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Live From Your Living Room Vol. 7

We review *From the Basement* and *Metal Machine Music*.

by **Laura Ferreiro**

March 12, 2009 - In this recurring column we highlight the latest and greatest live concert and music DVDs and Blu-Ray discs released that month. Each month we will break down the strong points and low points of each disc, outlining features and content, as well as providing brief critiques. For each highlighted disc, we will offer a general score and individual ratings in three major criterion: video, audio, and extras. As always, we use a 10-point system on our rating scale, so steer clear of anything hitting below a 6.0 in all three areas.

This week we look at two distinctly different approaches to documenting musical history. The first, *From The Basement*, captures intimate studio performances from some of today's most compelling artists (Radiohead, Beck, The White Stripes) with not a single word of dialogue, commentary or interview footage to complicate the proceedings. Meanwhile, *Metal Machine Music* uses interviews with experts and former band members as well as archival concert footage to paint a picture of Nine Inch Nails and explain the band's role in the evolution of industrial music and rock history. It would be a must-see for any fans of the genre if it weren't for one vital missing ingredient.

From The Basement (DVD)

It's not easy to capture the magic and energy of a live performance in the studio, but this DVD featuring the creme de la creme of contemporary indie musicians gets everything just right. *From The Basement* boasts a who's-who roster of artists including Radiohead, The White Stripes, Beck, The Shins, Sonic Youth, PJ Harvey and Eels, who all manage to deliver heartfelt, mesmerizing performances that give viewers the sense that they're a fly on the wall of these intimate studio sessions.

Unlike many performance DVDs, this one contains no interview footage, no announcer and no dialogue of any kind -- choosing instead to focus solely on the performances. Far from boring, this no-frills approach really works, thanks largely to the caliber of the musicians, the high-quality sound and the competent, innovative camera work. No one hides behind any production trickery here -- it's all laid bare for the audience to see what's really going on.

Radiohead get things rolling with two songs from their most recent album *In Rainbows*, and their engaging, beautiful performance makes it easy to see why they're widely considered one of the best bands on the planet. Next up is The White Stripes, who deliver their performance like it's meant for a huge audience rather than studio techs, which, of course, it is. Sharply dressed in their trademark black and red, Jack and Meg White breeze through rewed-up renditions of "Blue Orchid" and "Red Rain," making way for Beck, who's joined by a full band including his buddy Jamie Lidell. After providing back-up vocals for Beck, Lidell stays behind to do a track of his own. The towel around his neck seems an odd fashion choice, until we realize it's there so he can wipe the sweat from his brow during his intense a capella beat-box performance.

The parade of captivating performances never relents -- there's not a stinker in the bunch. It's also interesting to see how each artist uses the studio space differently. PJ Harvey, for example, brings in her own keepsakes to make the studio feel more like home, while Damien Rice performs barefooted on his knees on a Persian rug, which makes it seem as if he's in his own living room. There are no bonus features here, and although it might have been nice to see an interview or two, the lack of them adds to the mystique. The series originally aired on the Independent Film Channel at the end of 2008, and we should count ourselves lucky that someone had the good sense to make it into a DVD for those who missed this stellar series the first time around.

Dolby Digital Stereo DTS Surround Sound.

The Video: 9/10

The Audio: 9/10

The Extras: N/A

Overall: 9/10