

The American Folk-Blues Festival: The British Tours 1963-1966

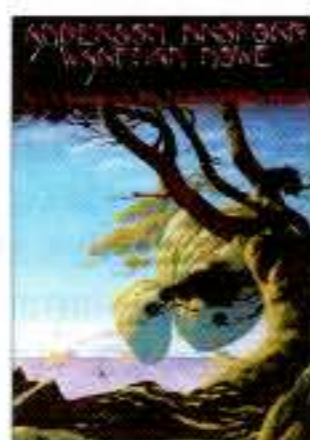
★★★1/2
(2007) 75 min. DVD: \$14.98.
Universal Music Group (avail. from most distributors).



One of the enduring ironies of popular music lies in the fact that it wasn't until British groups such as the Rolling Stones, the Animals, and the Yardbirds came to U.S. shores in the mid-'60s—singing the praises (and the songs) of bluesmen like Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Howlin' Wolf—that Americans discovered music that was local to begin with. Legend has it that some of the aforementioned Brits were in attendance when Wolf, Muddy, and others toured England for the concerts preserved in this 18-song package (three previous compilations were released during 2003-04). It's not hard to see why they were inspired, as this is the real deal, featuring complete performances by great artists (and some mighty fine sidemen, including guitarists Hubert Sumlin and Otis Rush, bassist Willie Dixon, and pianist Otis Spann) playing for audiences who gave them the respect they so richly deserved (and that had largely eluded them at home). Highlights abound: Junior Wells, sans harmonica and dancing like James Brown on a version of Ray Charles' "What'd I Say"; Lightnin' Hopkins, incredibly soulful as he delves deep into the Delta blues on two solo tunes; Big Joe Turner, bringing down the house with a rockin' "Oh Well, Oh Well"; Wolf, given a hero's welcome on his two numbers; and Lonnie Johnson, whose "Too Late to Cry" reveals him to be an underrated, jazz-influenced guitarist. The four bonus tracks may be the best of all: filmed outdoors at a train station in Manchester, they feature Waters, surrounded by adoring fans for "You Can't Lose What You Ain't Never Had" and "Blow Wind Blow," and Sister Rosetta Tharpe (the great blues-gospel shouter), who arrives in a horse-drawn buggy, picks up her guitar, and proceeds to strut and (quite literally) fret her way across the train platform ("pretty good for a woman, ain't it?" she says). Presented in PCM mono, this beautifully packaged compilation is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

• **Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe: An Evening of Yes Music Plus** ★★★

(1989) 143 min. DVD: \$19.95.
Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Filed September 9, 1989 at the Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View, CA, *Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe* features the near-classic Yes lineup of singer Jon Anderson, guitarist Steve Howe, key-

boardist Rick Wakeman, and drummer Bill Bruford, with Jeff Berlin filling in for the absent Chris Squire on bass. Promoting their 1989 CD release *Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe*, this two-hour-plus concert opens with the strains of "Benjamin Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," after which three of the band members take solo turns: Anderson ("Time and a Word" and "Owner of a Lonely Heart"), Howe ("The Clap" and "Mood for a Day"), and Wakeman ("Catherine Parr" and "Merlin the Magician"), before kicking into "Long Distance Runaround" (which concludes with a blistering Bruford drum solo). For fans, this 16-track set will be prog rock manna from heaven, as the beatific Anderson, nimble-fingered Howe, literally-surrounded-by-keyboards Wakeman, and brilliant percussionist Bruford serve up such timeless Yes tunes as "And You and I," "I've Seen All Good People," "Heart of the Sunrise," "Roundabout," and "Starship Trooper," as well as a stunning full-length rendition of "Close to the Edge." Interwoven throughout are a handful of then-current tunes, most of which still stand the test of time, including the hit "Brother of Mine" and "Order of the Universe." Not as spiffy-looking or as aurally rich (the sound is Dolby Digital stereo) as *Yes 35th Anniversary Concert: Songs from Tsongas* (VL-11/05) or *Yes Symphonic Live* (VL-9/02), this is nevertheless sure to appeal to Yes fans. Recommended. [Note: *Bill Bruford's Earthworks Video Anthology 1* and *2*, featuring Bruford with his jazz quartet, are also newly available, priced at \$38.99 each.] Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

• **Bert Jansch: Fresh as a Sweet Sunday Morning** ★★★

(2006) 101 min. DVD: \$19.95.
Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Bert Jansch is enjoying something of a renaissance these days, with younger musicians such as Beth Orton, Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, and Pete Doherty (better known as Kate Moss' junkie sometime boyfriend) collaborating with and/or paying homage to the venerable Brit folkie guitarist. Jansch's influence on rock 'n' rollers is not new; his "Blackwaterside," performed during this 23-song concert, was ripped off note for note, sans vocal, by Jimmy Page for Zeppelin's "Black Mountain Side." A former member of the folk "supergroup" Pentangle, Jansch was 62 at the time of this 2006 solo gig in Sheffield, England, and his finger-style playing is masterful, marked by uncommon chord work, bluesy string bending, and a deft virtuosity that makes it look much easier than it is (his singing, expressive but hardly beautiful, is more of an acquired taste). Here Jansch plays his own songs, as well as American blues ("Trouble in Mind," "Courting Blues"), British traditional num-

bers ("She Moved Through the Fair"), and tunes by little known U.S. singer Jackson C. Frank, English folkie Anne Briggs, and others. While there's not a lot of variety in the repertoire (and "Down Under" is the only instrumental), this concert, presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 is recommended, overall. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

Billy Harper in Concert: Live From Poland ★★★1/2

(2007) 80 min. DVD: \$19.98.
Arkadia DVD (avail. from most distributors).



Billy Harper in Concert: Live From Poland is nothing if not ambitious: saxman-composer Harper not only appears with his core ensemble (Francesca Tanksley, Clarence Seay, and Newman Taylor Baker), but also Polish trumpeter Piotr Wojtasik, several other Polish jazzsters, and a 60-piece choir for this concert at the Metropolitan Basilica Cathedral of St. Jacob in Szczecin, Poland. Unfortunately, while the video for this eight-song set looks great (an eight-camera setup allows for a variety of viewing angles), the sound quality generally disappoints as the cathedral setting produces a notable echo and the choir is poorly recorded (you really only hear a few of the five dozen voices). Harper's music—which here includes "Light Within," "Quest," "The Awakening," and "City of Hunger"—is often dense and emotional, but much of it will strike non-fans as jazz noodling (pretty, ultra-earnest, but self-indulgent just the same). While Harper aficionados will revel in the sumptuous visuals here, the echo-plagued Dolby Digital sound will please few. DVD extras include bonus concert footage and a photo gallery. Optional. Aud: P. (M. Moore)

• **Echo & The Bunnymen: Dancing Horses** ★1/2

(2005) 133 min. DVD: \$19.95.
Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Filed at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire, this 2005 concert by angst-ridden '80s English post-punkers Echo & The Bunnymen boasts a fairly wooden performance by the much-mutated six-piece band, featuring original members Ian McCulloch (vocals) and Will Sergeant (guitar). While there are a handful of pretty tunes in this 19-song set (including the keyboard-driven "Stormy Weather" and "In the Margins"), *Dancing Horses* suffers from a surplus of music that sounds both repetitive and derivative. And while McCulloch, who could have put more energy into his stage presence and less into puffing his cigarette, finally reaches his vocal stride during the middle of the set, he seems to tire by the time the band steams into "Nothing Lasts Forever" near the close. Pre-

sented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, DVD extras include interviews with McCulloch and Sergeant. Not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (M. Moore)