

DVD REVIEWS

THE BEATLES - Best Of The Beatles (Light Year)

Everybody knows the basic story of Pete Best. On August 12, 1960 he joined the Beatles. Two years later, he was sacked just as the band was recording their first single. Best has already given his account of his years with the Beatles in three books which he co-authored and now, we are presented with a video version of his life story. The real nexus of this riveting documentary is of course, the origins of the Beatles but the DVD also pays homage to Pete's mother, Mona or "Mo." In many ways, she was the unsung hero of the early career of the band as proprietress of the Casbah Coffee Club. The Casbah became a mecca of the local music scene, providing an environment to nurture the talent of local musicians, especially the Beatles.

This DVD covers all of the pivotal events that took place with the rise of the Beatles, from "The Casbah to Hamburg, and right through the first Abbey Road recording date" so states the tagline. In addition to the remembrances of Best, a whole legion of folks who were there and part of the scene provide their thoughts including other Liverpool musicians, fans, promoters, acquaintances, studio technicians, former members of the Quarrymen, sound engineers at Abbey Roads Studio, such as Cynthia Lennon, Klaus Voorman, Astrid Kirchherr, Neil Aspinall, Julia Baird (John Lennon's sister), Tony Sheridan, Neil Aspinall, etc.

Some of the anecdotes are pretty salacious. Best recounts one incident of Lennon peeing over a balcony at passing nuns which almost gets them expelled from Germany. Another describes an attempted mugging of a sailor by Lennon and Best (McCartney and Harrison promised to go along but backed out at the last minute).

I just have one complaint. No actual Beatle music is used other than snippets of a couple of the Bert Kaempfert recordings made in Germany, "My Bonnie" (where they backed Tony Sheridan who incidentally, declined the opportunity to become a Beatle) and "Ain't She Sweet" (with Lennon on vocals). But these weren't even real Beatle recordings as they were credited as "The Beat Brothers." Other than that, it's just cheesy soundalike covers or Beatlesque originals. I can understand where licensing normally might be an issue but you would think with the Best "family" connections to the Beatle empire, the rights to use their music for this documentary could be obtained. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention (as does the documentary) that Neil Aspinall, managing director of Apple Corps fathered Pete's half brother, Roag, according to a previous book that Pete co-authored with his two brothers.

That quibble aside, this is a first-rate companion to the "official" *Beatles Anthology*. (Jeff Watt)



CAPTAIN BEEFHEART - Under Review: An Independent Critical Analysis (Sexy Intellectual/Chrome Dreams, UK; all regions)

This is probably the strongest installment in this DVD series thus far (see also reviews of the Small Faces, Syd Barrett and the Velvet Underground), with an impressive roster of interviewees, including Magic Band alumnus of all eras—John French, Doug Moon, Mark Boston, Jeff Moris Tepper, Elliot and Ira Ingber, Jerry Handley, Eric Drew Feldman and Gary Lucas—alongside a select clutch of writers, including *Uncut's* ubiquitous Nigel Williamson, *UT's* Alan Clayson and Beefheart biographer Mike Barnes, whose familiarity with Beefheart's discography helps keep the narrative wheels moving here (his book, *Captain Beefheart: The Biography*, is recommended for beginners and longtime fans alike).

The story takes us from Beefheart's high desert garage band days to his withdrawal from the music scene in 1982-83, with plenty of interesting video clips along the way, from a dead cool "Diddy Wah Diddy" on *Where the Action Is* to the high desert hijinks of "Ice Cream For Crow."

John "Drumbo" French's contributions are particularly articulate and illuminating, and he even demonstrates some of the drum patterns he played on various tracks. For no particular reason, though, he spends the entire interview talking into a disconnected telephone hanging on a tree branch. This contrived and sometimes distracting attempt by the filmmakers to conjure up some Beefheartian weirdness also has Gary Lucas tucked up in bed, engineer and associate Gary Marker talking through the service window of a kitchen and Eric Drew Feldman sitting in the back of a large toy truck (although the placement of Alan Clayson behind the pulpit of an old English church is perhaps inspired choice, effectively casting him as some slightly mad vicar banished to a small country parish).

If you're going to start with one DVD in this series, this is the one to get. At 115 minutes (plus bonus material) it's significantly longer than the other *Under Review* titles, yet actually includes less padding. (MS)

CREAM - Cream Farewell Concert (Expanded Edition) (Image Entertainment), Royal Albert Hall (Rhino Entertainment)

Released on the same day, these two DVDs document Cream performances at the historical venue 37 years apart.

Cream Farewell Concert integrates concert footage of their final (for their initial run anyway) performance on November 26, 1968 with interviews with each member. Unfortunately, the same problems that plagued the original "broadcast" version continue with this new edition. For one, the color, never exactly stellar in the original, is shot to hell in the "Extended Version." It's faded and gone towards the brownish. There are a good deal of artifacts of worn film in much of the new footage, lots of dirt and scratches. The cinematography is dreadful: poor camera placement; rapid-fire zooming in and out; an intentional shaking of the camera while filming; a distracting throbbing oil/water light effect superimposed on the footage, which at times obliterates any view of the performers; distorted sound; the list goes on. And the less said about the pretentious prattle of Patrick Allen's narration, the better. One would



have hoped that some of these maladies of the original would have been remedied. The expanded version does add three new songs to the original broadcast version and is a little under 90 minutes. The broadcast version also included is 48 minutes.

By contrast, *Royal Albert Hall*, the reunion concert, effectively showcases the hypnotic power of the famed power trio. The high-definition video is beautiful and the sound is full. Obviously, Ginger Baker can't play as fast as he used to, so the opening number, "I'm So Glad," just doesn't have the apocalyptic power that the version on *Goodbye* possessed. Bruce acknowledged in the excellent and all-to-brief interview segment that he was determined to do "I Feel Free," but they just couldn't quite pull it off. (Baker also reveals that he was "threatened with death" by his family members if he didn't do "Pressed Rat and Warthog.") But Cream's playing were never just speed and flash, and when the early evening nerves subsided and they got into the heart of the concert, they got on quite fine indeed. Clapton even jokes about being back again after being "cut off in our prime," and Bruce immediately counters, "This is our prime!"

There are just too much great moments to discuss fully but the biggest, most unexpected surprise is "We're Going Wrong." There are two versions on this DVD and they build to a staggering intensity. Clapton's solos are white hot and impassioned.

Clapton has been running from this stunning legacy for his whole life, and with the exception of *Layla* has never approached the artistic heights achieved in Cream, Here, in this reunion that he wangled the others into doing, he comes full circle and gives everybody who ever loved Cream a reason to cheer. (CW Hinkle)

CREAM - DISRAELI GEARS (Eagle Vision) THE BAND - The Band (Eagle Vision)

Both of these releases are derived from the BBC documentary series, *Classic Albums*. The format of each show is basically the same: the surviving musicians discuss the making of the record; demonstrate musical phrases and techniques that often segue into snippets from vintage performance clips of underlying songs; a song or two are performed on acoustic instruments; an ancillary person or two, such as a road manager or photographer, provides perspective; a couple of prominent contemporaries weigh in to validate the importance of said recordings; and a critic discusses the seminal influences such recordings have had on the course of musical history as well as the influences that gave rise to the recordings in the first place.

The most recent installment in this series profiles Cream's second album, *Disraeli Gears*. The 82-minute episode includes the participation of all three members of the band, plus the reminisces and commentary of poet/lyricist Pete Brown, artist/cover designer/lyricist (for *Tales of Brave Ulysses* anyway) Martin Sharp, John Mayall, Manfred Mann and Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun among oth-

