

Cajun Visits offers brief profiles of Dennis McGee, Wallace "Cheese" Read, Canray Fontenot, Leopold François, and Robert Jardell, the latter two in conversation with Dewey Balfa. The musicians speak about their lives and their work, as well as about Cajun society, and do so mostly in French, although English subtitles are provided. These two Cajun films achieve a better balance between music and commentary than *Homemade American Music*, whose musical performances were subjected to more editing.

— Paul-Emile Comeau
(Comeauville, NS, Canada)

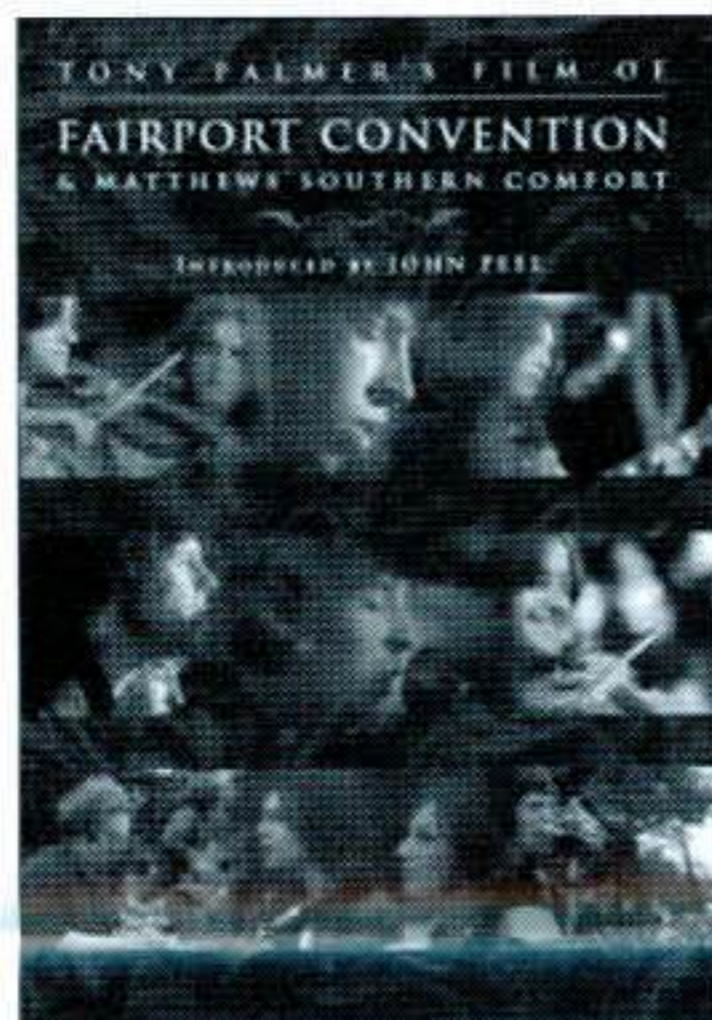
ERNEST RANGLIN: ORDER OF DISTINCTION (THE COLLECTORS EDITION)

AIX Media Group AIX 83047 (2006)

A guiding force of Jamaican music for more than a half century and one of the founding fathers of ska, 76-year-old Ernest Ranglin remains — as this recently released DVD documentary/studio session points out — "the greatest guitar player you never heard of." Ranglin's guitar scratching, octave playing, and Charlie Christian-like picking could be heard on hundreds of recordings by such Jamaican artists as Millie Small, the Skatalites, the Melodians, Prince Buster, and Bob Marley and the Wailers. He toured and recorded with Jimmy Cliff in the 1970s. Reunited with longtime cohort Monty Alexander on piano and melodica and joined by bassist Phil Chen and drummer Richard Bailey, Ranglin settles down to an informal session of groove-accompanied melodies. A variety of guests, including organist Jeff Lorber, drummer Adrian Young (No Doubt), and guitarists Robbie Kreiger (the Doors) and Elliot Easton (the Cars), turns this into a truly historic recording. While mostly instrumental, the album features Jewish-American reggae singer and ex-Wailers member Elan Atlas on "Hurts to Be Alone" and Alana Davis, the daughter of influential jazz pianist Walter Davis, Jr. and vocalist Anamari, on "Many Rivers to Cross" and "My Boy Lollipop." Comprising two double-sided discs, *Order of Distinction* features a CD, DVD-audio, and video of the recording session as well as an interactive

disc with interviews, artist bios, photographs, and a documentary, *Ernest Ranglin at Home*.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)



TONY PALMER'S FILM OF FAIRPORT CONVENTION & MATTHEWS SOUTHERN COMFORT

Isolde Films/MVD Visual TPDVD105
(2007)

For many fans of English folk-rock, the short-lived Fairport Convention lineups of 1969 and 1970 will always define the genre. There was the talented sextet that recorded the landmark album *Liege & Lief*, and then following the departure of Sandy Denny and Ashley Hutchings, the reorganized five-man band that recorded the almost as influential *Full House*. The only contemporary professional-quality film of the latter lineup is a short excerpt from a June 1970 festival at Maidstone in Kent that was briefly available years ago as a U.K.-format videotape. It has now been re-released on this somewhat awkwardly titled but historically and musically memorable 31-minute DVD that will delight Fairport's many fans.

In that summer of 1970, Fairport was fronted by fiddler/singer Dave Swarbrick and 21-year-old (and looking even younger) singer/guitarist Richard Thompson, joined by guitarist Simon Nicol, bassist Dave Pegg, and drummer Dave Mattacks. The band's repertoire was heavy with the merrily frantic instrumental medleys that comprise three of the five Fairport tracks here, with Swarbrick's fast and playful fiddling on the jigs and reels solidly reinforced by Thompson's sharp, skirling electric

guitar lines and backed by a driving rhythm section. The short film also includes a hearty version of the Scottish ballad "Sir Patrick Spens" and the enigmatic Thompson/Swarbrick composition "Now Be Thankful." Nearly 40 years later the sound is now familiar but still exciting, and the dancing crowd on a sunny afternoon was clearly caught up in the fun.

Sharing the bill was Matthews Southern Comfort, the country-rock sextet (incorrectly listed as a trio in the box credits) led by former Fairport singer Iain Matthews. Looking across the Atlantic, they smoothly cover Arlo Guthrie's "My Front Pages" and Ian & Sylvia's "Southern Comfort," adding a neat instrumental break to the latter. Director Tony Palmer heavily favors moody closeups of bandmembers' faces and dreamy audience shots that give the film a late-60s period look. He provides background on the film in an appended interview.

— Tom Nelligan (Waltham, MA.)

BLUES, RAGS & HOLLERS: THE KOERNER, RAY & GLOVER STORY

MVD Visual DM0509D (2007)

Tony Glover originally made this documentary in 1986, updated it in 1995, and added a bit more to it yet again for this 2007 DVD edition. Besides featuring 10 full-length performances, the documentary, which now lasts a full two hours, includes nine bonus live performances from 1991-99, along with album-by-album postscripts. Appropriately enough, considering how this highly influential group functioned, the film gives us separate profiles on each member and on their careers both within and outside the confines of the trio. Since there's a dearth of video footage from the trio's early days, the film relies mostly on later material, some of which consists of reminiscences by the artists themselves and by Willie Murphy and a few others who were part of the 60s bohemian scene in the Dinky Town section of Minneapolis.

As with the group's musical style and modus operandi, there's a lack of slickness to the film, although the only glaring inconsistency in quality is the occasional difference in sound quality. The fact

that Koerner, Ray and Glover brought something of a couldn't-care-less attitude toward success comes across in much of what each of them says, and that approach undoubtedly played a role in cementing their legendary status. Another reason the cult group never quite received the renown that it deserved was the fact that it was an aggregation that was loosely held together. Dave "Snaker" Ray, who died in 2002, was one of the greatest blues performers to have come out of the 60s folk scene, and John "Spider" Koerner acquired an equally strong reputation as a folksinger. Tony "Little Sun" Glover was always more than just a harmonica-playing sidekick, and the film explores some of his less heralded talents.

— Paul-Emile Comeau
(Comeauville, NS, Canada)

MARTIN GUITARS PCN (2003)

Add together the interest of craft, the appeal of woodworking, the heartfelt aspects of making music, and the long history of Martin Guitars, and you might think you had the ingredients for compelling television. Unfortunately, this program misses the mark. For nearly two hours, viewers follow host Dick Boak on a tour of the Martin Guitar factory in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. There's nothing compelling about the journey, visually or in Boak's narrative, and however interesting the basic elements of the subject are, there's little to connect with or inspire the viewer. The workers themselves are rarely introduced, and that adds to the air of distance. It's a "Now this is done, and then this is done, and then this is done" sort of narrative by Boak, and the videography follows the same task-focused passive style. It's a program about making guitars, yes, and guitars are made by and played by people. The human elements and consideration from musical and craft perspectives just don't come across or connect here, and that makes the program more than a bit tedious.

— Kerry Dexter (Tallahassee, FL)

