

FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2013

DVD Review: Welcome to Rockwell: A Night of Legendary Collaborations

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Welcome to Rockwell: A Night of Legendary Collaboration

Directed by Philippe Baudet

Masterpieces

ABC Entertainment GmbH

66 minutes, 2012

www.MVDvisual.com

Apparently big arena shows for charities did not end in the 1980s or early '90s. Well, I'm so okay with that. For this recent show, held at the huge O2 stadium in London, some of the top British bands get together for Nordoff-Robbins, which is geared towards music therapy for disabled children. As with most of these events, it went on for hours and this DVD goes on for just over one hour, so a lot was obviously cut out, and the *crème de le crème* (i.e., the headliners) made the grade.

Opening up the show here is Razorlight. Now, I stopped listening to

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About Me

Robert Barry Francos
Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

mainstream radio before I even heard the Ramones for the first time in '75, so I fully admit that I had never heard them play before. Also, they apparently were much more successful in England than in the States. They are okay, especially their last song, "In the City" (not to be confused with the Jam song). Vocalist Johnny Borrell has a decent voice, though he comes off a bit privileged and arrogant to me, like, "My music is important," rather than just getting out there and knocking it outta the park (or stadium). However, they still fare pretty well here, and they did come out for a charity event (publicity or true feelings is the question). FYI, Razorthlight disbanded this year.

Though I would have thought he'd be the last man standing on the stage as *the* headliner, Robert Plant comes by and shows Borrell how to do it, by being relaxed and in the moment, rather than showing off. With a mixture of standard instruments mixed with Sub-Saharan ones, the band pulls out the Led Zeppelin songbook with three of their classic songs, "Black Dog" (sans echo), "Whole Lotta Love," and the cover of the blues classic "Fixin' to Die." These are done less metal and shrill than Zep did, and slower, but it still is definitely in Plantland. I was actually disappointed because since the end of Zep, he's been focusing more on the Blues, and I was hoping he would do that rather than rehash his discography. Perhaps he was trying to bring in the charity cash, and if that is so, I will somewhat forgive him. I always found Zep kinda...tiresome.

Joss Stone always reminds me of Taylor Swift physically, but Stone definitely wins in both the looks and talent department. Yet, I still do not like to listen to her because of the rehashed (there's that word again) neo-disco sound she insists upon burying her talent. What a waste. If she was doing rock, or preferably blues *a la* Joplin or Billie Holiday, I would be a lot more interested. But do we need another Donna Summers or someone of that ilk? Vocally, she's the real deal, and could easily give the clinical Celine Dion a run for her power (vocal) chord money. Stone is just another singer who has a great voice that I can't listen to because of either what she sings or the way she performs it (e.g., Christina Aguilera, Mariah Carey).

Next up is Tom Jones, giving a rare appearance away from his Las Vegas hunting grounds. Speaking of rehashing, it makes sense that he performs "It's Not Unusual," and even makes it look like he isn't sick of singing it however many times a day he has to in Vegas. His voice is a bit creaky at time, and can't reach the high notes (from overuse of his voice?), but he's still fun. I have to admit there's something about Jones I like as a person, being totally willing to put himself on the line by making fun of himself and his "persona" in various films and television shows. He is a consummate celebrity who is comfortable with himself. That being said, with his extensive catalog of great songs, why in hell would he choose the awful disco - here it comes - rehashing of "Sex Bomb," easily one of the worst songs he has *ever* done? What a squander of an opportunity. At least Stone did something new, even if the style is a throwback. Jones' and Stone's duet of the Isley Brothers' "It's Your Thing" seems unrehearsed and slapped together.

Cult icon David Grey (who always reminded me of a British Elliott Smith) starts off his classic "Babylon" backed with the female electric string quartet of Escala, before sliding into "Fugitive." He is a man that works on the strength of his songs, more than anything else, rather than having much of a stage presence (not a complaint), but

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without a doubt his writing hold it up.

Most of the musicians come back for the finale, which starts off on a bizarre note with Tom Jones bringing out a lyric sheet. He explains they hadn't picked which song the organizers were going to use, so he needs the sheet: for "Let It Be." Really? There are definitely more musician on the stage then there are on this DVD, and some missing (e.g., Plant), as they meander through the song with no harmony or being in sync. Jones uses his lack of knowing the song by doing a call and response, but reads directly from the sheet when it's his turn at the solo. Rather than try to pretend and fake it, the fact that stands by his ignorance is something I respect.

Beverly Knight, who is not anywhere else on the DVD, steals the finale with her powerful R&B. But where was Lulu? She performed at the show, and she is someone I would have enjoyed seeing, as she is another belter who was underrated in North America (have you ever heard her version of "Shout" when she was a mere teen?; absolutely stunning). I definitely would have taken her segment over Jones or Grey, but she isn't where the dollars are these days, is she?

Track List:

Razorlight: *I Fall to Pieces*

Razorlight: *Golden*

Razorlight: *In the City*

Robert Plant: *Black Dog*

Robert Plant: *Fixin' to Die*

Robert Plant: *Whole Lotta Love*

Joss Stone: *Free Me*

Joss Stone: *Super Duper*

Tom Jones: *It's Not Unusual*

Tom Jones: *Sex Bomb*

Tom Jones and Joss Stone: *It's Your Thing*

David Grey and Escala: *Babylon*

David Grey: *Fugitive*

All: *Let It Be*

Bonus video: