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Delbert McClinton, Cat Stevens, John Martyn, Bill Monroe and Waking The Witch

Delbert McClinton - *Rocking the Boat*

This documentary has been racking up accolades at film festivals all over the country for the past year and about an hour's worth of bonus material has been added to the film for the DVD release. At first glance you may think the film takes its name from the fact that McClinton never does anything half way; he truly "rocks the boat" with an all-out performance every time he takes the stage. But the title actually has an even more interesting origin. Cruise liner sailings have always provided live on-board entertainment but there has been a trend lately for some cruises to take on big name acts to provide a draw with poolside jams, nightly concerts and plenty of meet-and-greets with fans. McClinton has been organizing his annual "Sandy Beaches" cruise for twelve years and this film was put together using footage culled from various sailings. The format is such that interview footage, mostly shot on board, is interspersed with the live performances. Of course McClinton didn't go on these trips alone; the roster of guests over the years includes kindred souls Marcia Ball, Rodney Crowell, Tommy Castro, Al Anderson, Jimmy Hall, Wayne Toups and many others. McClinton and his band perform seven songs including "Two More Bottles of Wine," "New York City," "Never Been Rocked Enough" and the humorous devotional "Hammerhead Stew." Off-stage McClinton is nearly as animated as he is on stage as he tells stories and reminisces about various career ups and downs. The film is subtitled "A Musical Conversation & Journey" and it fulfills that description; the viewer will certainly come away with a greater knowledge of what makes this fun-loving performer tick. The bonus footage pretty much foregoes conversation and focuses just on performance; some of those appearing are Buddy Miller, Teresa James, Chris Stapleton, Bob DiPiero and the amazing keyboard aggregation dubbed Pianorama. Every aspect of this film is very well done.

Cat Stevens - *Tea for the Tillerman Live*

This intimate vintage footage was captured on the set of TV station KCET in Los Angeles in 1971, more or less at the height of Stevens' popularity. After opening with "Moonshadow" Stevens makes a comment that pokes a little humble fun at his new-found success, saying that "On the Road to Find Out" was written "before I entered into my second life as a pop star." The singer

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ROCK N' TICKETS

accompanies himself on guitar and gets a little vocal assistance from second guitarist Alun Davies; the only other musician on stage is Larry Steele who plays bass or congas on certain songs. Stevens moves to piano for one song, a rousing version of "Miles From Nowhere," and otherwise the trio recreate nearly album-perfect versions of "Longer Boats," "Hard Headed Woman," "Wild World," "Father and Son" and "Where Do the Children Play?" The animated short *Teaser and the Firecat*, named after one of Stevens' albums, is included as a bonus.

John Martyn - *The Man Upstairs*

Martyn is an accomplished singer/songwriter and guitarist who is pretty much unheralded in the U.S. His biggest play for American notoriety came upon release of his '70s works *Solid Air* and *One World*. *One World* was the current album when Martyn taped this set for German television in 1978 and he performs the album's "Certain Surprise," "Big Muff," "Couldn't Love You More" and "Small Hours" for a rapt crowd of acoustic guitar fanatics (apparently John Fahey was also on the bill that night.) The audience, being German, understandably doesn't react when Martyn jokes around in English between songs so eventually he knocks off the pleasant chatter and mesmerizes the crowd with his playing and emotive vocals. The show is completely solo but Martyn plugs into an Echoplex effect pedal for some songs, causing his already ethereal music to take on an eerie edge. The emotional high point comes as Martyn performs "Solid Air," a song he wrote for his (at that time) recently deceased friend Nick Drake.

Bill Monroe - *Father of Bluegrass Music*

This documentary tells Monroe's story, mostly in his own words. The footage used in this film is primarily from the '90s and it is very intimate. Bluegrass as "family" music has often been performed on the front porch and that is where Monroe is interviewed, sitting with his beloved mandolin in hand. Most of the questions are proffered by musician John Hartford who gets enlightening answers with a thoughtful line of questioning. Ricky Skaggs interviews his hero too and some of the most endearing footage is of Monroe and Skaggs playing in the darkness sitting around a campfire. The film features performances of a few Monroe classics like "Uncle Pen" and "Muleskinner Blues" but this film has been made more for scholars of bluegrass as opposed to casual fans of the music. Additional commentary comes from a bevy of stars including Jerry Garcia, Marty Stuart, Emmylou Harris and Roy Acuff. Monroe died in 1996.

Waking The Witch - *Live*

Four very talented players make up Waking the Witch, an all-woman band that takes their name from a Kate Bush song. Each of the ladies writes, sings, and plays (at least) guitar and the first portion of this concert finds the girls going at it with just their voices and guitars, lined up on stage like a feminine version of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Their songs address modern issues but with an ear tuned to traditional sounds: "Jenny Thornton and the Boys from the Abattoir" is about how a young woman feels helplessly trapped in her little city, watching the trains roll by without stopping, but Waking the Witch infuses the song with a timelessness that makes the song conjure centuries-old images. About mid-set the women are joined by their (male) back-up band and the songs take on a more contemporary feel, sometimes bluesy when Becky Mills plays bottleneck slide. Fans of artists like Sandy Denny and Steeleye Span will quickly make new friends by viewing this film.

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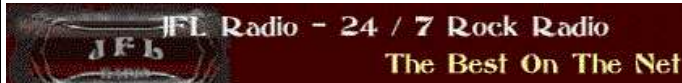


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