



Fairport Convention

*Tony Palmer's Film of
Fairport Convention and
Matthews Southern Comfort*

Voiceprint (TPDVD 105)

Grade: ★★★★★

When one considers just how immense a shadow Fairport Convention has cast over British rock, in both its folky and mainstream guises, there is a staggering lack of video footage available of the band at its peak. TV and filmed appearances do exist, and plenty of clips are circulating. But if you want to see the band at full steam, for more than 30 seconds or so, this short epic is the earliest it gets — and, dating from 1970, that's not very early at all. Already Martin Lamble is dead, and Sandy Denny and Ashley Hutchings have departed; when Tony Palmer set his cameras up at the Maidstone Fiesta, the band was busy promoting *Full House*, with Richard Thompson (himself soon to leave) the focal point, and the band approaching a five-year state of permanent flux and confusion.

It's not the most gripping spectacle, and the bonus interview with director Palmer offers a few insights into his own difficulty creating moving pictures from static players. Of course, the camerawork is exemplary, the musicianship spectacular and the five performances (two songs, three jigs) are enjoyable. But beard and denim rarely moves around, and the band exudes a studious air that leaves your eyes shifting restlessly around the room, even while your toes keep tapping. Ditto the two songs spliced in the midst of it, showcasing another ex-Fairporter, Ian Matthews, as he stepped out with his Southern Comfort; great songs, shame about the visuals. Again, however, faced with the current dearth of historical Fairport footage, even the 31 minutes must be celebrated, and Palmer himself would probably not even know how to make a truly dull movie. So, as the song says, "Now be thankful." www.voiceprint.co.uk
— Dave Thompson