★

StudioCanal OPTD 3075

Don't touch that dial, DJ... The *Stretch Armstrong & Bobbito Radio Show* was, to quote Nas, "the most important radio show of its time". Launched 25 years ago on Columbia college radio station WKCR, the late-night show broke the biggest names in 90s rap. Week after week, aspiring rappers would turn up to freestyle over Stretch's beats whilst demos of unsigned artists would set A&R's pagers beeping like a hyperactive heart monitor.

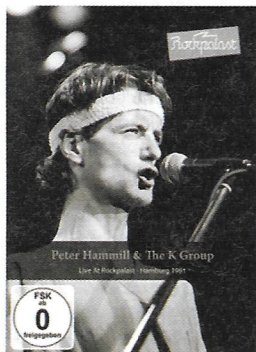
Written and directed by Bobbito, this astonishing film captures the entire tale first-hand, footage from the time mixed with modern-day talking heads. A 16-year-old MC named Biggie Smalls, a then-Nasty Nas freestyling *Illmatic* live, lost gangster hero Big L DESTROYING a cocky Jay-Z in 1995... Whether it's a wistful El-P or a fresh-faced Eminem, it's unbelievably sweet to see rap legends unguarded and misty-eyed in memory of Stretch and Bob.

Such footage alone would be reward enough but Garcia never flinches from the narrative and any tensions behind it. The show's roast-style banter that strayed into misogyny is addressed at length, as is the late 90s split between the duo; the beat-loving Stretch's self-confessed antagonistic championing of gangster rap leaving a more lyrics-focused Bobbito seething.

Whether you know or even

care who Big Pun is, this is an important film but the main takeaway is fun. Whether captured at the time or from retold war stories, laughter fills the air constantly, while the 2010 reunion will leave even the most gangster of eyes moist.

The only disappointment is a lack of extras and some of the parent-starring tales of their Upper Manhattan upbringing is a tad self-mythologising but it's a tiny quibble. This is as important as *Style Wars*, *Beat Street* or *Wild Style* for those wanting to understand pre-millennial rap. *Mike Goldsmith*



Peter Hammill & The K Group: Live At Rockpalast – Hamburg 1981

★★★★★

Made In Germany MIG 90667

Hammill's "punk" band tear it up on German TV

Although Van der Graaf Generator might have released their final album, Peter Hammill's parallel solo career shows little sign of finishing just yet. As ever, he's relishing confounding expectations and setting himself new

challenges. The K Group, featuring VdGG veterans Nic Potter and Guy Evans plus former Vibrators guitarist John Ellis, was Hammill's response to punk although, as one of the few old guard artists to escape its wrath, he seemed bent on forging his own strain of post-punk.

Hammill takes on Hamburg with torrential intensity, often startlingly offset by his cheery between-song demeanour, his selection including songs from then-recent albums such as *A Black Box* (22 Minute Flight, Losing Faith In Words, The Spirit) and *Sitting Targets* (My Experience, Stranger Still, Central Hotel), even reaching back to 1974's *The Silent Corner And The Empty Stage* for an awesome blast through Modern. The only VdGG track is The Sphinx In The Face from 1977's *The Quiet Zone/The Pleasure Dome*, although when they run out of songs he closes with a riveting solo take on My Room from 1976's *Still Life*.

Hammill's many devotees will lap it up, despite the dodgy John McEnroe-style sweat-band. *Kris Needs*

Frank Sinatra: Ol' Blue Eyes Is Back/ The Main Event

★★★★★

Eagle Vision EREDV 1241

At The Royal Festival Hall/Sinatra In Japan

★★★★★

Eagle Vision EREDV 1242

Concerts from the Chairman of the Board's twilight years

In 1971, Sinatra shocked the world by announcing his retirement. He was 56 and his voice was still in good shape

though he'd purportedly grown tired of performing. But he soon grew restless and two years later he made a comeback via an NBC TV special – *Ol' Blue Eyes Is Back*, which drew an audience of 40 million and featured a cameo from dancing great, Gene Kelly. It's now paired-up on DVD with 1974's *The Main Event*, recorded at Madison Square Garden. Evidently, Sinatra hadn't lost his between-song laconic repartee and droll humour, but there are times when his voice is hoarse and struggles to hit the right notes (which might account for why he sips honeyed tea on stage).

His voice is in much better shape on a second DVD twofer which combines 1970's *In Concert At The Royal Festival Hall Concert* with 1985's *Sinatra In Japan*. The former, introduced by Princess Grace of Monaco, is a superior greatest hits package, but performance-wise is eclipsed by the latter concert, recorded at Tokyo's legendary Budokan venue when the singer was a sprightly 70. Here, Sinatra rolls back the years with his typical pizzazz and chutzpah. Essential viewing for swingers. *Charles Waring*

Black Uhuru: Live At Rockpalast – Essen 1981

★★★★★

Made In Germany MIG 90652

Rocker-palast

The best-promoted roots reggae band to follow Bob Marley & The Wailers, Black Uhuru were the first ambassadors of the genre to play one of Rockpalasts' Rocknight Festivals, in October 1981, mere months after the Tuff Gong's passing in May that same year.

Chosen by the organisers for their innovative sound (drummer Sly Dunbar conceived the rockers rhythm after which the sub-genre is named, along with his synonymous musical partner, bassist Robbie Shakespeare), this concert sees the band's classic line-up with vocal trio Michael Rose, the late Puma Jones and founder Duckie Simpson delighting a vast Essen crowd with the pick of their *Showcase*, *Sinsemilla* and *Red* albums, their forceful blend of haunting harmonies and heavyweight roots grooves is at its peak here, at the point before

their sound took a more electronic turn.

Rose and Jones are animated stage-front focal points, and an impressive range of camera angles add to the enjoyment, showing Sly, Robbie and company making ultra-tight musicianship look effortless, pulling off dub-style instrumental drop-outs and segues on classics like Shine Eye Gal and Guess Who's Coming To Dinner. The accompanying soundtrack CD makes this an essential document of the band's prime-era live potency. *Rich Davenport*



Teresa Cristina: Canta Cartola

★★★★★

Nonesuch, cat no tbc

Samba star's legendary songbook reworked

An exquisite, near-perfect jewel, this DVD and live album captures the night when one of Brazil's greatest contemporary samba vocalists, Teresa Cristina, took on the songbook of Cartola – one of its best loved and most enduring songwriters in front of a rapt Rio de Janeiro audience.

With Cristina accompanied by guitarist Carlinhos Sete Cordas alone, Cartola's songs are shorn of the energetic polyrhythms that give them their usual dynamic. Stripped back to their very essence, the pair create a delicate, intricate sound more akin to Joao Gilberto's early bossa nova innovations. Cordas' astonishingly dextrous guitar lines bring fresh complexity to the music but its Cristina who dominates. An engaging, graceful and humorous host between songs, within them her velvet-smooth vocals wrap luxuriously around Cordas' guitar runs while developing the original melodies, investing standards like *Disfarça E Chora*, *Vai Amigo*, *Pranto De Poeta* and *Tive Sim* with a freshness and individuality that more faithful interpretations would have lacked. *Paul Bowler*