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America's Music Legacy: Rhythm & Blues

Score: **80%**
 Rating: **Not Rated**
 Publisher: **MVD Entertainment Group**
 Region: **A**
 Media: **DVD/1**
 Running Time: **120 Mins.**
 Genre: **Live Performance/Independent/Documentary**
 Audio: **Dolby Digital**

What passes for R&B today is pretty broad. **America's Music Legacy: Rhythm & Blues** is a showcase of artists that have a blend of pop and jazz influence, often performing in almost a straight jazz style with rock or pop instrumentation. R&B, jazz, and blues are all secular offshoots of gospel, and the early innovators were primarily African-American. Unlike jazz and blues, that both saw early innovation and branching into the white mainstream, R&B remained almost exclusively associated with black musicians until the latter half of the last century, when terms like "blue-eyed soul" began to be associated with white artists who were inspired by Motown artists like Sam and Dave (Sam Moore is featured here singing his hit, "Soul Man").

If you need evidence of the links between jazz, blues, and R&B, consider that the host of **America's Music Legacy: Rhythm & Blues** is Billy Eckstine. Eckstine is best known for leading big bands that featured singers like Sarah Vaughn and bop artists like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, but his long career and smooth, leading-man qualities bled into popular music. His musical influence on an artist like Scatman Crothers (known more widely in modern pop culture from his role in *The Shining*) is fairly obvious, since Crothers' so-called scatting was a well known device among jazz musicians. There are also obvious blues influences in artists like Brook Benton, singing "Boll Weevil" and "Rainy Night in Georgia," or Billy Preston impersonating Ray Charles, while playing the jazz standard "Summertime." The rhythm defined R&B by taking a traditional jazz or blues backbeat and infusing it with more of a straight rock feel. There's a tension between the loose swinging quality of older artists like Eckstine and the more stilted, driving quality of Mary Wells, as she sings "My Guy." The Eckstine version of R&B continues on with artists like Amy Winehouse and Duffy, while Wells and her style evolved into the modern rock sound.

Other great artists featured here include Ruth Brown, Gloria Lynne, and O.C. Smith. The format is like an intimate club rather than a big hall, making the performances on **America's Music Legacy: Rhythm & Blues** feel more like real gigs than revival concerts. Modern R&B artists have moved far beyond what you'll hear on this collection, incorporating heavy amplification and hip-hop into the mix. **America's Music Legacy: Rhythm & Blues** shows a group of performers who straddled the line between traditional music and pop music, and ended up building a bridge that others crossed to achieve massive mainstream popularity. To put it bluntly, you can't really understand artists like Public Enemy, The Eurythmics, and David Bowie without some appreciation for the influence of Soul and R&B. Think of **America's Music Legacy: Rhythm & Blues** as a musical primer for what has become a hugely important chapter in American music.



-Fridtjof, GameVortex Communications
 AKA Matt Paddock

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