

# MOVIES



▲ James Brown

## UNDER AFRICAN SKIES

Take a trip into Africa with these two musically themed documentary films.

### SOUL POWER

★★★☆☆

DIRECTOR: JEFFREY LEVY-HINTE

### YOUSSEU N'DOUR: I BRING WHAT I LOVE

★★★★☆

DIRECTOR: ELIZABETH CHAI VASARHELYI

AFRICA SERVES AS the setting for two new music-themed documentaries designed to get moviegoers grooving during these hot summer months. One is *Soul Power*, which chronicles Zaire '74, a star-studded music festival organized to coincide with Muhammad Ali and George Foreman's legendary Rumble in the Jungle title bout. The three-night concert featured performances by James Brown, B.B. King and Celia Cruz, and was recorded for posterity by the same film crew that documented the fight (footage that later became the acclaimed documentary *When We Were Kings*). Unfortunately, the same legal troubles that kept that movie in limbo for almost two decades also confined the Zaire '74 material to the vault until *Kings* editor Jeffrey Levy-Hinte accepted the challenge of assembling this



▲ B.B. King

rarely seen footage into a feature. It shouldn't be a surprise that *Soul Power* is at its best when the focus remains on the music—seeing Brown and King in their prime is unquestionably electrifying. But

*Soul Power* is at its best when the focus remains on the music.

the rest of the movie is a haphazard mash-up of behind-the-scenes moments and random appearances by Ali. *Soul Power* will likely play better on DVD, where you can skip directly to the performances.

While Brown was wowing crowds in Zaire, a 15-year-old Senegalese singer named Youssou N'Dour was embarking on a groundbreaking career that would eventually lead him to become Africa's biggest-selling recording

artist and a colleague of such renowned musicians as Paul Simon and Peter Dinklage (those are N'Dour's soaring vocals on Gabriel's generation-defining classic, "In Your Eyes"). Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi's award-winning doc *Youssou N'Dour: I Bring What I Love* provides a compelling overview of N'Dour's life, paying particular attention to his 2004 Grammy-winning album, *Egypt*, which explored his Islamic faith through

songs that married folk sounds with traditional religious music, an approach that sparked significant controversy among Senegal's devout Muslim population. Don't be surprised if you feel the urge to create an all-N'Dour playlist after seeing this buoyant, music-soaked film. **ETHAN ALTER**

#### SOUL POWER

SEE IT RENT IT SKIP IT

#### YOUSSEU N'DOUR

SEE IT RENT IT SKIP IT

### Influencing the Influencers

Like Youssou N'Dour's effect on Western music, these artists benefited from African sounds.

#### Talking Heads

*Fear of Music*  
1979 On their third record, New York's original hipster band moved away from the art-house punk stylings of their formative CBGB years, experimenting with more complex African-influenced beats.

#### Paul Simon

*Graceland*  
1986 The more successful half of Simon & Garfunkel employed a whole army of South African musicians—including vocal group Ladysmith Black Mambazo—to craft his celebrated sixth solo album.

#### Ry Cooder

*Talking Timbuktu*  
1994 Before he met Cuba's Buena Vista Social Club, the globe-trotting musician teamed up with acclaimed Malian guitarist Ali Farka Touré to record this Grammy-winning album.

#### Béla Fleck

*Throw Down Your Heart*  
2009 Eager to learn about the roots of his signature instrument, the banjo, the New York-born picker traveled to Africa to record his latest album—a journey that was filmed and turned into a documentary of the same name. **EA**