

When rock was young

Cavett DVD captures legends

By MICHAEL GILTZ

TALK show legend Dick Cavett can't play an instrument, can't really sing and never really listens to rock 'n' roll.

But rock stars loved him.

"Dick Cavett: Rock Icons" (Shout; \$39.98) is the first in a series of DVD boxed sets that presents complete, uncut episodes of Cavett's Emmy-winning talk show.

It's filled with performances and interviews with rockers like Jefferson Airplane (just back from Woodstock), Stevie Wonder, Paul Simon, Sly & The Family Stone, George Harrison, the Rolling Stones, Janis Joplin and others.

"I don't know why they all agreed to come on my show," says Cavett, who once hit the cover of Time but admits he was so clueless about the rock lifestyle (ie. drugs) that his staff had to explain what the paraphernalia the rockers left behind was used for.

One hilarious interview finds a nervous and very fey David Bowie stroking a cane and sniffing very loudly throughout his interview.

Cavett insists he was naive about the goings-on behind the scenes of these shows, which were taped in a Broadway house in the early '70s just around the corner from the Ed Sullivan Theatre (where David Letterman's "Late Show" is taped today).

"Does sniffing indicate coke? I'm so innocent. I could never really tell," says Cavett. "I knew something was operating besides themselves, but I never knew quite what it was or how to spot the variety of available drugs . . ."

But tellingly, what Cavett remembers most about Bowie was an unexpected and poignant response to a question about his mother (Bowie's father had already died).

"I think she has a day job," said Bowie. And how does she explain her son to friends? "I think she pretends I'm not hers," he says. After laughing a bit nervously, Bowie adds, "We were never that close, particularly. We have an understanding."

Coming next month is a set de-



Old TV pearl: Janis Joplin with her favorite interviewer, Dick Cavett.

voted to frequent guest Ray Charles and, in November, one devoted to John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

Sly Stone mumbled most of his answers "during their chat, kept saying "I like you," to Cavett and got bored.

Grace Slick tried to remain above it all by calling Cavett "Jim." (He responds mock angrily, "You've got to learn my name, Miss Joplin!" Everyone laughs: Cavett never pretended to be hip, but he wasn't a pushover either.)

But one disc in this first set is devoted to perhaps Cavett's most important and memorable musical guest of all: Janis Joplin, who loved doing the show. And no wonder: Cavett brought out the sweet, funny and delightful person she truly was.

Whether she's extolling the virtues of F. Scott Fitzgerald or engaging in a surreal battle of wits with Raquel Welch, Joplin shined with Cavett.

On one show, Cavett jokes that he's up on all the latest lingo. "Yeah," says Joplin. "I can tell you're a real swinger by the shoes you're wearing."

Cavett barely drank but Joplin once got him stoned on a joint big enough to impress Cheech & Chong. Cavett returned the favor by taking Joplin out to a fancy New York restaurant.

Cavett misses Joplin still.

Watching episode after episode of Cavett — filled with fascinating guests, witty and informed conversation and terrific music — you realize we miss Cavett, too.