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Van Morrison shines in Under Review

Marke Andrews, Vancouver Sun

Published: Thursday, April 24, 2008

UNDER REVIEW 1964-1974

Van Morrison

Sexy Intellectual/MVD

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Rating 4

In the vernacular of the sports fan, Van Morrison has legs. He's been a force on the music scene for more than four decades, and this music documentary in the excellent Under Review series looks at what is arguably his brightest decade, 1964-74.

Belfast may not be the most fertile musical garden, but Morrison was well-grounded in pop, blues, jazz, gospel and country from listening to his father's extensive record collection, and all those forms would find their way on to records in that period. His first band was a skiffle group, but then he hit it big on the charts with Them, a short-lived rock band that leaned on Morrison's rough-edged, R&B-style vocals.

After moving to the U.S., Morrison recorded what is arguably his best album, Astral Weeks. Backed by seasoned jazz musicians, he improvised much of the vocal material and wrote stunning lyrics. Astral Weeks didn't sell, but Moondance did, an album more rooted in pop. The albums that followed through to 1974 went from peak to valley to peak in terms of sales, but all had merit for anyone with ears.

This DVD, which mixes vintage concert footage with talking-heads commentary by critics, musicians and friends, doesn't deal much with his personal life or his bland stage presence, although some point out that for a brief period in 1973-74, he was animated in front of an audience. Stage antics aren't what Van's about; it's the music that counts, and the music comes through here.

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