

DVDs

JOHNNY CASH'S AMERICA

Columbia/Legacy 88697 23401 2 (2008), DVD w/CD

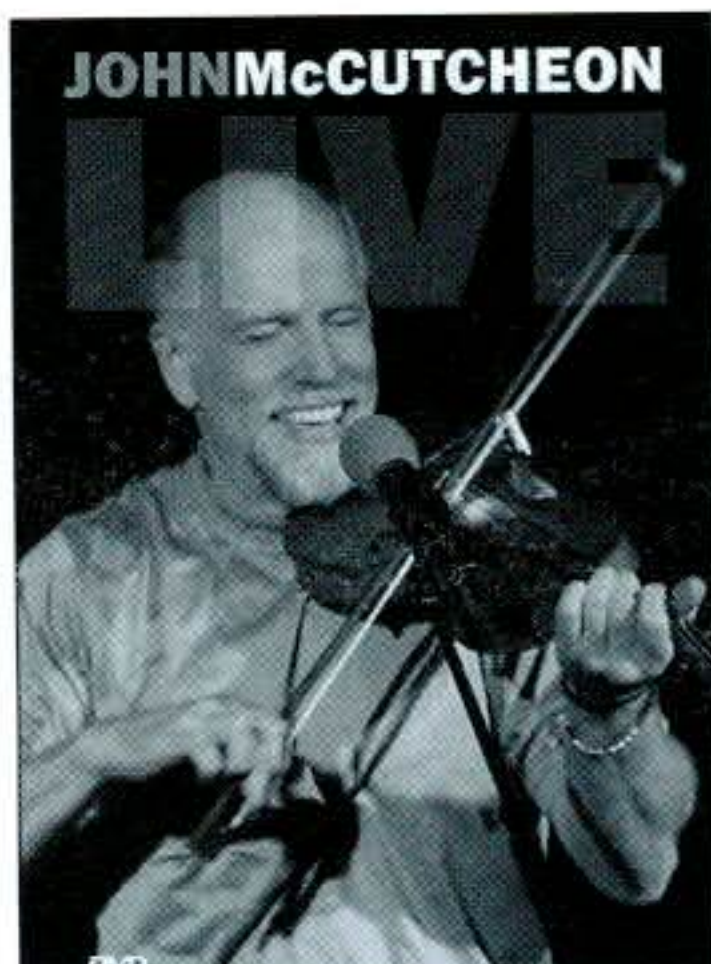
Singing about prisons, gunslingers, the destruction of war, or love of his country, Johnny Cash (1932-2003) provided a voice for America's working class and disenfranchised populace. That's the message delivered by the CD/DVD set *Johnny Cash's America*. Cash's more politically minded recordings between 1955 and 1980 are explored on an 18-song soundtrack CD that combines hits and previously unreleased songs. The DVD, though, is what makes this an essential package. Directed by Morgan Neville and Robert Gordon and narrated by Chris Cooper, the 88-minute main feature and 20 minutes of bonus material tell the story of the Man in Black through archival footage and interviews with his daughters, Rosanne and Cindy; sister, Joanne; and Tennessee Three bassist Marshall Grant. Musicians Bob Dylan, Kris Kristofferson, Merle Haggard, Steve Earle, and Jim Dickinson, whose paths crossed Cash's, offer their recollections. But, it's the comments by Snoop Dogg, Ozzy Osbourne, and Al Gore that show how far Cash's influence traveled.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

JOHN McCUTCHEON LIVE

Bamboo Concerts (2008)

Don't pigeonhole John McCutcheon. Having learned his craft from Appalachian folk music pioneers, including Roscoe Holcomb and Clarence Ashley, in the early 1970s, the Wisconsin-born and Georgia-based multi-instrumentalist/vocalist defies categorization with his repertoire of storytelling, original songs, interpretations of contemporary folk-songs, and traditional music. Filmed at the Ark in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in March 2008, *Live* reflects the diversity of musical experience found at McCutcheon's performances. Accompanying himself on hammered dulcimer, autoharp, banjo, guitar, fiddle, or piano, and singing a cappella, McCutcheon ventures through the depths of American folk music. The traditional tune "Mole in the Ground" sparks a spoken-word recollection of performing at his first



folk festival. A hammered dulcimer medley includes the traditional "Rights of Man," "Kitchen Girl," and "Mississippi Sawyer," as well as Paul Van Arsdale's "Dulcimer Reel." Fervent renditions of Bob Franke's "The Great Storm Is Over," Steve Goodman's "Penny Evans," and a dozen originals — including a hammered-dulcimer instrumental ("Leviathan"), a ballad set during World War One ("Christmas in the Trenches"), and politically tinged singalongs ("Not in My Name" and "Forgive Us") — expand the tradition.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

SUNSHINE SUPERMAN - THE JOURNEY OF DONOVAN

SPV 80001294 2DVD (2008)

Donovan Leitch was one of the very first British musicians during the 60s to fully embrace the comparatively new media of film, video, and television in order to get his music to a wider audience. Consequently, he was one of the best-documented singers of his time. With a wealth of archival footage, *Sunshine Superman: The Journey of Donovan* is a musical autobiography unlike any other. Filmmaker Hannes Rossacher collaborated with Donovan to construct a fascinating chronological journey, from the late 50s to the present, in which Donovan is the subject, host, and musical accompanist to his own life story.

The nearly three-hour documentary traces the musician's journey, from a folkie with a keen ear for jazz to a controversial Dylan imitator (some claimed). He's been a companion to the Beatles, pop star, spiritual icon, psychedelic explorer with Gram Parsons and Keith Richards,

mid-70s space-child, middle-aged innovator, "indie" artist, and tireless promoter of peace through yoga and meditation. There are wonderful moments with Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie, Mickie Most, Rick Rubin, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, Franco Zeffirelli, and David Lynch. Donovan revisits all the places that were important in his life, and there are some stunning moments when a split screen is employed to show the Donovan of 1968 side-by-side with his modern counterpart, walking and strumming his guitar in the same location and singing the same song, some 40 years apart.

Donovan is an excellent keeper of history, folklore, and philosophy who concentrates more on the political and social movements that produced the Beats, Hippies, flower children, punks, and new-age spiritualists and less on his own accomplishments (though he does that, too). The film footage is staggering in its scope. The older footage is tempered with contemporary interviews and commentary, and unlike so many rock documentaries, it is inherently positive in its outlook on life. The filmmakers have also provided a second DVD with more than two hours of uncut footage that includes many of Donovan's early television performances (some of them wonderfully dated and fey), rare early videos (he practically started the medium of the rock video), recent performances of yet-to-be-released songs, and the ultra-rare complete video of "In an Old Fashioned Picture Book," featuring animation by Scotland's renowned artist/illustrator/screenwriter/playwright John Byrne (under his then-pseudonym of "Patrick").

Donovan's assertion that the 60s did mean something and did bring about long-lasting and positive change is well supported by this amazing film, which is worthwhile viewing for those who want to know what it was all about from someone who was witness to it all.

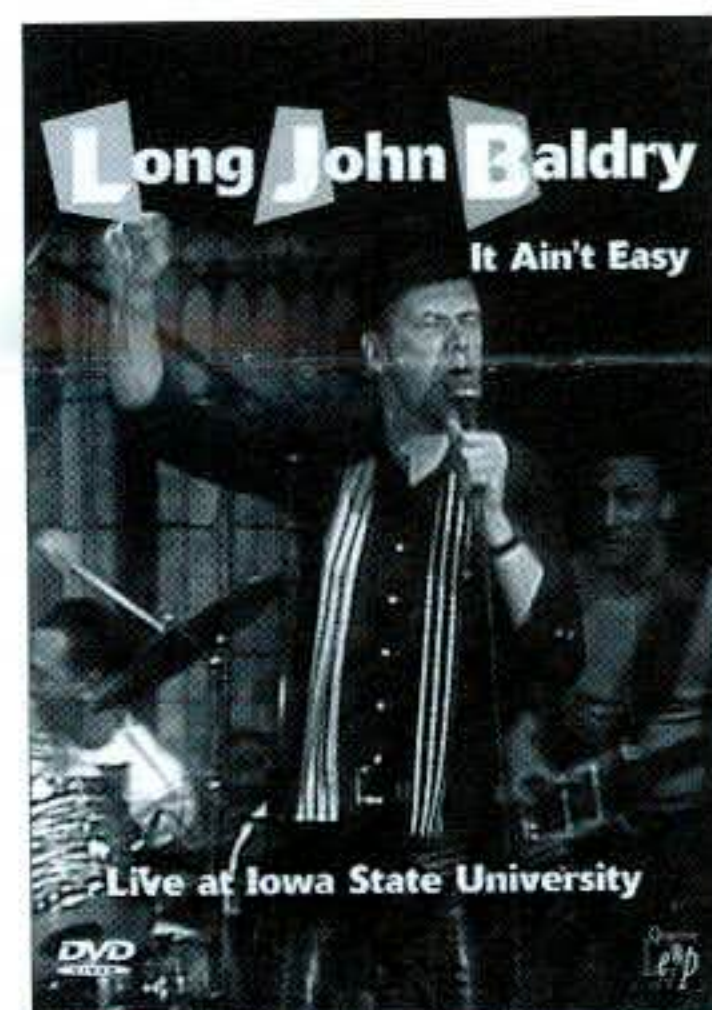
— Lahri Bond (Leverett, MA)

LONG JOHN BALDRY: IT AIN'T EASY

Quantum Leap/ MVD Visual QLDVD 6204 (2004)

Endorsed by Rod Stewart as "the first white guy singing the blues (in England)," Long John Baldry (1941-2005) was one of British blues' most enigmatic performers,

casting a strong shadow on the genre for more than four decades. He toured with Ramblin' Jack Elliott, sang with Muddy Waters, helped Alexis Korner and Cyril Davis to form Blues Incorporated (which later included Mick Jagger and Charlie Watts), and, as a bandleader, hired such players as Ginger Baker, Jeff Beck, and Brian Jones. Though never commercially successful, Baldry took little time off. Moving to the Pacific Coast of Canada in the early 1970s, he continued to perform until shortly before his death in 2005.



Taking its name from Baldry's most successful album, released in 1971, *It Ain't Easy* documents his Iowa State University performance in 1987. Backed by a crack band that included Papa John King (guitar), Joseph Ingraio (keyboards), and David Norris-Elye (saxophone), Baldry applies Leadbelly-like vocals to classic blues, including New Orleans' "Iko Iko" and his signature song, "Don't Try to Lay No Boogie Woogie on the King of Rock and Roll." Backup singer Kathi McDonald steps into the spotlight with two songs — "Respect" and "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman" — in the middle of the 50-minute performance, providing the DVD's most skip-pable moments.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

RONNIE EARL AND THE BROADCASTERS: HOPE RADIO SESSIONS

Stony Plain SPDVD 1326 (2008)

Depression and diabetes have prevented Stratocaster master Ronnie Earl from touring. Thus, *Hope Radio Sessions*, filmed live in the studio, before family and friends,