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Video Anthology Vol. 2 (DVD) Rock Goes To College (CD) Bill Bruford



Bill Bruford is one musician extremely difficult to label. Having tasted success early on as a founding member of Yes — along with a reoccurring role in King Crimson and a short stint with Genesis — Bruford has managed to maintain an usually heightened sense of individuality and vision that distances him from the mainstream. The drummer's yen for jazz, fusion, improvisation, experimentation — in their most eclectic, inventive forms — keeps the music constantly in motion, courting the edge. Great examples of Bruford's growth and skills are well represented on the **Rock Goes To College** CD and the **Video Anthology Vol. 2** DVD. These two merely graze the surface of what brews in the mind of Bill Bruford.

Frustrated with the dismal state of progressive rock in the late 70s, Bruford took things into his hands and began making records under his name. Bruford the group was a dream unit of the first order with über guitarist Allan Holdsworth, bassist Jeff Berlin and keyboardist Dave Stewart. Together, the quartet set out to twist melodies, reshape choruses and bust the metronomes. During one of their few live performances, the four, along with avant-garde vocalist/songwriter Annette Peacock, played a show on March 7, 1979 at Oxford Polytechnic College. Recorded for prosperity, the ensuing **Rock Goes To College** release draws from the group's two albums, **Feels Good To Me** and **One Of A Kind**.

The interaction is tight from the get-go. Fading up into "Sample And Hold," followed by "Beezlebub," the group engages in a virtual chess match, where each player's riff is countered with a more daring, unexpected maneuver. Bruford anchors the floor, adding feet to the arrangements, directing traffic in a quagmire of winding leads and layers of keys. The tempered notes, the gapless wonders and building cadences that perpetuate tracks like "The Sahara of Snow," "Forever Until Sunday" and "Back To The Beginning" are what make the fusion idiom so diabolical and thorny to define. But it sure gives you something to wrap your warped mind around. Even when Peacock, known for her own far-out ruminations dating back to the early 60s, warbles aimlessly through "Adios a la Pasada (Goodbye To The Past)," you have to appreciate the heady experience imparted to what most likely was a group of impressionable college students.

Flash forward to the 80s, 90s, 00s and beyond, and Bill Bruford is an entirely different headspace. During the early 80s with King Crimson, Bruford pioneered electronic percussion, blossoming into a musician's musician of the highest caliber. In 1987, he formed Earthworks, an outlet for this new melodic range of percussion mixed with acoustic woodwinds, brass and string instruments to create a surreal, jazz-infused tapestry.

An ongoing project, Earthworks in various incarnations have been filmed and filed under the appropriate *Video Anthology* banner. **Volume 1** delves into the 2000s, while **Volume 2** stretches back to the 1990s. Unfortunately, this writer has yet to see the former, but was thoroughly engrossed by the latter. This DVD isn't so much an anthology as a collection of three live performances — Stuttgart, Germany on March 30, 1991, Tokyo, Japan on December 2, 1991 and Sofia, Bulgaria on October 30, 1999. The first two feature Django Bates and Iain Ballamy on horns, both of whom comprised the fusion synthesis of the original Earthworks. From "Up North" to "Nerve," Bruford intercepts and counterpoints beats, rhythms and actual melodies with rapturous results.

In Sofia, Bruford ditches the Simmons drums for acoustics. He also appears with a whole new Earthworks

lineup, which heads in much more traditional jazz direction. Steve Hamilton correlates the ivories, while Bruford and bassist Mark Hodgson steady the anchors and drive the undercurrent. Saxophonist Patrick Clahar runs into open territory and blows the roof off the joint. It's interesting to hear the two versions of "Bridge Of Inhibition" by both lineups, and spot the obvious and not so obvious differences. The less frenetic, smoother version from the 1999 show illustrates Bruford's ongoing evolution as a drummer and a band leader — clearly a musician not only difficult to label, but continually on a quest to break new ground, refusing to rest on his laurels.

~ Shawn Perry

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