

DVD REVIEWS

JEFF BECK: Performing This Week...Live at Ronnie Scott's (Eagle Vision)

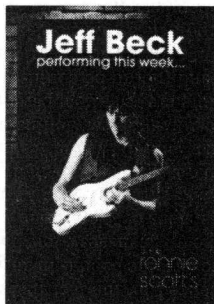
Back when fans scrawled "Clapton is God" on walls, someone should have added, "But Beck handled Creation," for of the '60s guitar gods, Jeff Beck was surely the most original. The man pulled sounds like no other—not Green, not Page, certainly not Clapton. But that was then, and now Jeff Beck is 65, though you wouldn't know it from the CD or DVD of his weeklong gig at Ronnie Scott's Club in London. He still looks much like his old Yardbirds self, and he handles his Strat like it's better than anything short of sex in a young guy's life.

The 140-minute DVD catches him leading an amazing ensemble and ripping through a 21-song set—16 on the CD—with minor help on vocals from ringers Joss Stone, the amazing Imogen Heap and, yup, Clapton. Individually, they join Beck on the five tunes that didn't make the CD. Guests, of course, are best tolerated if they don't stay long, and even "god" doesn't overshadow the headliner.

Beck kicks the set into sonic overdrive with the first number, "Beck's Bolero," the song he and Jimmy Page pieced together back in 1966 when they slipped into a studio with a disguised Keith Moon (dodging Pete Townshend) and John Paul Jones. There's no electric 12-string from Page here (though he can later be spotted in the Ronnie Scott's audience); but Beck slams out enough Maurice Ravelian notes to electrify the capacity crowd. From there he leads the band through stand-outs from his back catalog, including his versions of John McLaughlin's "Eternity's Breath," Billy Cobham's "Status" and Stevie Wonder's "Cause We've Ended as Lovers."

His backing band of Vinnie Colaiuta drums, Jason Rebello keyboards and Tal Wilkenfeld bass get plenty room to play amid, around and behind Beck's astonishing fingering, whammy-barring and volume shifting. Especially rewarding is the space he gives Wilkenfeld for a bass solo in "Cause We've Ended as Lovers." She's only 22 years old, looks like a 14-year-old headed to recess, but plays like a sane Jaco Pastorius. Only someone still new to the stage could take as much delight she does in the audience's applause, and to Beck's eternal credit he looks like the proudest parent on two continents when the crowd lays on the love.

Other songs in their set include Beck's reggae-flavored take on "Behind the Veil," the double-whammy of Charlie Mingus' "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" coupled with "Brush with the Blues," his automobile ode "Big Block," an exquisite cover of Lennon-McCartney's "A Day in the Life" and the Bulgarian-melodious "Where Were You." The collaborations with Clapton are Muddy Waters' "Little Brown Bird" and Willie Dixon's "You Need Love." Eric sings, Jeff plays—exactly as it should be. (Bill Wasserzieher)



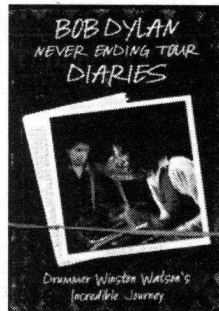
BOB DYLAN - Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey (Highway 61 Entertainment)

Over a five-year period, drummer Winston Watson was a member of Bob Dylan's touring band, playing 400 shows on the so-called Never Ending Tour, demonstrating a certain flair that set him apart from the other band members. Recognizing the significance of this opportunity, Watson kept extensive diaries and home video footage to document his experiences. These documents, along with a current interview, provide the basis for the *Never Ending Tour Diaries* documentary.

Watson is engaging and humorous as he tells his story, beginning with a brief biography that includes his early musical experiences. Due to his unique heritage, he was exposed to many different styles of drumming, which he incorporated into his own playing. By a stroke of luck, Watson found himself literally thrust into surreal situations as a member of Dylan's touring band with very little instruction or guidance. As someone who lived a "rock and roll dream," Watson recounts anecdotes involving some of rock's most revered artists who themselves are in awe of Dylan.

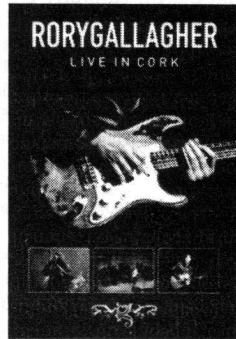
It is interesting to hear the point of view of someone who has worked with Dylan in this capacity, gathering perspective on how Dylan interacts with hired hands. The sort of haphazard way Dylan's bands are put together leaves little time to develop chemistry, which can lead to disagreements and out-of-sync moments on stage. *Never Ending Tour Diaries* works mainly as a vehicle for understanding what it's like to be a member of a touring band—the highs of playing to thousands of fans, and the lows of separations from family and the difficult adjustment to normalcy once the tour ends.

Some negatives about the documentary include cheesy segues, the length of the film itself (100 minutes, which is far too long for such a subject), and the fact that it really doesn't reveal too much about the inscrutable Dylan himself. If approached as a documentary about a regular guy touring with Dylan rather than a documentary about Dylan, *Never Ending Tour Diaries* has something interesting to offer the viewer. (Alison Hayes)



RORY GALLAGHER - Live in Cork (Eagle Rock Entertainment)

Fourteen years after his death, the Irish blues-rock legend Rory Gallagher (1948-1995) has never been more popular. From the outset, when he formed his trio Taste with two other Cork natives in 1966, Gallagher drew a core following ("cult" seems too sinister a word). Taste not only opened for Cream at their farewell concert at the Royal Albert Hall, they rocked the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival and toured the US with Blind Faith. (Full disclosure: I was the only guy in my dorm to own the two studio albums by Taste on Polydor, giving me cachet among the Clapton-worshipping rabble.) After Taste split, Gallagher embarked on a long, surprisingly prolific and consistent solo



recording career—"Blues" because "surprising" because "relentless and battled demon alcohol much of the way."

While Gallagher sold 30 million albums worldwide, he was not a darling with the critics. All remaining doubters are advised to watch this DVD of a 1987 homecoming concert at the venerable Cork Opera House to understand Gallagher's appeal. The show was filmed for broadcast on Irish TV at the time, and Gallagher was 39, already showing signs of wear and tear that would allow him to live only eight more years. But he was at the peak of his playing ability with enough life experience to put across the words in "Ain't No Saint" and "Messin' with the Kid."

Based on the filmed evidence here, Gallagher could flat out play his famously battered Fender Stratocaster, and he was equally adept at slide guitar as he was at soaring improvisations that did not seem to be simply showing off. He could also finger-pick the hell out of a Martin acoustic (put to good use on Leadbelly's "Out on the Western Plain") as well as steel guitar (seen on "Wanted Blues"). He was an underrated singer, too, with his voice a sort of urgent shout reminiscent of the Groundhogs' Tony McPhee, injecting Irish soul into the largely American black blues styles that shaped his music.

In concert, he was a quick study: No pyrotechnics, virtually no between-song stage patter, no leather pants—just flannel shirts, jeans and long unkempt hair. At one point in this show, an audience member climbs on stage, saunters casually over to Gallagher and whispers something in his ear while he's in mid-riff. Gallagher nods, smiles and the interloper exits. Though this brief encounter adds to the cozy atmosphere, it may offer a clue as to how Gallagher dodged "stardom." Had the same thing happened in the US, stage hands would likely have pummeled the trespasser in full view of the cameras.

The song selection here also offers a clue as to Gallagher's inner fires. That is, he makes no attempt to start the concert slowly and build to a crescendo. Rather, he turns the gas up full throttle on the opening "Continental Op," followed by the well-roasted chestnut "Tattooed Lady" and a cover of Sonny Boy Williamson's "Don't Start Me to Talkin'" (he later covers Williamson's "When My Baby She Left Me"). Bassist Gerry McAvoyn and drummer Brendan O'Neill keep up with Gallagher and never get in his way, though harmonica player Mark Feltham seems a bit out of his league in places.

The package for this DVD, arranged by Rory's brother, Donal Gallagher, is clearly a labor of familial love as well as civic pride (a library, street and public park are all named for Rory Gallagher). Included with the concert is a "virtual" tour of the city of Cork, stopping at all places with a connection to the guitarist's upbringing. Having been to Cork twice, I can personally attest to its understated likeability. The city's appeal is, in fact, similar to that of its most famous musical son. (Alan Bisbort)

IRON BUTTERFLY - Concert & Documentary, Europe 1997 (ABC Entertainment)

Back when Lennon (and/or Lenin) eyeglasses and bellbottoms were both fashion and political statements, the gathering of the tribes in Los Angeles took place near the carousel at Griffith Park. Those be-ins were never as large as the ones in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, but the music was free, and there was always the chance that a high school kid could meet a girl and get away with pretending he was a college guy. It was, after all, a hopeful if usually futile time.

One band that showed up for those Sundays in Griffith Park was a bunch of San Diegoans called Iron Butterfly who seemed to take their musical cues from 138-dB civil defense air raid sirens and their song lyrics from some curious language spoken in Outer Gobbygook. Who knew that in a year's time