

CD Review



Various Artists
"When We Were Kings"
 The DAS Label/Mercury Records
 Grade: A-

Most film soundtracks contain a lot of music that sound as if it belongs in the film, but really doesn't have anything to do with the film — meaning it was either a tossed off b-side from a well-respected artist, a quirky cover song by an even quirkier modern rock band or a song that everyone has heard before.

Not the case with "When We Were Kings," which is a long-awaited documentary about "The Rumble in the Jungle," the name that traditionally has been associated with the 1974 heavyweight championship bout between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman.

The inclusion of two live songs by James Brown — "The Payback" and "Gonna Have a Funky Good Time" — alone would warrant the purchase of this disc. But executive producers David Sonenberg and Scot McCracken didn't stop there, throwing in an exciting blend of traditional African music and old-school blues and soul standards by African-American artists, including the Spinners' "I'll Be Around" and Bill Withers' hauntingly good medley of "Ain't No Sunshine" and "You."

Live tracks by B.B. King and the Jazz Crusaders round out the disc's coverage of the live music event, while brief but fantastic dialogue clips from Muhammad Ali provide both comic relief and memories of Ali when he still ruled the boxing world.

The new tracks on the CD are less consistent, with the efforts from Brian McKnight, Diana King and Zelma Davis falling flat before they even have a chance to pick themselves up.

But the disc's first track, a pass-the-mic groove produced by the Fugees' Wyclef, more than makes up for any of the other new material's weaknesses. The song, "Rumble in the Jungle," features all three members of the Fugees as well as A Tribe Called Quest, Busta Rhymes and Forte.

The result of all these elements is a soundtrack that pays homage to Muhammad Ali, the music of the era that spawned his greatness and the sport of boxing — all at once. And that is no small feat.

— Jeff Randall



Various Artists
"Suburbia"
 Geffen Records
 Grade: B

"Suburbia," the latest film from "Slacker" king Richard Linklater, looks to be more of his usual fare — jaded kids set against a backdrop of all-too-mellow parents, police officers and other trappings of suburban life.

And no greater evidence of this exists than the songs on the film's soundtrack.

A low-key collection of alternative rock mainstays, the "Suburbia" soundtrack is effective in that it does actually sound like a mix tape made by one of Linklater's 20-something-and-younger characters.

Sonic Youth figures heavily into the music mix, contributing three tracks as a group and one from their frontman, noise-rock icon Thurston Moore.

Groove rockers Girls Against Boys contribute "Bullet Proof Cupid," a track from their magnificent 1993 release, "Venus Luxure No. 1 Baby." Other previously released numbers include "Cult" from the now-defunct Canadian industrial band Skinny Puppy and "Human Cannonball," an oldie-but-goodie from the Butthole Surfers.

More noticeably, Beck makes his first soundtrack appearance with "Feather in My Cap," an outtake from "Odelay" that relies heavily on acoustic guitar and Beck's twisted lyrical abilities as the bearer of hip-hop folk for the next generation.

Another unlikely appearance is that of Pavement frontman Stephen Malkmus with England's reheated new-wave purveyors, Elastica.

Boss Hogg turn in the requisite '70s rock cover song with "I'm Not Like Everybody Else," a Kinks tune that probably was better left a few decades back.

At the very least, this soundtrack is an interesting collection of music from virtually every corner of modern rock's wide-ranging spectrum.

At it's best, the soundtrack to "Suburbia" is proof of new and groundbreaking music in the post-Nirvana haze of pale imitators and label-hyped money sponges.

And as an added bonus, it provides a little shot of angst-stroking for all of us suburb-bred kids.

— Jeff Randall



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