

## DVD Review: America's Music Legacy Series

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America's Music Legacy: Rock 'n Roll

Director: Arthur Forrest

Cube International / Century Home Video, 1985 / 2010

110 minutes, USD \$16.95

Cubeinternational.com

Oleap.co.uk

MVDvisual.com

I actually remember when this show was on, titled *Fabian's Good Time Rock n' Roll*. Hosted by its producer, Fabian Forte, he starts off singing Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock and Roll," clearly showing why his career fizzled out before the Beatles even showed up. He makes Pat Boone look like, well, Bob Seger, despite actually having charted with 11 songs. However, as a producer, he's done a splendid job here.

If you've watched any of those PBS specials (usually replayed *ad nauseam* during pledge periods where they trot out artists from a long ago era and have them perform their songs, well you have the idea here, though this form was not a common a thing to do back then.

Taped in Baton Rouge, the stage is set for a rockin' revival, which starts off with the Coasters doing a bunch of their classics, such as "Poison Ivy," "Yakety Yak," and of course "Charlie Brown" ("Why's everybody always pickin' on *me*?"). While I'm not sure how many of the original band is still present here, they sound true to the hits.

Next up is Lou Christie (nee Lugee Alfredo Giovanni Sacco), who had some really big hits, as shown here, namely "I'm Gonna Make You Mine," "Two Faces Have I" / "The Gypsy Cried" (a smart medley, since they are actually quite similar), and that great (and yet misogynistic) "Lightenin' Strikes (Again)." His falsetto is still strong (his range is 3 octaves), as is the color of his shiny shirt (not to mention the mullet). Woof! I will add that he is actually quite the dynamic stage performer.

He is followed by the diminutive-yet-still-powerfully-voiced Lesley Gore. Yeah, she does the overplayed (and I think overrated) "It's My Party," and my least favorite song of hers, "Sunshine, Lollipops and Rainbows," but she follows it up with an amazing "You Don't Own Me" (I would have liked to have also heard so many of her other great songs, like "Maybe I Know" and "California Nights"; be sure to check out her relatively recent album, *Ever Since*). She has great eyes, by the way.

She's then joined by Christie, and they do a medley of "Since I Don't Have You" and "It's Only Make Believe" (which was released as a single; I bought it after seeing this when it was originally on). They make it into a strapping power ballad that would make a *Glee!* fan squeal.

Ernest Evans is next, in his *nom de music* of Chubby Checker. He starts off with "Pony Time"

and ends with "The Twist" (duh!), and inbetween is a rambling medley of eight different songs, by the likes of Fats Domino, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, and the Beatles. He's quite a bit older than when he started, but he could still twist the night away at that point.

Bringing it down a bit is the producer pulling his power, and Fabian sings some of his hits, such as, "Turn Me Loose," "Tiger," and once again for some reason, "Old Time Rock and Roll." I sat through it all the way, but next time it'll be at 8x.

I know I'm whining a bit and nitpicking, but I need to say that the Crystals are the next act, in which only Dee Dee Kenniebrew is one the originals. And they are *bad*. No one here can touch Darlene Love (well, few can anyway), whose band the Blossoms released a bunch of songs as the Crystals. The three on this show take a stab at "He's A Rebel," "He's Sure the Boy I Love," "Then He Kissed Me" and "Da Doo Ron Ron," (all actually Blossoms tunes), and I could not help but wince. Perhaps it would be better if they covered the Crystals' own hits, like "There's No Other (Like My Baby)" or "Uptown."

Getting back to the earlier times, the next performers are doo-woppers, the Diamonds, a mix of originals and new guys (as is true with most groups from that time period). They do their biggies, "Silhouettes," "The Stroll," and my favorite of theirs, "Little Darlin'" (which is overstated here as "the national anthem of rock and roll").

Little Anthony Gourdine comes by with a run of some of his charters, including "Tears On My Pillow," "Hurt So Bad" (my fave of his hits), and "Shimmy, Shimmy, Ko-Ko-Bop" (my *least* fave of his hits, and apparently his: before the song starts, he's sure to make the point by stating that he was told he *had* to do the song "to get the gig"). Better he should have been allowed to do "Going Out of My Head," a much better song. Gourdine is definitely one of the more chatty artists, commenting that he's 44 years old and has 8 kids, and that he played on an Alan Freed show in 1958. I will add that he also is in fine vocal form.

The mood completely changes when Bo Diddley takes the stage and makes it his own. He drives through some of his boastful tunes: "Hey Bo Diddley," "I'm a Man" and "Bo Diddley Put the Rock into Rock and Roll" (he was one of the first artists in rock and roll to consistently praise his own prowess). He has that rumpa-rumpa-rumpa sound that he created, and is rightfully proud of, right up front. His influence on music was early (e.g., Buddy Holly), and still continues. Ellas McDaniel Bates (d. 2008) was a powerhouse.

What is needed is some Chuck Berry (the true king of rock and roll), and while the man is not present (perhaps they wouldn't meet his fee), everyone gets back on stage to sing "Johnny B. Goode." It's a train wreck, honestly, but one that put a smile on my face.

In all its incarnations over the years, many of which are presented here, it's true that *rock'n'roll is meant to be; it will never die.*