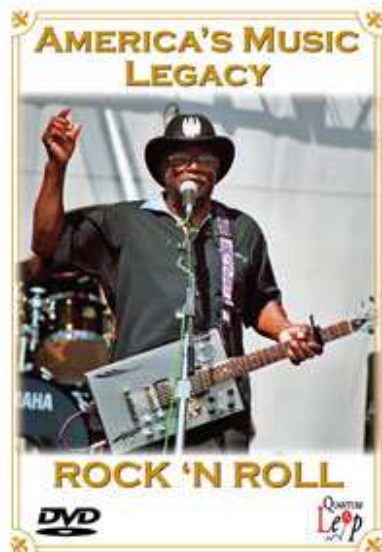


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# Roctober

**Wednesday, September 15, 2010**  
**America's Music Legacy DVD series**



**(MVD)** These DVDs, culled from some kind of early 80s series of productions called *America's Music* (was it on TV? Home video? Europe?) are much better than you would expect from 80s concerts by pre-80s artists. By gathering talented groups of artists and having them play with house bands for nostalgia crowds you should get something as lifeless as those PBS oldies pledge drive shows or that Ohne Filter series of DVDs that has great blues cats being consumed by 80s musical cliches. Yet somehow each very different volume of this has something worth watching. The weirdest one is probably "Rhythm & Blues," as the producers seem to have defined R&B as any black secular music. Ever. Hosted by Billy Eckstine (who kicks things off unpromisingly by promising some kind of window into the souls of black folk) this opens with shadows of black minstrelsy, as Brook Benton sings a plantation-recalling "Bollweevil" and Scatman Crothers turns back the clock to vaudeville. It's obvious from the jump that the dinner lounge style

**waymon**



Roctober Magazine Senior Tastemaker

Roctober Magazine Reviews:

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band isn't going to be kicking out powerful soul or jumping R&B (except when Billy Preston plays along, leading them somewhere deeper), but several artists fantastic voices thrive when framed by this type of music, particularly Eckstine and O..C Smith, and the slick sounds contrast well with Sam Moore's rough voice. And Ruth Brown deftly shows how ready she was for her soon-to-come corny Broadway comeback. Perhaps the most solid disc in the series is "Gospel," because no genre embraced, understood, and elevated cheezy 80s keyboard sounds like black gospel music (the cheap church keyboards they had been utilizing must have braced them for it). Standouts include the Winans, Andrae Crouch, Walter Hawkins, and the Robeson-esque Wentley Phipps, who I'd only previously on the Minnie Ripperton memorial episode of *Soul Train*. The "Country and Western" volume is similarly solid, balancing slick modern country by Sylvia with old time Opry stuff by Eddie Dean, with some crack young traditionalists like Ricky Skaggs and Doug Kershaw thrown in. The highlight of this thing is a long set by Jerry Lee Lewis, who apparantly was not told he was supposed to play his country material. Speaking of old time rock n roll, the "Rock 'n Roll" volume kicks off with Fabian croaking out that Bob Segar tune, but it's all uphill from there. While this kind of oldies stuff is common to see, better to see it in the 80s when there were still original Coasters and Diamonds in the lineups. Then again, maybe the early 80s were not the best time to catch the great Lou Christie (or "Christy" as the box says) who is done no favors by his two-tone, swoop-topped mullet and smarmy non-falsetto singing voice. But when he kicks in to the high-pitched oddball magical singing that makes lightning strike all is forgiven...even his shake dancing! He also pairs up with the great Lesley Gore who is magnificent here. One interesting aspect of this is that this house band has the capacity to switch into heavy rock mode, and does it (sensibly) for Bo Diddley, who is not being an oldies act here, but rather a vital, verile rocker. The band also kicks it hard for (not quite as sensibly) Chubby Checker, who actually gets the crowd rocking like a Metallica concert. There's apparantly a few more volumes of this and I'm looking forward to seeing them.

*Posted by Roctober Magazine Reviews: at 11:03 AM*

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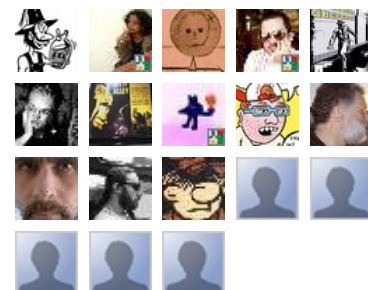
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