

REVIEWS

MUMFORD & SONS LIVE FROM SOUTH AFRICA: DUST AND THUNDER

EAGLE VISION/GLASSNOTE/
UNIVERSAL
(BLU-RAY)

★★★★★

With their last album, "The Very Best & Beatenberg," Mumford & Sons created an absolute bond with their South African audience, underscored by sharing their billing with Senegalese singer and guitarist Baaba Maal. The populist propriety that propelled them to seemingly instant success found a perfect pairing with Maal and his musicians, a scenario that echoed Paul Simon's collaboration with Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the cultural crossover Johnny Clegg instilled in both his bands, Juluka and Savuka. Like those earlier instances, any distinction in language, origin or tradition was immediately relegated to the back burner.

Not surprisingly then, "Live From South Africa: Dust and Thunder" effectively rekindles that kinship, not only through the participation of the South African musicians who crowd the stage towards the end of the set, but also by the band itself simply doing what it does best. They have the crowd mesmerized from the first notes and hushed tones of "Snake Eyes," so that by the time they commence their second song, "I Will Wait," the crowd is singing along en masse. The sea of cell-phones and white faces



seems to stretch back hundreds of yards in a stadium packed to capacity with rabid fans who eagerly anticipate every riff and embrace every melody. Only three albums in, the Mumfords cast an aura of superstardom. The stadium setting belies the intimate appeal of their melodies and softly burnished narratives, and yet, in the audience's enamoured embrace, passion and poignancy find common ground. Played out amongst the quietly stirring anthems that embody the bulk of these seventeen songs, "Awake My Soul," "Ghosts That We Knew" and "Lover of the Light" combine revelry, reverence and a clear purity of purpose.

It's nearly impossible to watch "Live From South Africa: Dust and Thunder" and not feel inspired, impressed, or both. The sway that the Mumfords hold over their admirers becomes akin to a kind of religious revival, where everyone – artist and audience – are caught up in the spell of absolute elation. An epiphany of sorts, it's hard to imagine this as anything other than a highpoint in a still nascent career.

– Lee Zimmerman



SHOOT ON THE FRONTIER

Angel Air (CD)

★★★★★

Drummer Jim McCarty's ongoing devotion to The Yardbirds, the band he helped found and continues to helm, is certainly admirable, even 50 years past its prime. There are ample reasons of course, not the least of which has to do with maintaining a hallowed name, one well respected for its role in the first wave of the British invasion. The fact that McCarty remains the sole original member could cause a feeling of suspicion that he's merely banking in on the brand to further his commercial commerce. Ah, that's for the more cynical to decide, although from all accounts the current Yardbirds line-up remains formidable indeed.

It's also worth noting that McCarty hasn't always clung to The Yardbirds' name. His initial outing following the band's break-up came by way of Illusion, which found him paired with Yardbirds' vocalist Keith Relf. That band, in turn, paved the way for Renaissance, which McCarty helped launch before forming Shoot, a group that found him switching to keys and lead vocals in order to take the helm. Members of Manfred Mann's Chapter Three and Third World War, as well as Renaissance veteran and future Strawbs keyboardist John Hawken, joined in support. The band made only a scant number of live appearances and managed only a single album, "On the Frontier," now reissued by Britain's highly laudable Angel Air label with two radio sessions tagged on for good measure. Nevertheless, it's a somewhat elusive set of songs, jazzy to a degree, with a hint of Southern California country as well, and sweeping in its set-up. Still, a closer listen reveals several hidden gems – the supremely melodic "The Neon Life," "Ships and Sails" and the title track (belatedly covered by a McCarty-less Renaissance) among them. Sadly though, nothing made what's best described as an immediate impression, possibly due to McCarty's less than emphatic vocals, and the album failed to register enough to justify a follow up.

It's little wonder then that The Yardbirds remained the better option. Nevertheless, there's something to be said for the album's sensual sound, making it more than a mere curio and a still-worthy part of The Yardbirds' lingering legacy.

– Lee Zimmerman