



Laramie Movie Scope: War: Loose Grooves, Funkin' Live in England, 1980

Vintage War concert footage

by Robert Roten, Film Critic

April 3, 2007 -- "War: Loose Grooves, Funkin' Live in England, 1980," is a compilation of concert footage shot April 9, 1980 at Civic Center Theatre in Halifax, England by Jeffery Kruger. The DVD features some of War's best known songs, including "Low Rider" and "Cisco Kid." There are some good performances on the DVD, but poor lighting and mediocre sound quality hamper the film.

The film looks like it was shot with available light, which includes a lot of gaudily colored concert lighting, including deep blues. That makes it hard to see detail at times. The sound quality is a bit muddy. The DVD's audio is presented in an uncompressed, two-channel linear PCM format, running at 48khz and 16 bits per sample. The DVD is region 0 for international, region-free play. The concert came at the end of a long English tour, and it runs quite short at 51 minutes. The shortest song of all, unfortunately, is one of the group's biggest hits, "Spill the Wine." Only about 45 seconds of that song, chorus only, is played before the group transitions to "All My Sorrows."

"Spill the Wine" was the group's first hit song, recorded in 1969 when Eric Burdon (formerly of the Animals) was the group's lead singer. In this concert, 11 years later, Burdon was long gone (having left the group, coincidentally, in the middle of another European tour), but several of the group's original members were still with the band in 1980. Original band members seen on this DVD are keyboardist and vocalist Lonnie Jordan, harmonica player Lee Oskar, percussionist Papa Dee Allen, drummer Harold Brown and lead guitarist and vocalist Howard E. Scott. The original band members are joined on stage by flute, clarinet and saxophone player Pat Rizzo, bassist Luther Rabb and drummer Ron Mammon. The group's best concert number on the DVD is "Gypsy Man," but hit songs "Cisco Kid" and "Low Rider" are also very good. Other songs include "I'll Be Around," a boogie number, "Me and Baby Brother," followed by an encore performance of one of the groups biggest hits, "Why Can't We Be Friends?" There are some improvised lyrics on this last song.

War is very unusual for a pop group in that it doesn't really emphasize vocals and lyrics, especially in their concerts. During Eric Burdon's brief stint with War, things were different. At the Halifax concert, however, War operates almost exclusively as an instrumental group, laying down jazz sounds with a latin flavor and a bare minimum of lyrics. There is a hint of Caribbean rhythms in the heavy, complex layers of percussion. War's sound is often called funk, and it is said to have paved the way for modern rap and hip hop music. It is also not that far removed from reggae. It would be best to say that War's music is unique. This video illustrates the polish and passion of this powerful band. This video rates a C+.

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