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America's Music Legacy: Rock 'n Roll

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**

When we think of rock today, there's a glut of influences that contribute to whatever sound we hear in our mind. If you're not white, you may not hear anything specific, other than the music played on the radio. The mainstream style branded as **Rock & Roll** can be traced back to some specific people, and many of them are featured on this edition of **America's Music Legacy**. In fact, this material was originally released as part of a special filmed in our very own Baton Rouge, LA - Fabian hosted a concert in 1985 for over 85,000 fans under the title "Good Time Rock 'n' Roll." Why this DVD wasn't released under that title probably has to do with some obscure licensing fracas typical of the music business, but fans of these artists (and the attendees at this historic concert) will be glad to see this released now.

In reference to the comment earlier about racial disparities in music, this concert does feature a mix of black and white "rock stars." Back in the day, they weren't really called rock stars in the way we now use that term (think bawdy revelry, jail time, and embarrassing celebrity magazine spreads), but there's no doubt that musicians like Fabian, Chubby Checker, Bo Diddley, and Little Anthony achieved some massive commercial success. The reality of the business for black artists was different than for their white counterparts; for every Chubby Checker and Bo Diddley, there were numerous struggling, talented artists playing predominantly to black crowds in R&B and blues styles during this period. Corporate interests of that time - much as now - had a chokehold on what popular music was promoted, but many black artists were successful in crossing over and playing to white audiences. Even Chubby Checker's signature hit "The Twist" was actually covering R&B artist Hank Ballard, and Ballard himself claimed influence from cowboy minstrel Gene Autry... The Barbershop phenomenon that gave way to Doo-wop eventually morphed into full-blown Rock & Roll, and even solo artists like Lou Christy or Leslie Gore betray the heavy influence of group harmony singing. It's easy to listen to Little Anthony singing "Tears On My Pillow" and imagine the backing vocals that would turn this crooner into the lead for a Doo-wop group.

Other artists featured on this collection include The Coasters, The Crystals, and The Diamonds. In some instances, the "original" lineup isn't on-stage, but we include quotations because many groups shifted out members over the years for various reasons. The other phenomenon with groups like The Coasters was to have multiple touring ensembles that used the band's name, but included none of the original members. This has been a common practice in recent decades, so it's refreshing to see most or all of the original members for these groups gathered on one stage. It's also a neat feature, prompted by the spontaneity of live performance, that **America's Music Legacy: Rock & Roll** captured several duets, one between Christy and Gore and one giant version of "Johnny B. Goode" as a finale that features Fabian, Bo Diddley, The Crystals, The Diamonds, and Little Anthony. For fans of classic Rock & Roll, it doesn't get much better than that...



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