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Skatalites

Skatalites - Live at Lokerse Feesten 1997 & 2002 [DVD]

(Charly/MVD) Rated: N/A
US release date: 25 November 2008
UK release date: 27 March 2008

by [Christel Loar](#)

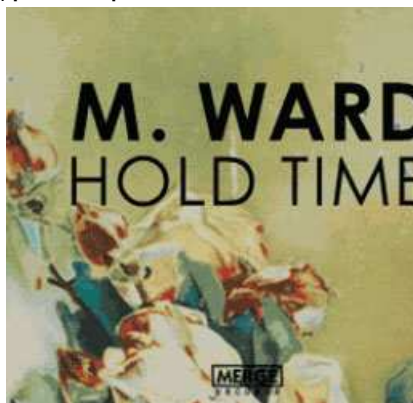
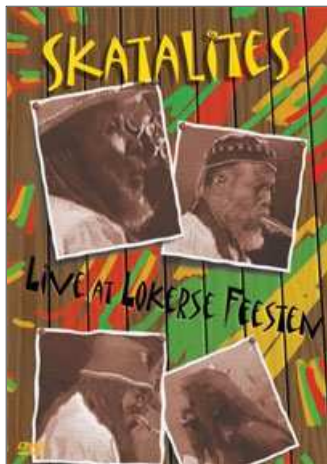
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Skatalites are the epitome of roots music. The group is the genesis of an entire genre, not to mention the influence the band has had on ska, reggae and almost every other kind of popular music for more than 60 years now. The Lokerse Feesten is a mammoth ten day Belgium music festival. The Skatalites played the festival twice, and *Skatalites: Live at Lokerse Feesten 1997 & 2002* does an outstanding job of documenting both of these unparalleled performances.

Hailed as the originators of ska, Tommy McCook, Rolando Alphonso, Johnny Moore, Lester Sterling, Don Drummond, Lloyd Knibb, Lloyd Brevett, Jerry Haynes, and Jackie Mittoo began working together in Kingston, Jamaica in 1963 and they formed the Ska-talites 1964. They recorded with all of the top producers, including Clement 'Sir Coxson' Dodd, Arthur 'Duke' Reid and Cecil 'Prince Buster' Campbell. The Skatalites helped to launch the careers of such legends as Delroy Wilson, Desmond Dekker, The Wailers and Lee "Scratch" Perry. On the strength of, among many things, trombonist Drummond's compositions, the Skatalites chart in the UK, begin touring and start to become known worldwide. In August, 1965 The Skatalites play their last show. Original members reunite a few times over the years, and are nominated for Grammys in both 1996 and 1997.

It's during the 1997 world tour that the first of the two concerts presented on *Skatalites: Live at Lokerse Feesten* was filmed. It features many original members, including Tommy McCook and Rolando Alphonso who both passed away in 1998. An excellent selection of hits and energetic performances are just two of the reasons this show is so great. Right from the opening salvo of "Freedom Sound", it's apparent that this not only going to be an amazing performance, but also an above average production. The video is crisp and clear, despite the simple stage and lighting, and the sound, available in either 5.1 or stereo, is absolutely flawless!

Intimate, but unobtrusive, close ups of individual players and instruments abound



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in both shows, however each close up unfortunately isn't always on whoever happens to be highlighted at that moment musically. Piano parts are often accompanied by lingering shots of the bass, guitar solos are, as often as not, represented by pans over the brass players. They are obvious, if minor, visual time lags. It's not too distracting, though, because the audio is what carries the attention and the camera usually does manage to catch up to the right musician before his spotlight shifts.

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One of the subtle but much appreciated details about both of these shows, especially the 1997 set, is the unwavering focus on the stage. There aren't random, unnecessary cuts to the audience. The cheers and the band members' acknowledgments between songs make it clear that the crowd is large and enthusiastically into the show, but the focus is wisely, tightly and exclusively maintained on the Skatalites. It adds to the intimacy and to the feeling of actually being in the audience.

I know that when I'm at a performance, I'm locked on the performance. I'm not constantly looking around to see what everyone else is doing because it's not what is of importance, and the filmmakers here seem to feel the same. The main exception is "Guns of Navarone" where a few shots of skanking in the first rows are interspersed with the trumpet and sax solos. It's a nice complement to the high energy of what is surely the Skatalites signature song.

The biggest bonus of the first concert is the inclusion of several tunes featuring original female vocalist Doreen Shaffer, dubbed "The Queen of Ska". She is beyond brilliant in mid-set singing "Can't See Your Love", perennial favorite "You're Wondering Now" and "Simmer Down". She returns later in the set for another highlight with "The Vow".

The 2002 concert is marked by the addition of Cedric 'Im Brooks to the group, taking over McCook and Alphonso 's roles. Also, by 2002, trumpet player Johnny 'Dizzy' Moore had joined the band, and it's interesting to notice this and compare performances of the same songs between the 1997 and 2002 concerts. One of the other things to interesting things to watch—in both concerts, but particularly the second—is what a fabulous player and consummate performer the Skatalites have in Lester Sterling on sax and trumpet. They don't call him Mr. Versatile for nothing!

Though it's obviously presented in different order, the setlist for the second show consists of largely the same numbers as the first, but the arrangements are so intricate, the musicians so involved and the energy so incredible, you'll be able to find something new no matter how many times you listen. Doreen Shaffer graces the stage again to lay some rock steady on us with "Sugar Sugar", and Marley's "Nice Time", neither of which appear in the other concert, before going into another version of "Simmer Down" with "Turn Your Lamp Down Low". There's more crowd interaction shown for this show, and it's no secret the audience, and the rest of the band, loves Shaffer. The crowd also goes wild for Johnny Moore's "Rockfort Rock (EL Cumbanchero)", another track not featured elsewhere on the DVD.

Both of the concerts close with "Freedom Sound - Reprise" and its introductory countdown (to "...bring you back down to the earth and put you back in yourself.."). When it begins in the 2002 performance, there's a moment of disappointment, not because it isn't fantastic—it is—but because it means the show is over. However, the DVD isn't.

The "Specials" section has even more Skatalites, just in case you can't get enough. First, there is a 17-minute documentary feature entitled, *On Tour with the Skatalites*, which follows the group on its 2002 worldwide trek. Interviews with various members, old and newer, are intercut with backstage and rehearsal footage, and it's a treat to hear the opinions on the style and the history of the Skatalites straight from the source. Next up is a "History", which is an indepth timeline with year-by-year explanations of the group's musical milestones. There's also an extensive "Discography" listing albums, boxed sets and compilations, and a "Slideshow" of stills from the 2002 tour.

Skatalites: Live at Lokerse Feesten is a must have for any Skatalites fan, for any ska or reggae fan, or indeed for any music fan. Not only does it feature some of the most talented musicians in the world playing some of the most irresistible songs, it's a lesson in musical history, it's an example of stellar showmanship, and it's a perfect presentation of one of the most

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influential and enduring forces in music.



"Simmer Down" in 1997

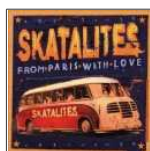
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