

DVDs



Van Morrison Under Review 1964-1974: An Independent Critical Analysis

Chrome Dreams

A documentary on Van Morrison's most fruitful years including live con-

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cert footage would be welcomed by fans everywhere. Yet the academic subtitle here says all too much about this British film on Van the Man. And the back-cover promotional text seals the deal, promising "Rare and classic Van Morrison performances, re-assessed by a panel of esteemed experts."

Morrison is notoriously crabby and uncooperative: He refuses to lend his hand to biographers or filmmakers interested in his story. So what's left is to gather together stray footage, found photos, scrape up the odd old interview, and weave it all together with commentary by those esteemed experts.

The result here is mixed. Just when vintage '60s and '70s footage of Van in concert starts rolling, a talking head interrupts the action to explain what an artist Van is. Back to the concert shot – only to be broken off once again by another commentator emphasizing the first expert's sage words.

And all too often Van himself appears bored, as during the shots of him playing "Wild Night" and other tunes. Or perhaps he was too stoned to care. In the end, the classic recordings from Them as well as Morrison's solo outings *His Band And The Street Choir*, *Astral Weeks*, *Moondance*, *St. Dominic's Preview*, *Tupelo Honey*, *Veedon Fleece*, and *It's Too Late To Stop Now* are all best heard by themselves.

But if you're a Morrison fan, you'll definitely want to at least check out this film. There are jewels hidden between the "critical analysis." – *Michael Dregni*

ent positions as reference points throughout each and every song. Fingerpicked chords and single-line runs mix deftly on every tune.

Showing old-school dexterity, Smither uses his left thumb to fret bass notes in a manner many professionally trained guitarists would look at with disgust. While a good many numbers move along at a medium pace, several tunes let Smither show off, including include his classic "Love You Like a Man," popularized by Bonnie Raitt. His version is a stompin' blues where Smither is more than comfortable playing the country blues he learned years ago. Many of his more current compositions get hearings, as well, including the brilliant "No Love Today."

While Smither doesn't talk a lot on stage, there are two wonderful interview segments that find him filling us in on part of his history and background. That includes a story how Ms. Raitt first heard the aforementioned "Love You Like a Man" and how she happened to turn a Chris Smither song into a signature Raitt song.

The intimate setting is perfect, and Smither's blend of folk and blues is captured as well as can be. It's good to see masters of this sort of music get a forum to put forth their music. – *JH*

