

John Sebastian:

Welcome Back ★★½

(1987) 85 min. DVD: \$12.95.

Music Video Distributors

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The Lovin' Spoonful, fronted by singer-songwriter John Sebastian, wasn't one of your heavier 1960s bands—their blend of blues, folk, jug band, and rock influences was known as “good time music”—but Spoonful classics like “Summer in the City” still resonate today. Unfortunately, once Sebastian set out on his own, the artist inexplicably turned into a lightweight; his tie-dyed solo turn at Woodstock and slate of little-remembered solo albums evidence enough that despite Sebastian's leadership, the Spoonful as a whole was considerably greater than the sum of its parts. A full band would certainly have boosted this 1987 performance, recorded at Iowa State University, in which Sebastian plays both solo (on electric and acoustic guitars and harmonica) and with guitarist David Bromberg, who guests on about half of the tunes. Sebastian tilts his set toward the Spoonful catalogue, revisiting such enduring classics as “Lovin' You,” “Daydream,” “Nashville Cats,” “Younger Girl,” “Did You Ever Have to Make Up Your Mind,” and the lovely “Darling Be Home Soon” (he also serves up some blues, such as Little Feat's “Dixie Chicken,” and, of course, “Welcome Back,” the sitcom theme song that revived his career in the '70s). While these are all terrific songs, Sebastian's voice sounds oddly pinched and strained, and even with Bromberg's accompaniment, the impact is, well, light. Sebastian is an amiable

host, bantering with the audience, answering questions, telling stories, and offering quips, but for a taste of John Sebastian at his best, the Lovin' Spoonful video anthology *Do You Believe in Magic* (VL-9/07) is a better bet. An optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)