

Hit List

DVDs



Koerner, Ray & Glover
**Blues, Rags & Hollers: The Koerner,
 Ray & Glover Story**
MVD Visual

The fact that this folk-blues trio existed at all is noteworthy. By the time KR&G hit the national scene, first at the 1963 Philadelphia Folk Festival and then Newport a year later, you could count the number of white blues performers on one hand (a very young John Hammond and, at times, Dave Van Ronk come to mind). "They went out and did it," stresses guitarist Galen Michaelson in

one of this documentary's interview segments—underscoring what is now commonplace was virtually unheard of 45 years ago, when the trio started gigging around Minneapolis.

This 1986 documentary was directed by the group's harpist, Tony Glover, who added postscripts in '95 and now in '07, for this expanded, two-and-a-half-hour edition, which includes nine bonus performances from the reunited group in the '90s.

Glover's nickname was "Little Sun"; acoustic guitarists John Koerner and Dave Ray (a Leadbelly-inspired 12-stringer) were "Spider John" and "Snaker," respectively. Blues guys need nicknames, after all. It's that kind of naivete that, in hindsight, makes the group so charming. It's the same lack of self-consciousness that would allow them to sing a work song like "Linin' Track"—something you're not likely to see three white college kids doing today.

An early business card read, "Blues-Ragtime-Folk. Available for concerts, lectures, clubs and house parties"—"lectures" being the most telltale word—and later performances, incorporating beat poetry, revealed the intellectual bent that was always under the surface. Thankfully, they didn't play like academics, though they approached the music from a folk-informed angle. "We were the only cats playing any blues," says Ray. "Everybody else was into that folk music stuff." Koerner adds, "We insisted on being funky, no matter what."

The film chronicles the different paths the bandmates would eventually take, which included several reunions—fortunately, since the original incarnation was not captured on film until almost 20 years after they first formed. The credits point out that it was done with no grants or arts funding, which shows at times, but thank God it was made, since Ray's death in 2002 (the youngest member, then 59) put an

end to any further reunions of this seminal group. —DF



Adam Steffey
My Approach to Bluegrass
Mandolin

Acutab Publications

Adam Steffey has developed a reputation as one of a small number of truly elite mandolin players. On his latest instructional video, *My Approach to Bluegrass Mandolin*, he shares some of the techniques that make his playing special.

My Approach to Bluegrass Mandolin contains two discs. The first concentrates on Steffey's style and includes information about using his little finger (pinky), his right-hand technique, practice regimen, and how he recommends players build speed. The disc wraps up with his renditions of "Banks of the Ohio," "Whitehouse Blues," and "Little Maggie."

The second disc begins with a rendition of the bluegrass standard, "Salt Creek," accompanied by Kenny Smith on guitar. Steffey also breaks down his version of "East Tennessee Blues." His instruction level is suitable even for beginners, although intermediate and advanced players will benefit most from studying his individual style.

The set includes tablature that's about 90 percent accurate, occasionally failing to note double-stops and slides. As with most instructional discs, you'll get more from actually watching the player than trying to learn the tablature by rote study.

While it will still take an advanced player years of concerted practice to perfectly mimic Steffey's style (and who would really want to do that?) the information here should help any player, advanced or beginner, to play better. —SS VG