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DVDs: Scorsese Falls Short Of Scorsese

Posted August 4, 2008 | 02:29 PM (EST)



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Martin Scorsese has directed one of the best concert films of all time. Unfortunately, it's most definitely NOT Rolling Stones: Shine A Light (\$34.99; Paramount and only \$5 more for the BluRay). It so easily typifies all that is wrong with most concert films (and especially rock concert films), you wonder if Scorsese has watched his own masterpiece The Last Waltz lately. That film ranks with Jazz On A Summer's Day, Stop Making Sense, Bob Dylan: The Other Side Of The

Mirror, Monterey Pop and a handful of others as the standard to match for concert films. Some delve into the atmosphere of the concert setting, going backstage, providing interviews, peering into the odd corner. Others focus almost completely on the music. But they all show discipline and care in the filming and editing. If they find a good angle from which to watch the action on a particular song, they stick with it for 30 seconds or a minute or even an entire song. If they cut away, there's always a good reason. Since the performers are so electric, these movies realize they don't have to cutcutcutcutcut like a frenetic MTV video in order to create some excitement.

Scorsese seems to have forgotten all of this while filming Shine A Light. He wastes 20 minutes or so on pre-concert silliness, such as the dull sight of watching the Stones meet Bill Clinton's mother or Scorsese hoping to get a set list before the show begins. Oh, the tension! Swooping cameras, massive banks of lights and tons of quick cutting only distract from the fact that the Stones are still a viable live act and can deliver. Two guest spots are highlights: Jack White has a blast and when Buddy Guy takes the stage even Scorsese knows to step back and enjoy the fireworks. But it's all too typical of this wasted effort that the film ends on such a ridiculous note -- not a shot of the Stones wearied after the concert or an ecstatic crowd but (I can hardly believe it) a FAKE point of view shot of Mick Jagger leaving the building which means the last person we see is not Mick or Keith but Scorsese, until the camera pans up to the night sky and a goofy cartoon emblem of the Stones takes the place of the moon. A wasted opportunity.

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Other music DVDs just out include *Darren Hayes: The Time Machine Tour* (\$15.99; Powdered Sugar), which has its share of quick cutting but is rescued for fans by a theatrical set and the best songs yet from the former Savage Garden singer, especially the one-two punch of "Words" and "Casey." *Love Story* (\$29.99; Start) is a brief (50 minutes) but interesting documentary on the mercurial 60s band Love and lead singer Arthur Lee which will send everyone right back to that band's masterpiece *Forever Changes*. And Daft Punk dispense with the concert film completely by delivering a feature film *Electroma* (\$22.98; Vice) that follows two robots traveling across America hoping (naturally) to become human - no Daft Punk music but vague and arty enough to play at the Cannes Film Festival, it's certainly visually striking.

Cult Movies -- Quentin Tarantino gives his movie geek stamp of approval to *Inglorious Bastards* (\$29.95; Severin), a *Dirty Dozen*-like war movie from 1978 presented in a 3 disc set that includes loads of extras and even a CD soundtrack. But if Tarantino likes it so much, why is he remaking it? *Bastards* is a good bad cult movie, while *Forbidden Zone* (\$19.95; Legend) is a bad bad cult movie now in color, a flick that can really only be enjoyed by people who like the weird and oddball for its own sake. This is not an undiscovered hoot like *Bastards* but just a strange, strange comedy remembered for the music of Danny Elfman and Herve Villechaize as the randy King Fausto of the Sixth Dimension. If you're intrigued by that description, this is the movie for you. *Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle* was the best sort of cult movie, a genuinely hilarious flick just left of center enough to make you feel like it belonged to you and not the entire world the way say *Juno* did. The very disappointing sequel -- *Harold & Kumar Escape From Guantanamo Bay* (\$28.99, \$34.99 Special Edition and \$35.99 BluRay; New Line) -- undercuts their post-racial hipness by making a fuss over their racial identities and downplays the sweetness in favor of a lot more crude jokes.

Movie Stars -- *Tyrone Power: Matinee Idol* (\$49.99; Fox) is a 10 movie collection of the box office superstar. But while Power was certainly pretty in his early days, it's hard to see how he broke out from the pack to gain leading man status. Watch *WarGames 25th Anniversary Edition* (\$14.98; MGM), the delightful drama about a hacker nearly starting World War III and you can tell immediately why Matthew Broderick would be around for years to come. (They've made a direct to DVD sequel/remake -- *WarGames: The Dead Code* (\$26.98; MGM) -- not that anyone was asking for one.) Ben Stiller wanted to be a leading man with more range than just comedies, but addiction drama *Permanent Midnight* (\$14.98; Lionsgate) failed to make people think of him as more than just the funny guy. It has to be depressing for him to realize that even a paper cut-out presented properly can hold center stage, as demonstrated in the charming silhouette animation of Michel Ocelot's *Princes and Princesses* (\$24.95; Kino). Also out at the same price is the more traditionally animated Ocelot film *Kirikou and the Wild Beast*.

TV on DVD -- Who would have imagined that *Two Fat Ladies* (\$59.99; Acorn) would prove such a hit? But these hilarious 24 cooking shows starring Jennifer and Clarissa prove every dish can be improved with loads of butter or slabs of bacon and that even a cooking show can be fun and amusing. *The Deal* (\$24.95; Genius) is the TV movie starring Michael Sheen as Tony Blair which pre-dated *The Queen* and showed Blair tussling for power with Gordon Brown. *Beverly Hills 90210 Fifth Season* (\$59.98; Paramount) comes along just in time to remind us of its heyday as the relaunching of the franchise begins this fall. And if you think soapy fun is easy to dish out, you haven't seen the tiresome but bizarrely popular show *The Hills Third Season* (\$39.98; Paramount). *Robin of Sherwood: The Complete Collection* (\$99.99; Acorn) is an early 80s spin on Robin Hood that goes the New Age route, as exemplified by the score from Clannad. Not for purists. *Dark Shadows: The Beginning Collection 5* (\$59.98; MPI) collects the episodes of the supernatural soap before the vampire Barnabas Collins appeared and made it a smash hit. *Law & Order Special Victims Unit Year 7* (\$59.98; Universal) rolls along just like the original thanks to leads Chris Meloni and Mariska Hargitay. *Stargate Continuum* (\$26.98; MGM) is a direct to DVD original movie in the indestructible scifi franchise, though it only includes a cameo by Richard Dean Anderson, so act accordingly. *Centennial* (\$59.98; Universal), a lumbering miniseries of the sort that TV used to turn out regularly tells the history of Colorado via an all-star cast of TV stars like Richard Chamberlain, Robert Conrad, Timothy Dalton, Sharon Gless, Sally Kellerman and Raymond Burr. And finally the disappointing re-release of *A History Of Britain* (\$39.95; BBC). Simon Schama is an engaging popularizer of history; it's just annoying that this widescreen production was cropped for US TV and remains butchered in this compact boxed set. With so many shows presented in widescreen and flat screen TVs so popular, such a decision is inexplicable.

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Sports -- *Surfwise* is a pretty good documentary about the famed Paskowitz surfing family (\$26.98; Magnolia). We certainly get the message that Doc Paskowitz isn't just a lovable rogue but has a dark side to him yet more questions are raised than answered by filmmakers who seem to have gained access at the expense of asking some blunt questions. *Joe Louis: America's Hero...Betrayed* (\$19.98; HBO) is a typically probing HBO documentary that looks at the fame and pressures that the Brown Bomber invariably rose above. And *WWE: Night of Champions 2008* (\$24.95; WWE) has 7 major clashes capped by Triple H taking on John Cena.

Kids Stuff -- The stuff kids watch and care about change constantly (although the Jonas Brothers are, like, forever). The latest TV show to catch their fancy? *Wizards of Waverly Place: Wizard School* (\$19.99; Disney), which lets kids indulge their Hogwarts fantasy. Tinier tykes can still be mesmerized by the basic antics of *The Wiggles: You Make Me Feel Like Dancing* (\$14.98; Warner Bros.), though really it hasn't been the same since Greg Page retired, has it? And two older cartoons prove kids can be engaged by anything with a little wit, no matter when it was made: *Tiny Toon Adventures* (\$44.98; Warner Bros.) and the fairly anarchic and funny *Freakazoid!* (\$26.98; Warner Bros.).

So what's your LEAST favorite concert film? For me, it's anything starring Bruce Springsteen. He's arguably the greatest live act in rock and roll today and yet in virtually every single concert film (from Brian DePalma's stiff video for "Dancing In The Dark" to his recent Seeger Sessions live shows), a brilliant live act has been mummified or sliced and diced on film until all the joy has been sucked out of it. A single camera placed 5th row center and just pointed at the stage would do a better job of capturing the Boss than all those concert films strung together.

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**terrierist** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of terrierist](#) [permalink](#)

Shine A Light in IMax was awesome. I agree that the opening dragged, but it made Jumpin Jack Flash even more awesome. The camerawork & editing were superb. I would have liked it even better if the backup singers and bass player Darryl Jones get more camera time.

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**garlicpowder** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of garlicpowder](#) [permalink](#)

Hey Mike- Monterey Pop is overrated, really. The audience is documented separately from the musical performances. I would imagine this is a result of a lack of cameras. Anyway, I think this makes it less exciting. For example, Otis Reddings historical performance has no reaction from the audience. I know the significance of the film and I like Monterey Pop but I dont love it. Also, Sinatra and Red Norvo,awesome disc but cant someone get rid of the hiss?

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**Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Re: Sinatra: that's why I'm looking for a great bootleg DVD. Obviously a clean audio for a great CD would be awesome too. I know what you mean about Monterey, but I think the lack of cameras was a good thing -- it forced them to choose and focus on certain things. I don't really need to see an audience member applaud when Otis is on fire. Plus that magical moment with Shankar is just great. But yes, it's perhaps cruder than future flicks. But don't you prefer it to Woodstock?

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**ohmemercylard** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of ohmemercylard](#) [permalink](#)

Huh. I saw Shine a Light in IMAX and had a helluva good time. I liked it. Sorry.

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**Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Well, the Stones are a great band and even with lots of cutting and the silly padding, you can't go too far wrong. I did think the Jack White and Buddy Guy spots were terrific (the Aguilera less so). I'm glad you enjoyed it and I bet it had more pop on IMAX. But have you seen Gimme Shelter? I think it's much much better.

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**PhillyQuaker** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of PhillyQuaker](#) [permalink](#)

I liked seeing Dylan as Alias in Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat\\_Garrett\\_and\\_Billy\\_the\\_Kid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat_Garrett_and_Billy_the_Kid)

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**Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Probably his best on-screen moment, though the bar is very very low :)

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**Guitarsandmore** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Guitarsandmore](#) [permalink](#)

"Surfwise" certainly is a documentary in a class all by itself. I never realized that people like that existed. I guess that's what they mean by "surf bums". It looks like they had boy babies until they had a

girl baby; then they stopped. One wonders if child 9 hadn't been a girl if they would have continued to have more children. How many kids will actually fit in a 24 foot camper anyway? Does Stanford admit to graduating this malcontent gypsy doctor? Are there more of them out there and are they contagious?

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 08:39 PM on 08/05/2008

3fingerbrown See Profile I'm a Fan of 3fingerbrown permalink

I'm cheating a little here because it isn't purely a "concert film," but Bob Dylan's "Renaldo and Clara" scarred me for life.

From what I recall, try as I might to blot out the memory, it was a dramatized account of Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue, with lots of concert footage and backstage scenes with director-star Dylan as Renaldo and his wife, Sara, as Clara. It was released (escaped?) in 1978 at 292 minutes, and I was one of the few, the brave, to see it at full length before it was cut in half to feature mostly the badly shot, poorly recorded concert footage.

All these years later, questions still haunt me: Did the girl I took to "Renaldo and Clara" ever fully recover from the ordeal? Did she later spawn a brood of hoofed-and-horned demon children due to prolonged exposure to Bob Dylan in clown-white makeup? Whatever became of the rescue helicopter Jimmy Carter sent to liberate the hostages ... I mean, audience?

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

You're a brave person indeed. Any movie in which Bob Dylan acts is to be avoided like the plague. The man has (obviously) conquered songwriting and rock n roll and radio shows (w his Theme Time Radio Hour, which is great fun) and even books with his terrific memoir. But acting -- never worked for him.

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dannyo152 See Profile I'm a Fan of dannyo152 permalink

In defense of Springsteen, maybe it's poor direction. I thought his MTV Unplugged performance was quite watchable. His No Nukes segment was good too (while the rest of the film was so-so).

Worst concert film, well for me, Woodstock. I tried to watch it once in a theatre, a few years ago as a matter of fact, and I couldn't make it to the end. Besides its running length, it seems some of the acts only released their B songs for inclusion, which makes it drag more.

The ABBA movie is also problematic, what with the added off-concert story-line combined with their touring in support of an album that had weak songs.

Isn't the problem that film people use camera motion and editing to produce excitement which overlays a distraction to viewing in that it forces focus. Another problem is that the contagious excitement of the crowd cannot make the leap from live to film/vtr. There's also the post-MTV phenomenon of blocking the stage a la the music video which then makes it impossible to compress back into frame.

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Finally (seriously) I found the MTV Unplugged concert very annoying because they didn't show the full song and commentary -- they'd cut into the song to show what Bruce said about it or fade out half way through his chat when he clearly had more to say or cut into the middle of the tune as if we'd get bored. They even did it on the DVD. Better than many of his concert films because it was so unusual but still....

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Gosh I can talk. Anyway, Woodstock is indeed problematic in many ways. You're exactly right about bad concert films - they cut and cut and cut to different camera angles because they think wrongly that it creates energy and excitement when in fact a great performance does that on its own and the cutting only distracts. I've seen plenty of concert films like the ones mentioned above (and Flamenco, a great dance/music film) where the energy of the performance and the crowd is captured to know it can be done. In the revival of The Last Waltz in NYC, the paying audience I saw it with broke into spontaneous applause after each great number. In Cannes, they showed it on the beach and the French people did the same thing after the stunning version of "The Weight" and then kept it up during the rest of the film. The staging and spect ratio can be fluid and should be set during a concert being filmed with the movie in mind, a la Stop Making Sense. It can be done. Most directors are just dumn and

Scorsese should have known better.

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[-] **DCDan** See Profile I'm a Fan of DCDan permalink

Great article, Mr. Giltz.

Seems to bear mentioning -- and brings the discussion full circle -- that one of the editors of the Woodstock movie was . . . Martin Scorsese! He first cut his teeth in filming music with this project (believe he was one of the cameramen at the festival as well). Supposedly, one of Scorsese's next projects is a documentary on the life and music of Bob Marley.

I would disagree with the assertion that Monterey Pop is overrated. It's a taut, well-paced film that holds up exceptionally well 40 years after its release. I would say, however, that D. A. Pennebaker's other best-known doc is somewhat over-regarded; that being, Don't Look Back, from Dylan's 1965 UK tour.

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[-] **Guitarsandmore** See Profile I'm a Fan of Guitarsandmore permalink

You have to remember that the movie "Woodstock" is now almost 40 years old and science and technology have marched way past this movie. When this movie was originally released (somewhere around 1970) the technology used to create the film was more state of the art and it was great fun to see the music festival of a generation documented for all to see. I still like this movie despite itself as there are too many good memories from that era to dislike it.

Try the DVD of the George Harrison concert "Bangladesh" also from about the same time frame but somehow done with more loving care and attention paid to the sound quality. The camera angles are less creative and probably more to your liking.

Many, many, Grateful Dead movies have been made with excruciating detail paid to the sound quality and visual treats resulting in a superior product.

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[-] **Michael Giltz** See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Danny, it's DEFINITELY poor direction and editing. Springsteen is a magnetic live performer and it's almost laughable how poorly he's been served by videos and concert films. On his compilation DVD of videos and live performances, there's an early performance of Springsteen singing "The River" where the camera is focused solely on him for virtually the entire song. (It's a midframe shot I think where you're looking at him fairly dead on. There's a harsh red stage light behind his head and during the song Springsteen occasionally tilts this way and that and he's almost completely obscured/hidden by the red light when his head isn't blocking it from that camera. But there's little cutting during the song, even though this is "wrong" and the light should be a distraction. Springsteen talks to intro the song (which is clearly new, the album is just out or maybe coming out) and he's so absorbed in the song that you can't take your eyes off him. When he moves a tad and the red light bleeds in, the tension is great, somehow just emotionally right and then he moves back and you can see him clearly again and it's just devastatingly good. I've joked to people I show the clip to that I would GLADLY watch that entire concert from the single angle. That's not obviously how I would shoot him for an entire show, but I sure as heck wouldn't make 30 cuts during each tune just to maintain "excitement."

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[-] **Guitarsandmore** See Profile I'm a Fan of Guitarsandmore permalink

On stage Springsteen draws himself up into a powerhouse of high volume, high emotion music with an intensity second to none. Off stage and in interviews he has this quiet, quiet, shy little voice, kind of like "little boy telling stories and jokes" and throwing stones into the water on the way to the fishin hole hands in pocket, looking down, and shuffling his feet and grinning all the way. He's like the good natured kid that sat next to you in high school. What a transformation this guy goes through on the stage! That's the thing that always really struck me about Springsteen. Oh, yeah and his music is pretty good too!

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 **Nunziato** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Nunziato](#) [permalink](#)

I find most concert films boring and unwatchable, simply because, as you said, "a single camera placed 5th row center and just pointed at the stage would do a better job" than most directors. I admit, I loved "Shine A Light" in iMax and found myself cheering in the theatre after songs. This film would never work on home video. But as wonderful as "The Last Waltz" is, I gave up watching concert films after one of my favorite bands of all time, released the absolute worst concert film of all time, Led Zeppelin's "The Song Remains the Same." The editing is so horrific, you see Jimmy Page's face during the guitar solo in "No Quarter," and his fingers during Plant's vocals.

As for the "5th row, single cam" theory, one of the best concerts I have ever seen on DVD, is actually a bootleg of U2 from Irving Plaza. It was pro-shot from a tri-pod in front of the soundboard, about halfway back. Your perspective of the entire performance, is the exact perspective you would have had if you had attended the show. Why is that less exciting to watch? Why aren't more music videos and concert films recorded this way?

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 **Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

The Zep concert is insanely goofy -- and you didn't even mention the faux Tolkien segments. The U2 bootleg sounds very satisfying and is probably better than most concert films of theirs (though I actually like the film version Rattle and Hum, unlike most people). Certainly that very basic approach is a good starting point. Imagination and great intimate angles can give you an experience far superior to sitting in that fifth row (we can't usually hover over the drummer or see the byplay between singer and guitarist from the side of the stage), but they should always be asking WHY are they cutting in the middle of a sentence to a camera placed in the balcony and then 10 seconds later to a camera swooping in and then a camera behind the band and then a camera from the back of the auditorium. I'm not caling for a lack of imagination, but time and again in the best concert films you see the camera find a great perspective and then stay there until emotionally or musically there's a reason for cutting away to another angle. I avoid bootlegs however because there's just so much darn stuff to listen to officially that bootlegs scare me. Unless it's Sinatra during that Australian tour with Red Norvo, I don't want to be tempted.

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 **jvarga** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of jvarga](#) [permalink](#)

Michael did you know that Starship Troopers 3 comes out on DVD tomorrow? I'm sure it will be even worse than Starship Troopers 2, especially since the commercial for it showed the stunningly bad battle suit cgi. Undoubtedly I'll go try and buy it tomorrow at best buy, but yeah, I have pretty low expectations. Somehow Denise Richards' character isn't in it, but Casper Van Diem obviously had nothing else to do :P

The only concert dvds I have are Pink Floyd's Pulse, and Roger Water's In The Flesh, both of which were good. Its hard for pink floyd to have a dvd represent the live show, unless your tv room is shooting gigawatt lasers at you and has giant inflatable pigs, so I can see that as being similar to Springsteen's dvds not representing his showmanship. The Roger Waters concert I saw was pretty low key, they even had a couch on stage where he and some of the musicians sat and drank tea while guitar solos were going on, so it didn't lose much in the transition to my apartment.

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 **Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Maybe the Roger Waters/Pink Floyd concerts need to be shot in 3-D and will have to wait for the home stereo media systems that can do them justice. I may be one of the few people who ranks The Final Cut right after Dark Side, though I can't say much for Hitchhiking and his official solo work. Still, the idea of them drinking tea during a guitar solo is hilarious. While those spectacles may be hard to capture (the theatricality might not translate and it's like watching a videotape of a Broadway musical -- you get the idea but it's not the same). And yet, that's not the problem with Springsteen -- if the directors and editors would just get out of the way, he could certainly be captured wonderfully on film. Sadly, I have not been sent Starship Troopers 3 or I would gladly review it (and hopefully any new group shower scenes).

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