

Videos

JOHN MARTYN: THE MAN UPSTAIRS

Voiceprint/MVD Visual VPDVD34 (2007)

This DVD captures guitarist John Martyn performing solo before a German audience for the venerable "Rockpalast" TV show. Martyn seemed somewhat foul of mood and dismissive of his audience for this performance, but nonetheless dazzled with his virtuosity, whether finger-picking hits like "May You Never" and "Bless the Weather," crooning an old standard like "Singing in the Rain," or unleashing heavily processed electronic cacaphony on "Outside In" or strapping on an electric Gibson for a very spacey version of "Small Hours." The audio and video quality of this session is excellent, and it gives a rare glimpse into what Martyn was up to in the late 1970s. The original video performance is supplemented by an extra performance of "I'd Rather Be the Devil" from the same performance.

— Michael Parrish (San Jose, CA)

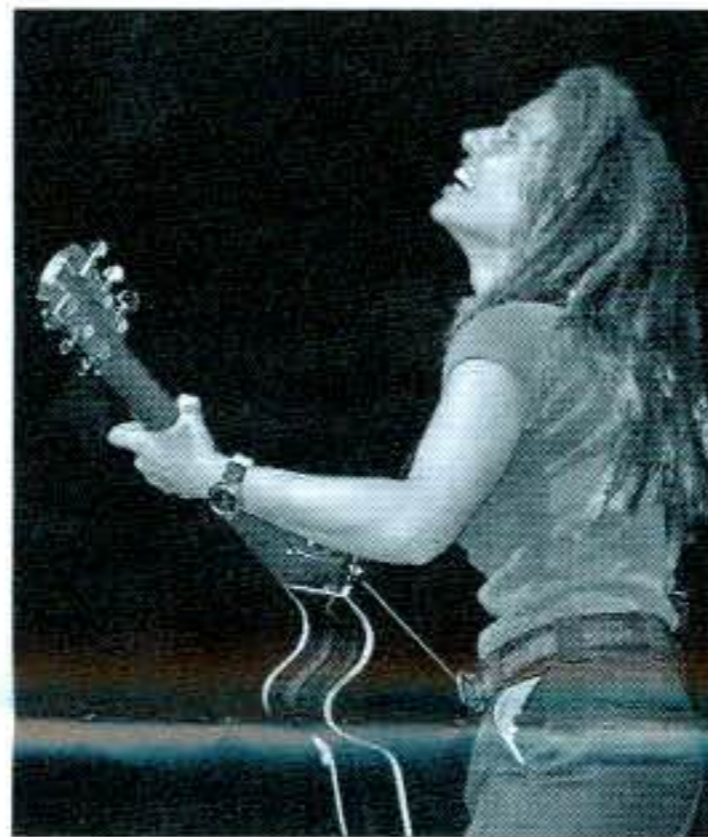
ALBERT COLLINS LIVE AT MONTREUX 1992

Montreux Sounds/Eagle Eye Entertainment EE 39163 (2008)

There's nothing fancy about this disc, but it does hold some very cool surprises. The whole DVD is spent on concert footage — no behind-the-scenes action, no interviews. Within the first minute, the guitarist introduces Collins, who takes the stage and we're off. So the value's down to the performance, which is solid but not stellar. Although in 1992, Collins was just a year away from his death from cancer, he was in fairly good form, slewing out his trademark stinging fingerpicking on his Fender Telecaster with the capo way up the neck, although a few fluffs on guitar and singing are evident. Several of the songs are quite lengthy: "Lights Are On (But Nobody's Home)," a slow blues with great sax work from Jon Smith, is 11 minutes, and "Put the Shoe on the Other Foot," during which Collins walks through the audience while soloing, runs for 17. However, the four cuts from Collins' 1979 Montreux appearance really make this disc a total "keeper." Chief among the bonus cuts is a smokin' version of "Frosty" featuring Clar-

ence "Gatemouth" Brown sitting in on dual guitar. The '79 band features Collins' longtime sidemen Casey Jones on drums and saxophonist A.C. Reed, who are gone by the '92 footage. These four cuts would be worthwhile on their own and make for a great bonus offering!

— Jeffery R. Lindholm (Montpelier, VT)



Ani DiFranco

ANI DIFRANCO LIVE AT BABEVILLE

Righteous Babe RBR058 DVD (2008)

Taking a break from touring to become a mother, Ani DiFranco had a chance to reflect on her rise from obscurity, having released her debut album in 1990, to becoming one of independent music's most successful artists. Fresh from the release of a double-CD retrospective, *Canon*, DiFranco again digs into her archives, coming up with a career-spanning performance on her third DVD, *Live at Babesville*. Accompanying herself with staccato-slap rhythms and fingerpicked guitar melodies and joined by her touring band — Allison Miller (drums), Todd Sickafoose (upright bass), and Mike Dillon (vibes and percussion) — DiFranco injects new meaning such tunes as "Napoleon," "Not a Pretty Girl," "Paradigm," "Little Plastic Castle," and "Hypnotized." Filmed with six high-definition cameras, this CD captures the inaugural performances (September 11 and 12, 2007) at the 19th-century Gothic revival-style church that DiFranco and Scot Fisher, her manager and president of Righteous Babe Records, transformed into a state-of-the-art performance space and contemporary arts center in Buffalo, New York. In addition to 18 songs, including two that have not appeared on previous studio albums, an interview and footage from the soundcheck are included.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

VAN MORRISON UNDER REVIEW 1964 - 1974

Sexy Intellectual Production/MVD Visual SIDVD535 (2008)

The problem with doing video biographies of such iconic people as Bob Dylan and Van Morrison is that the performers themselves are sick of doing interviews and retrospectives. What you have then are videos such as this, shrouded in terms like "an independent critical analysis" (which translates into the more familiar "an unauthorized biography"). This means that while you have the views of (in this case) "a panel of esteemed experts," the one person who could shed the most light on the artist's work, the artist himself, is conspicuously absent.

Van Morrison: Under Review is still quite probably the best video biography thus far attempted. The filmmakers have wisely chosen to narrow their field of inquiry to Morrison's 10 most fertile years, 1964-1974, during which he burst onto the early Irish rock 'n' roll scene in the brash and groundbreaking group Them, crossed the Atlantic for his solo years in New York City, Woodstock, and San Francisco, and returned to Belfast. In this short amount of time, Morrison transformed remarkably from a Jagger-like young punk enthralled with American rhythm and blues to a startlingly original singer/songwriter of a unique blend of jazz, soul, and rock, supported by an underlying fascination with Celtic mysticism and quest literature.

The "a panel of esteemed experts" includes two of Morrison's best biographers, a host of musical journalists, and one ex-member of Morrison's band. Their opinions are often astute. Several audio tracks of Morrison himself, culled from the archives of his biographers, are played, though video of a reel-to-reel tape machine makes a poor stand-in for Morrison. The real gems of this DVD are a host of live film clips that trace Morrison's career from his mop-topped, sneering days of fronting Them in concert and in the standard lip-synching pop TV shows of the day to singing with some of his best bands ever. The latter includes amazing footage of Morrison with the mighty Caledonian Soul Orchestra, which included a full horn section, bass virtuoso David Hayes, and a string quartet. Too often the excellent performances are interrupted by

talking heads and often useless opinions, when the music says it all: One interviewee actually utters the less-than-insightful phrase to describe Morrison's music as "the gift that keeps on giving."

Unfortunately, the video compilers have chosen to fill up the extra sections of the disc with more talking head outtakes and a completely useless and stupid Van Morrison trivia test instead of using the extra room on the DVD to air the extraordinary live performances in their entirety. Someone really needs to release the full video performance of Morrison's 1973 tour with the Caledonian Soul Orchestra, which until now has been available only on the wonderful *It's Too Late to Stop Now* double LP/CD. Still, in spite of its faults, *Under Review 1964-1974* is a welcome reminder of Morrison's towering talent and his amazing first decade as a professional musician.

— Lahri Bond (Leverett, MA)

CHRIS SMITHER: ONE MORE NIGHT

Signature Sounds SIG-DV-5001 (2008)

The magic of veteran folk-bluesman Chris Smither's music has always been that he combines the old sounds and rhythms of country blues with some very modern lyrics, plenty of brilliant acoustic guitar picking, and as comfortable and laid-back a stage presence as you could hope to find. This enjoyable concert video, recorded mostly last year at a solo performance in a small Connecticut theater, captures the twinkle in Smither's eye as much as his weathered but warm voice, fluid guitar, and steadily tapping feet.

Smither's fast-moving 15-song set concentrates on fairly recent material from his 40-year career, a mix of social commentaries like "Origin of Species" (a sly review of evolutionary theory) and "Diplomacy" (a far more serious critique of the Iraq war) and songs from personal experience, both reflective ("Leave the Light On") and lighter ("Happier Blue"). There's a feeling of hard-earned wisdom in his music, suggesting that he's a man who has won the battle between doubt and hope in his life, who can both worry and laugh about the state we're in. He performs some oldies here too, like his much-covered "Love You Like a Man" and the traditional "Stateboro Blues."