

January-February 2014

Video Librarian

VOL. 29 ■ THE VIDEO REVIEW MAGAZINE FOR LIBRARIES ■ NO. 1



IN THIS ISSUE

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More Than Honey

★★★★1/2

(2012) 91 min. DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$349 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). Kino Lorber.



Swiss director Markus Imhoof's *More Than Honey*—centering on the mysterious disappearance of the honeybee worldwide—takes an intimate and artistic approach to the subject, offering close-up views on the world of the hive (the film is Switzerland's official Academy Award submission). Imhoof starts by profiling Fred Jaggi, an alpine man who feels no need for protective gear ("I'm not a sissy"). Although his family's cannery business once revolved around fruits and vegetables, today it's all about bees and honey. As Jaggi notes, "they fed our family," and beekeeping seems to suit him fine until the queen makes a move that devastates his colonies (fortunately, breeders can create more queens, allowing Jaggi to start all over again). From there, Imhoof turns his attention to a migratory beekeeper who travels through North Carolina, California, and Washington state, helping farmers pollinate fruit and nut crops. And viewers also meet

a New Mexico beekeeper who switched to killer bees when he discovered that they are more productive, require fewer resources, and boast harder immune systems (however, unlike Jaggi, he has to suit up to handle these African-born bees). Imhoof even takes a brief trip to China, where laborers painstakingly pollinate trees by hand, before concluding in Western Australia with his biologist son-in-law, who is raising healthier bees that could be instrumental in stemming the tide of colony collapse disorder, which—to Imhoof—seems to be more of a multi-faceted problem involving a variety of harmful factors. Peter Scherer's string-based score adds to the elegiac tone, while actor John Hurt serves as narrator (the original German version is also included here). Extras include an interview with Imhoof, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a photo gallery. Boasting exquisite macro-cinematography by Jörg Jeshel that takes viewers down to the microscopic level inside the world of bees, this is a gorgeous-looking and thought-provoking documentary—with a cover quote from Albert Einstein that reminds us: "if bees were to disappear from the globe, mankind would only have four years left to live." Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

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- Colin Murray, Graphic Novelist



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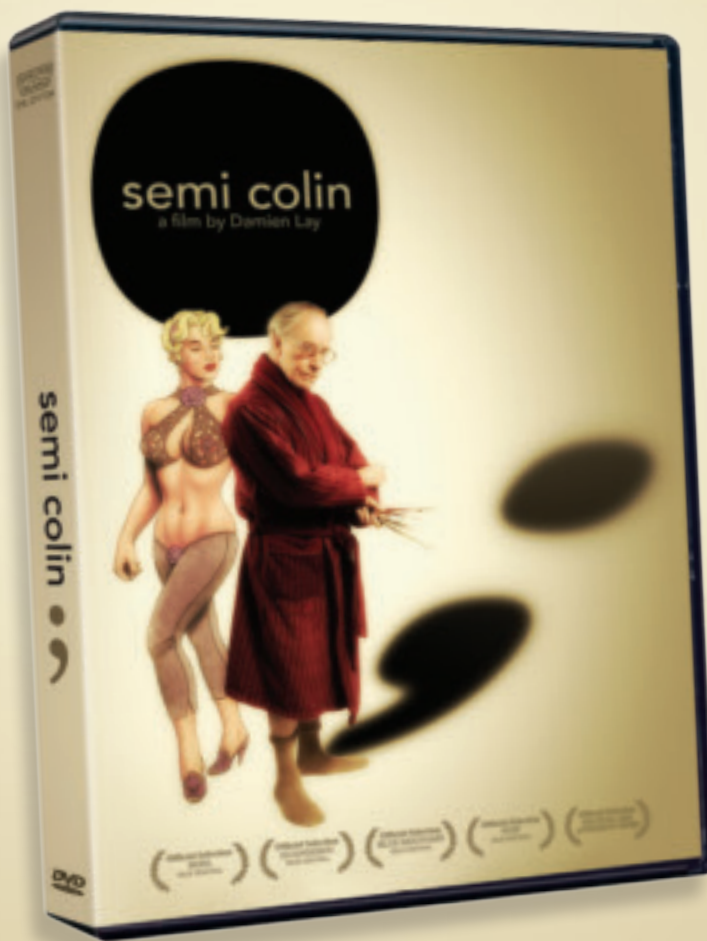
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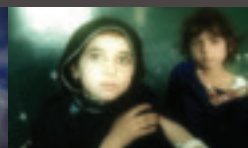
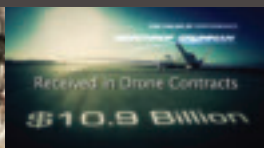


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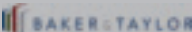
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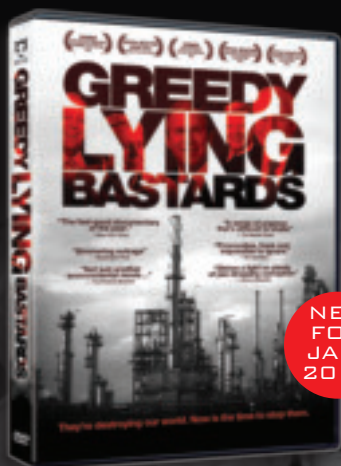
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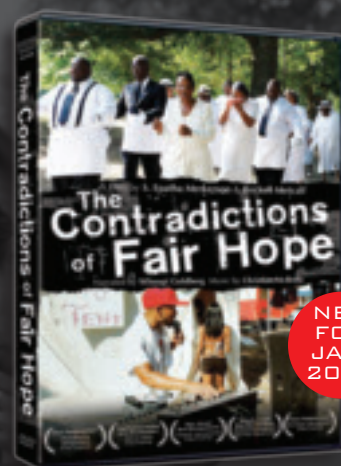
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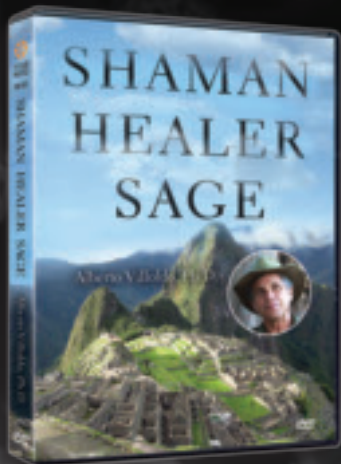
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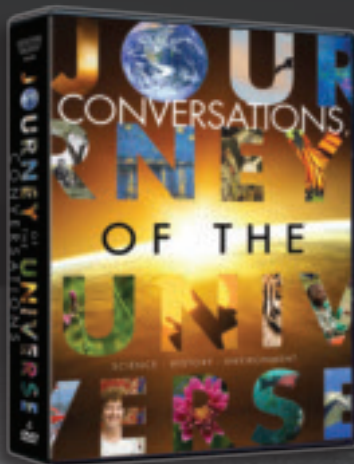
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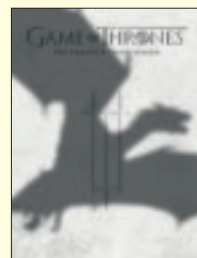
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Video Newsbriefs

F.W. Murnau's "Sunrise" Bows on Blu-ray on January 14 from 20th Century Fox

20th Century Fox Studio Classics has announced the Blu-ray debut of the 1929 Academy Award-winning classic *Sunrise* (Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99), slated for release on January 14. Director F.W. Murnau's story of betrayal and redemption earned Oscars at the first Academy Awards ceremony in 1929 for the most "Unique and Artistic Picture," Best Actress (Janet Gaynor), and Best Cinematography. The love and loyalty of a farmer and his wife are put to the ultimate test in this classic silent film that utilized the groundbreaking Fox Movietone sound system—making it one of the first studio films with a true soundtrack, featuring music and sound effects. Presenting both the original Fox Movietone and European silent versions, extras include audio commentary by ASC cinematographer John Bailey, outtakes, the screenplay, and restoration notes.

inated series at the 2013 Emmy Awards follows the battling families of the Seven Kingdoms, who continue to fight for power as bonds are strained, loyalties are tested, and cruel fates are met



in this acclaimed show based on George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy novels. DVD/Blu-ray extras include production featurettes, extended and deleted scenes, and audio commentaries. Exclusive to the Blu-ray release are interactive guides, illustrated histories, and behind-the-scenes segments on the pivotal episode "The Rains of Castamere."

"The Jungle Book: Diamond Edition" Blu-ray Slated for February 11 from Walt Disney

Walt Disney Studios has announced the upcoming high-definition debut of the animated classic *The Jungle Book: Diamond Edition* (DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99), arriving February 11. Based on Rudyard Kipling's classic 1894 novel, the 1967 song-filled celebration of friendship, fun, and adventure was Disney's 19th animated masterpiece. Featuring jazzy, toe-tapping songs—including "I Wan'na Be Like You" and the Academy Award-nominated classic "The Bare Necessities"—the story follows young boy Mowgli on a fun-filled journey with unforgettable characters, including wise panther Bagheera, jazzy King Louie, hypnotic snake Kaa, and lovable, happy-go-lucky bear Baloo. Bonus features will include intros by Diane Disney Miller and lyricist Richard M. Sherman, an alternate ending, the production featurettes "Sparkling Creativity" and "Music, Memories & Mowgli," a "Bear-E-Oke" sing-along, and more.

Corrections

In our "highly recommended" review of Shelter Island/TDC's *Wings of a Warrior: The Jimmy Doolittle Story* on page 77 of the November/December 2013 issue, the videographic header information was accidentally cut off—the line beneath the title should have read: "(2013) 84 min. DVD: \$14.98. (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-939517-08-1." Also in the same issue, the *Editor's Choice* review of The Cinema Guild's *Step Up to the Plate* on page 67 should have had 4 stars, not 3. We apologize for the errors.

"Downton Abbey: Season 4" Hits January 28 from PBS

On January 28, PBS Distribution will release *Downton Abbey: Season 4* (DVD: 3 discs, \$49.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$54.99), compiling the fourth season of the Emmy, Golden Globe, and Screen Actors Guild award-winning ensemble drama—created and written by Julian Fellowes—that has become the most-watched drama in PBS history. The new season brings new cast members, including Paul Giamatti as Cora's playboy brother, Harold, and returning stars Hugh Bonneville, Laura Carmichael, Lily James, Elizabeth McGovern, and Dame Maggie Smith. Six months after the events at the end of the third season, the Crawleys are beginning to recover from tragedy, and the servants are also bucking up, with new arrivals, departures, rivalries, and betrayals among the downstairs staff.

Third Season of "Game of Thrones" Arrives February 18 from HBO

Game of Thrones: The Complete Third Season (DVD: 5 discs, \$59.99; Blu-ray/DVD Combo: 7 discs, \$79.98) is slated for release on February 18 from HBO Home Video. Part political thriller, part epic fantasy, the 2013 third season introduced TV viewers to the fabled and controversial "Red Wedding." Starring Lena Headey, Emilia Clarke, and Peter Dinklage, the most nom-

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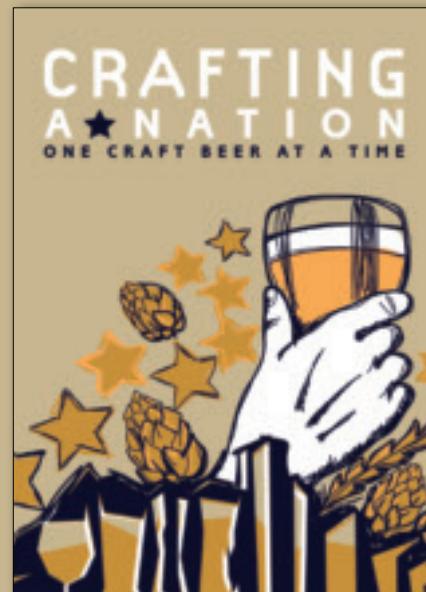
The American craft beer industry is unlike any industry ever seen before in America. It began its rise during the worst economic crisis in America since the Great Depression.

In 2012, as the craft beer movement was sweeping the country, a team of visionary young filmmakers with a passion for both documentary film and craft beer, set out to tell the story of how the American Dream is alive and well. The feature-length documentary film, *Crafting A Nation*, is the result.

Filmed in California, Colorado, Texas, Missouri, Delaware, Massachusetts, Minnesota and North Carolina, *Crafting A Nation* features breweries, small businesses, and individuals across America. Individuals with passion and dedication. Individuals with the single-minded focus and determination needed to beat the long odds presented by the economic downturn. *Crafting A Nation* is about the craft brewing movement, but it's much more than that. It's about entrepreneurship, vision, and the American Dream.

"When the young director of *Beer Culture*, a documentary about the success of Colorado breweries, saw how well the film was received, he decided to tell the larger story: that American craft breweries are buoying the national economy. *Crafting a Nation* takes the viewer into the cold storage and barrel rooms of a slew of breweries, large and small, across the country." - *Beer Advocate Magazine*

"The film is inspiring and you'll find yourself rooting for Chad, Carissa, and Branden from Black Shirt Brewing each step of the way as Kolicko, Harris and the rest of the film crew capture their story with artful cinematography, soulful interviews, and a touch of empathy." - *Growler Mag*



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The following films based on books are slated to open during January and February. Movie release dates are subject to change.

Coming in January

The Adventurer: The Curse of the Midas Box (Jan. 10) is based on *Mariah Mundi: The Midas Box*, the 2007 first novel in G.P. Taylor's YA fantasy series. Directed by Jonathan Newman, the film stars Aneurin Barnard as teen



Labor Day (Jan. 31) is adapted from Joyce Maynard's 2009 coming-of-age novel. Directed by Jason Reitman, the film stars Kate Winslet, Josh Brolin, and Dylan Minnette.



Coming in February

The Monuments Men (Feb. 7) is based on Robert M. Edsel's 2009 nonfiction book *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*. Directed by George Clooney, the star-studded WWII drama features Clooney, Matt Damon, Cate Blanchett, and John Goodman.



About Last Night (Feb. 14) is a contemporary update of David Mamet's 1974 play *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and Edward Zwick's 1986 film adaptation. Directed by Steve Pink, the romantic comedy stars Kevin Hart, Michael Ealy, and Regina Hall.



Endless Love (Feb. 14) is based on Scott Spencer's 1979 novel and Franco Zeffirelli's 1981 film adaptation. Directed by Shana Feste, the romantic drama about a teen couple's love affair stars Alex Pettyfer, Gabriella Wilde,



and Bruce Greenwood.

Vampire Academy (Feb. 14) is based on the 2007 first book in Richelle Mead's six-part YA paranormal romance novel series. Directed by Mark Waters, the film stars Zoey Deutch, Lucy Fry, and Joely Richardson.



Winter's Tale (Feb. 14) is based on Mark Helprin's NYC-set 1983 fantasy novel. Directed by Akiva Goldsman, the film stars Will Smith, Jennifer Connelly, Russell Crowe, and Colin Farrell as central character Peter Lake.



In Secret (Feb. 21) is based on Émile Zola's 1867 novel *Thérèse Raquin* and a 1991 play adaptation by Neal Bell. Director Charlie Stratton's romantic murder drama stars Elizabeth Olsen, Tom Felton, and Jessica Lange.



Looking Ahead

Slated for March is **Divergent**, director Neil Burger's adaptation of the 2011 first installment in Veronica Roth's dystopian sci-fi YA trilogy, starring Shailene Woodley, Theo James, and Kate Winslet.



Coming in April is **Heaven is for Real**, based on Christian pastor Todd Burpo's 2010 *New York Times* bestseller *Heaven is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back*. Directed by Randall Wallace, the drama stars Greg Kinnear, Kelly Reilly, and Thomas Haden Church.



Slated for May is **Inherent Vice**, director Paul Thomas Anderson's adaptation of Thomas Pynchon's 2009 detective novel, featuring a star-studded cast that includes Jena Malone, Josh Brolin, Joaquin Phoenix, Reese Witherspoon, and Benicio Del Toro.



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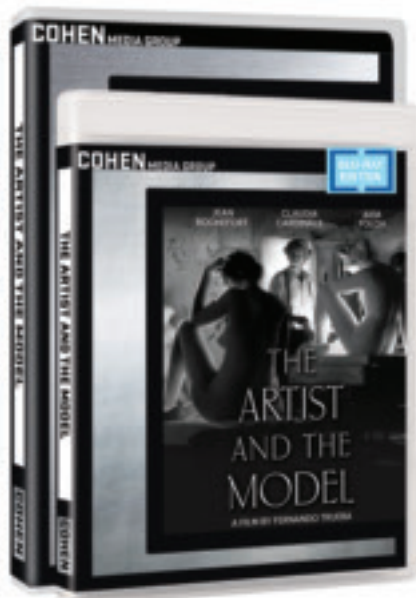
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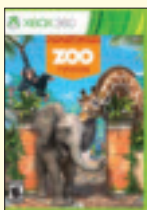
Mixed Media features new release information on upcoming video games and TV series on DVD/Blu-ray, as well as notable older titles that are re-priced or new to DVD/Blu-ray.

Video Games

Note: Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) ratings for video games are: E (Everyone), E10+ (Everyone 10+), T (Teen), M (Mature), and RP (Rating Pending). Some titles are not rated until just prior to release date.

Available Now

Zoo Tycoon (Microsoft, X360/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: E). In this remastered edition of the popular long-running simulation series, players create the zoo of their dreams with over 60 animals to adopt, care for, and ultimately release into the wild.



January 26—February 1

Dragon Ball Z: Battle of Z (Namco Bandai, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: T). The Dragon Ball Z cast returns in this third-person fighting game featuring a new character—the most powerful form of Goku (Super Saiyan God).

Fable Anniversary (Microsoft, X360: \$39.99, Rated: RP). In this modern remastering of the classic bestselling Xbox game *Fable*, players once again revisit the world of Albion to embark on a third-person role-playing quest to avenge the village of Oakvale.

Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition (Square Enix, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). Remastered for next-gen consoles PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, this acclaimed third-person origin story of action heroine Lara Croft features a blend of survival, stealth, exploration, and melee and ranged combat gameplay as Croft unravels the dark history of a forgotten island.



February 9—February 15

Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII (Square Enix, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: T). In this third and last chapter

of the *Final Fantasy XIII* third-person role-playing series, players return to the world of Gran Pulse, where heroine Lightning is tasked with saving as many souls as possible.



February 16—February 22

Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze (Nintendo, WiiU: \$49.99, Rated: E). In this sequel to the rebooted *Donkey Kong Country* franchise of third-person side-scrolling platformers, Dixie Kong and Cranky Kong join the adventure on a mission to reclaim Donkey Kong Island.

Earth Defense Force 2025 (D3, PS3/X360: \$49.99, Rated: M). In this third-person shooter sequel to *Earth Defense Force 2017*, players will be able to choose among four character classes to repel the most terrifying invasion of giant aliens and ravagers the world has ever seen.

Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare (EA, X360/XOne: \$29.99-\$39.99, Rated: E10+). In this comical take on the third-person-shooter genre, players blast zombies, plants, and all-new characters in a fully three-dimensional world.

Ragnarok Odyssey ACE (XSEED, PS3: \$39.99, Rated: RP). In this expanded version of the popular third-person action giant-hunting game originally released on the PlayStation Vita, players battle through an original world based on Norse mythology.

February 23—March 1

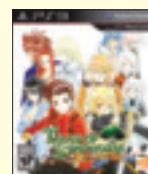
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2 (Konami, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). Players will once again control Gabriel Belmont in this third-person action-adventure sequel that sees the return of Dracula, weakened and yearning for release from his eternal bonds.

The LEGO Movie Videogame (Warner, PS3/PS4/WiiU/X360/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: RP). In this new third-person LEGO action game, players step into the shoes of Emmet, an ordinary, rules-following, perfectly average citizen who is mistakenly identified as a most extraordinary person who holds the key to saving the world.



Rayman Legends (Ubisoft, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E10+). Bringing the critically acclaimed game to the next-gen consoles PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, this sequel to one of the best platformers of 2011 is a strikingly-animated third-person action game that finds Rayman and the gang being sucked into mysterious paintings.

Tales of Symphonia Chronicles (Namco Bandai, PS3: \$39.99, Rated: RP). This collection of anime-style cel-shaded third-person role-playing games includes remastered versions of both 2004's *Tales of Symphonia* (originally released for the Nintendo GameCube), and the 2008 sequel *Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World* (originally released for the Nintendo Wii).



Thief (Square Enix, PS3/PS4/X360/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: RP). Players will control master thief Garrett in this third-person stealth adventure game as he steps out of the shadows and into the City, where he finds himself caught in an uprising against the evil Baron.

TV on DVD/Blu-ray

Available Now

Bat Masterson: Season 3 (TGG, DVD: 4 discs, \$24.98). This 1960-61 third and final season of the Western series starring Gene Barry, based on the life of the titular lawman gambler, features a guest spot by Lon Chaney Jr.

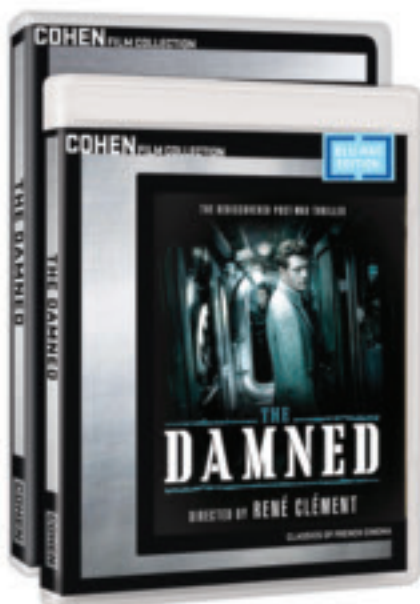


Burning Love: Season 1 (Paramount, DVD: \$16.99). Nominated for an Emmy, this 2012 first season of the reality romance parody stars Ken Marino, Michael Ian Black, and Abigail Spencer.

Celebrity Billiards with Minnesota Fats (VCI, DVD: \$19.99). In-character pro billiards player Rudolf "Minnesota Fats" Wanderone Jr. goes up against celebrities in this compilation from the 1967-1971 game show series that features guests Groucho Marx, Milton Berle, and the Smothers Brothers.

Doc Martin: Series 6 (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Starring Martin Clunes as the titular English doctor, this 2013 sixth series features a wedding between the

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GP and his longtime schoolteacher love (Caroline Catz).

Family Guy, Volume Twelve (Fox, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98). Creator and star Seth MacFarlane's degenerate Griffin family is back in this 12th volume that includes the 11th season's 200th episode "Yug Ylimaf."

Gator Boys: Season 2 (Gaia, DVD: \$14.95). Florida-based alligator trappers Paul Bedard and Jimmy Riffle are back in this 2013 sophomore season of the Animal Planet-aired series.

Justified: The Complete Fourth Season (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$55.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$65.99). Starring Timothy Olyphant as Deputy U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens, this 2013 fourth season of the FX-aired action-crime series also features Walton Goggins and Natalie Zea.



The Mentalist: The Complete First Season (Warner, Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$40.99). A celebrity psychic uses his skills to bring killers to justice in this 2008-09 debut season of the drama starring Simon Baker, Robin Tunney, and Amanda Righetti, newly available on high-definition Blu-ray.

Mystery Science Theater 3000: 25th Anniversary Edition (Shout! Factory, DVD: 5 discs, \$64.99). This compilation from the long-running movie-riffing series includes four never-before-seen episodes as well as the three-part documentary *Return to Eden Prairie: 25 Years of Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

Naked City: The Complete Series (Image, DVD: 29 discs, \$179.98). Featuring a bevy of guest stars—including Robert Duvall, Christopher Walken, Diane Ladd, and George C. Scott—this collection includes the complete 1958-63 138-episode Emmy-winning police drama series.



The Promise (BFS, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Starring Christian Cooke, Claire Foy, and Perdita Weeks, this four-part 2010 BAFTA-nominated miniseries depicts the parallel romances of a British teen's in Israel and her grandfather's in Palestine during WWII.

Snapped—The Killer Collection: The Complete Sixth Season (Timeless, DVD: 3 discs, \$24.99). This 2007-08 sixth sea-

son of the Oxygen-aired series profiles true stories of female murderers.

Wolfblood: Season One (Cinedigm, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.99). Produced by the BBC and aired on the Disney Channel, this 2012 first season of the fantasy series follows a 14-year-old (Aimee Kelly) whose family turns into wolves.

January 7

Archer: The Complete Season Four (Fox, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Superlative spy Sterling Archer (voiced by H. Jon Benjamin) and the agents of ISIS are back in this 2013 fourth season of the FX-aired animated action series.

Barney Miller: The Complete Fourth Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 3 discs, \$24.99). Hal Linden stars as the titular police captain in this 1977-78 fourth season set from the Golden Globe-winning sitcom, featuring guest appearances by Doris Roberts and Ed Koch.

Being Human: The Complete Third Season (Entertainment One, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$49.98). A trio of twentysomething roommates—a vampire (Sam Witwer), a ghost (Meaghan Rath), and a werewolf (Sam Huntington)—try to maintain normal lives in Boston in this 2013 third season of the Syfy-aired American reboot of the British supernatural series.



Copper: Season Two (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.98). Detective Kevin Corcoran (Tom Weston-Jones) is hard-pressed to maintain order in 1860s Five Points NYC in this 2013 second and final season of the Emmy-nominated BBC America series.

Duck Dynasty: Season 4 (Lionsgate, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$19.99). This 2013 fourth season of the A&E reality series following the Robertson bayou-based clan features a surprise wedding bash and an attempt to make duck jerky.

The Following: The Complete First Season (Warner, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray/DVD Combo: 7 discs, \$49.99). Kevin Bacon, Natalie Zea, and James Purefoy star in this 2013 first



season of the serial killer cult crime-drama series.

House of Lies: The Second Season (Paramount, DVD: 2 discs, \$45.98). Starring Don Cheadle in a Golden Globe-winning role as a lucrative management consultant, this 2013 second season of the Showtime-aired comedy series also features Kristen Bell and Ben Schwartz.



Star Trek Enterprise: Season Three (Paramount, Blu-ray: 6 discs, \$129.99). This 2003-04 penultimate third season of the Emmy-winning sci-fi spin-off is newly available on high-definition Blu-ray.

Top of the Lake (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.99). Revolving around the mysterious disappearance of a pregnant 12-year-old, this New Zealand-set 2013 seven-episode miniseries stars Elisabeth Moss, David Wenham, and Holly Hunter.

January 14

Hazel: The Complete Final Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.95). Based on Ted Key's *Saturday Evening Post* comic strip, Shirley Booth stars as the titular wisecracking housekeeper in this 1965-66 fifth and final season of the Golden Globe-nominated comedy series.

Joanna Lumley's Greek Odyssey (Athena, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Aired on public television, this three-hour series follows host Joanna Lumley as she explores popular locales in Greece, including the Parthenon, Delphi, the Gates of Hades, Mount Olympus, and the birthplace of the Olympic Games.

Last of the Summer Wine: Vintage 2001 (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Chronicling the escapades of a mischievous elderly trio (Peter Sallis, Frank Thornton, Keith Clifford), this compilation from Roy Clarke's long-running comedy series includes the 22nd season Christmas special "Potts in Pole Position."



The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis: Season Two (Shout! Factory, DVD: 5 discs, \$29.95). Starring Dwayne Hickman as date-happy teen Dobie, with Bob Denver as sidekick Maynard, this compilation from the 1960-61 sophomore season of

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Running for Jim

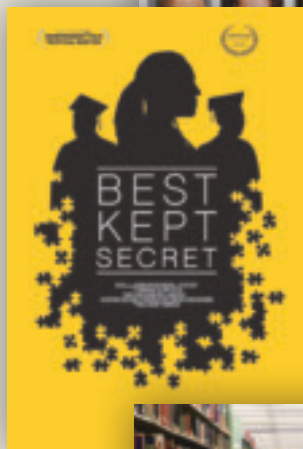
Running for Jim is the story of Jim Tracy, the deeply dedicated, tough-loving high school running coach who has been diagnosed with fatal Lou Gehrig's disease. Jim's story first came to international attention in 2010 when one of his runners "hit the wall" and collapsed several meters from the finish line during a race. With a record-breaking state championship at stake, the athlete crawled across the finish line, securing the record-breaking championship for her team and ailing coach.

For the previous 17 years, despite being at times penniless and homeless, Jim committed his time and energy to training teens to run. Now, as Jim faces the challenge of his life battling ALS, he personifies the strength and fortitude he unequivocally demands of his athletes.



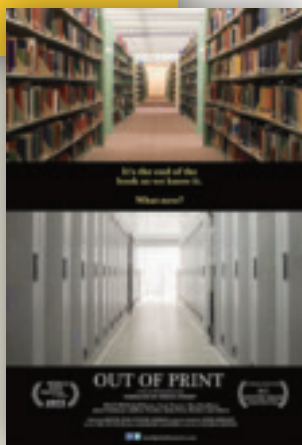
The Latino List: Volumes I and II

This two-film set presents a unique glimpse into the vibrant and burgeoning culture of Hispanic America through a series of highly personal video portraits of Latinos who have richly contributed to the fabric of contemporary society. The films capture Hispanic heritage with 30 extraordinary interviews, including Victor Cruz, Gloria Estefan, America Ferrera, Jose Hernandez, John Leguizamo, Eva Longoria, George Lopez, Senator Bob Menendez, Pitbull, Chi Chi Rodriguez, Sonia Sotomayor, and Christy Turlington.



Best Kept Secret: Aging Out with Autism

At JFK High School, located in a run-down area in Newark, New Jersey, Janet Mino has taught her class of young men with autism for four years. When they all graduate, they will leave the security of the public school system forever. *Best Kept Secret* follows Ms. Mino and her students over the year and a half before graduation. The clock is ticking to find them a place in the adult world—a job or rare placement in a recreational center—so they don't end up where their predecessors have, sitting at home, institutionalized, or on the streets.



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the romantic comedy series includes guest appearances by Jack Albertson, Jo Anne Worley, and Theltonious Monk.

Top Gear: The Complete Season 20 (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$18.98). This 2013 20th season of the popular British auto appreciation series hosted by Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond, and James May features a race against an America's Cup yacht in New Zealand and supercar speeding across Spain.

The Universe in 3D: A Whole New Dimension (A&E, Blu-ray: \$19.99). This latest addition to the History Channel-aided series includes three new high-definition 3D episodes: "Crash Landing on Mars," "Worst Days on Planet Earth," and "God and the Universe."



January 21

Bounty Hunters: The Complete First Season (Entertainment One, DVD: 2 discs, \$24.98). Aired on CMT (Country Music Television), this 2013 first season of the animated crime comedy series features the voices of comedians Jeff Foxworthy, Bill Engvall, Larry the Cable Guy, and Lisa Lampanelli.

Bullet in the Face (Shout! Factory, DVD: \$19.99). A sociopathic killer receives a face transplant from the cop he murdered and must take over his job in this 2012 IFC-aided thriller series starring Max E. Williams, Eddie Izzard, and Eric Roberts.

Comedy Bang Bang! The Complete First Season (Anchor Bay, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99). Based on creator and star Scott Aukerman's titular podcast, this 2012 debut season of the sketch comedy series includes guest appearances by Zach Galifianakis, Jon Hamm, Seth Rogen, and "Weird Al" Yankovic.



Counting Cars: Season 2, Volume 2 (A&E, DVD: 2 discs, \$14.98). Featuring Las Vegas chopper and hot rod shop owner Danny Koker and his crew, this compilation includes episodes from the 2013 sophomore season of the auto-themed, History-aided, *Pawn Stars* spin-off series.

How the Universe Works: Season 2 (Gaia, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95). This

eight-episode 2012 second season of the Discovery Channel-aided series looks at planets, weather, energy, magnetism, orbits, comets, and more.

NYPD Blue: Season 05 (Shout! Factory, DVD: 6 discs, \$34.99). This 1997-98 fifth season of the Big Apple-set Golden Globe and Emmy-winning crime-drama series from creator Steven Bochco stars Dennis Franz, Jimmy Smits, Nicholas Turturro, and Kim Delaney.

The Returned: The Complete First Season (Music Box, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.95, Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$34.95). Nominated for an International Emmy, this 2012 French-language series follows the turmoil in a small village that is rocked after people thought to have died return back home.



January 28

The Agatha Christie Hour: Complete Collection (Acorn, DVD: 4 discs, \$59.99). Featuring adaptations of stories by Dame Agatha Christie, this 10-episode 1982 PBS *Mystery!*-aided series stars John Nettles, Amanda Redman, and Rupert Everett.

Downton Abbey: Season 4 (PBS, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$54.99). Created by Academy Award-winner Julian Fellowes, this 2013 fourth season following the Crawley family and their servants stars Hugh Bonneville, Laura Carmichael, and Michelle Dockery.



Treme: The Complete Fourth Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.99). Starring Khandi Alexander, Rob Brown, and Melissa Leo, this fourth and final 2013 season brings to a close the Emmy-winning drama series telling the story of New Orleans residents who rebuild after Hurricane Katrina.

Vera, Set 3 (Acorn, DVD: 4 discs, \$59.99). Based on the mysteries by Ann Cleeves, this third set starring Brenda Blethyn as tousled Detective Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope includes the 2013 episodes "Castles in the Air," "Poster Child," "Young Gods," and "Prodigal Son."

February 4

The Broker's Man, Series 1 (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Starring Kevin Whately as

an ex-cop turned insurance company detective, this 1997 first series of the British drama includes the two-part episodes "Double Dutch," "Dangerous Bends," and "Siege."

Family Matters: The Complete Fourth Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99). Clumsy next-door neighbor Steve Urkel (Jaleel White) irritates the Winslow family in this 1992-93 fourth season that features guest stars including T.K. Carter, Dave Koz, and Naya Rivera.



Joanie Loves Chachi: The Complete Series (Paramount, DVD: 3 discs, \$28.99). Erin Moran and Scott Baio reprise their titular *Happy Days* roles in this short-lived 1982-83 sitcom spin-off that also features Al Molinaro and Ellen Travolta.

Laverne & Shirley: The Seventh Season (Paramount, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). This penultimate 1981-82 seventh season starring Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams as Burbank single ladies features guest appearances by Richard Moll, Charles Grodin, and Anjelica Huston.

The White Queen (Anchor Bay, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.99). Featuring 10 episodes, this 2013 Starz Original miniseries stars Rebecca Ferguson, Max Irons, Amanda Hale, and Janet McTeer.

February 11

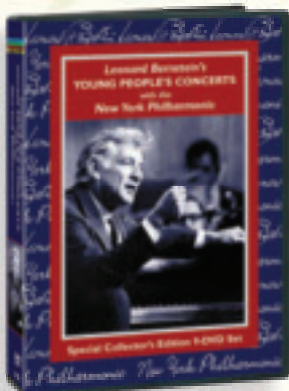
The Americans: The Complete First Season (Fox, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.99). Soviet spies (Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys) masquerade as an American married couple in this 2013 debut season of the FX-aided Emmy-nominated crime thriller series.



Dallas: The Complete Second Season (Warner, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.99). Set after the suspicious death of J.R. Ewing (the late Larry Hagman), this 2013 sophomore season of the re-boot of the classic nighttime soap stars Josh Henderson, Jesse Metcalfe, Jordana Brewster, Patrick Duffy, and Linda Gray.

The Mind of a Chef: Season 2 (PBS, DVD: \$24.99). Narrated by executive producer Anthony Bourdain, this 2013

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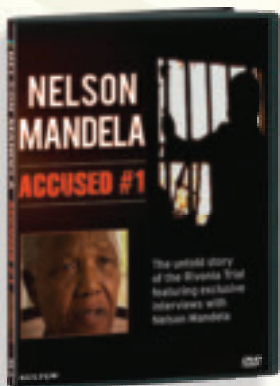
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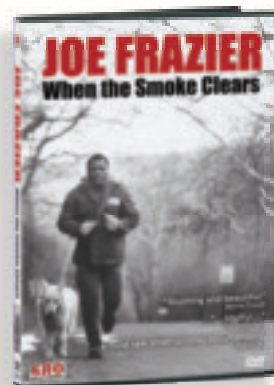
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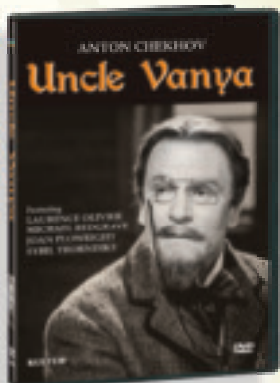
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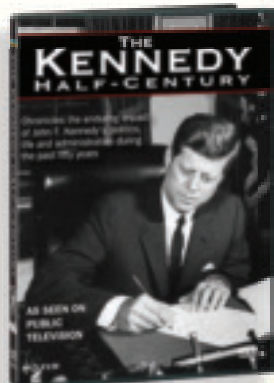
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second season of the PBS-aided culinary series profiles Southern food aficionado Chef Sean Brock.

Newhart: The Complete Second Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.95). Starring Bob Newhart as a New York author who relocates to run a small Vermont inn, this 1983-84 sophomore season from the Golden Globe and Emmy-nominated series also stars Mary Frann and Julia Duffy.



Sherlock: Season Three (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman star as famous super sleuth Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in this 2014 third season of the BAFTA and Peabody Award-winning mystery series, which includes "The Empty Hearse," "The Sign of Three," and "His Last Vow."

February 18

Game of Thrones: The Complete Third Season (HBO, DVD: 5 discs, \$59.99; Blu-ray: 7 discs, \$79.98). Based on George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* epic novel saga, this 2013 third season of the Emmy, BAFTA, and Golden Globe-winning fantasy adventure series stars Peter Dinklage, Lena Headey, and Emilia Clarke.



Gentle Ben: Season Two (Paramount, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.99). Set in the swamps of the Florida Everglades, this 1968-69 second and final season based on Walt Morey's children's novel about a boy's friendship with a tame bear stars Dennis Weaver, Beth Brickell, and Clint Howard.

Nurse Jackie: Season Five (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Picking up with the titular drug-addicted ER nurse (Edie Falco) getting out of rehab early, this 2013 fifth season of the Showtime series introduces Adam Ferrara as love interest police officer Frank Verelli.

The Six Million Dollar Man: Season 5 (Universal, DVD: 6 discs, \$39.98). Lee Majors is back as bionic-body intelligence

agent Steve Austin in this 1977-78 fifth and final season, which includes guest appearances by Suzanne Somers, Eric Braeden, and Bibi Besch.

February 25

Legit: The Complete First Season (Fox, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). An Aussie-born standup comic (Jim Jefferies) struggles for success in both his professional and personal lives in this 2013 first season of the FX comedy series.

The Middle: Season 4 (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$44.98). Patricia Heaton and Neil Flynn star as small-town Indiana heads of the Heck family in this 2012-13 fourth season set from the Emmy-nominated comedy series.



Looking Ahead

Slated for March is the debut season of **Devious Maids**, the second season of **Veep**, the sixth season of **Californication**, and the complete series of **Hill Street Blues**.

Re-priced or New to DVD/Blu-ray

Abraham Lincoln (PBS, DVD: \$19.99). This new compilation highlighting the life of America's 16th president includes the 2009 *American Experience* documentary *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, the 24-page biography *Abraham Lincoln: President and Icon*, and a set of exclusive memorabilia reproduced from original materials at Washington DC's National Archives and Records Administration. Also newly available at the same price is *Gettysburg and the Civil War*, which includes *Gettysburg: The Boys in Blue & Gray* (VL-11/02 ★★1/2), as well as a 24-page book, memorabilia, and a selection of battle maps.



Deceptive Practice: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay (Kino Lorber, DVD: \$29.95). Newly available on home video, filmmakers Molly Bernstein and Alan Edelstein's documentary profile (VL-7/13 ★★1/2) focuses on the



career of magician-cardsharp/actor/author Ricky Jay and features archival footage or reminiscences of Slydini, Francis Carlyle, Charlie Miller, Dai Vernon, and playwright-filmmaker David Mamet. Bonus features include never-before-seen performance footage, clips of Jay colleagues (including Steve Martin), and a *New Yorker* profile of Jay. Also new to home video are *Drew: The Man Behind the Poster* (VL-7/13 ★★) and *Greenwich Village: Music That Defined a Generation* (VL-9/13 ★★).

Hava Nagila: The

Movie (Docurama, DVD: \$29.95). Filmmaker Roberta Grossman uses "Hava Nagila" and its various iterations to portray the Jewish-assimilation experience in this entertaining film (VL-5/13 ★★)—new to home video—that includes interviews with celebrities Leonard Nimoy, Connie Francis, and Harry Belafonte, as well as various rabbis, rebbes, and authors. Bonus features include extended interviews, historical footage, and musical clips.



Le Joli Mai (Icarus, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Newly restored and making its DVD debut, filmmakers Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme's 1963 documentary portrait of the City of Light—filmed just after the ceasefire of the French colonial war in Algeria—features narration by Simone Signoret. Bonus features include deleted scenes, bonus shorts, and a 24-page booklet.

Nelson Mandela:

One Man (Janson, DVD: \$24.95). Produced in 2009, this hour-long documentary explores the career of tireless anti-apartheid activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela (1918-2013).



The Search for Robert Johnson

(Kultur, DVD: \$19.99). Director Chris Hunt's 1991 documentary traces the life of legendary bluesman Robert Johnson, including his rumored supernatural pact with the devil, tangled family ties, and grisly murder. Also newly available are *Pablo Neruda*, *The Real Rembrandt*, and *The Victorian Nude: The Empire of the Nude* (VL-11/03 ★★)

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Bringing Joshua Home

In late December, 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a bill banning all American adoptions of Russian children. *Bringing Joshua Home* tells the personal story of one family who successfully adopted a Russian child. Arthur and Hanna Rasco share the challenges, joys, and drama of adopting their baby boy from Moscow and introducing him into their family. If you've ever wondered what it is like to adopt internationally, this film gives an inside, real-life look into the process from start to finish. Documentary, 25 minutes.

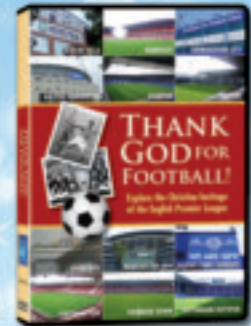
DVD - #501513D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01513 2



The Pink Room

The Pink Room tells the story of Mien and other young girls who have been victimized in the unspeakably dark world of child sex slavery in Cambodia. But this is not just a story about the problem. *The Pink Room* is an inspiring story of restoration as ordinary people become heroes, lives are mended, and Cambodians rise up to take back their country. In a world where it is estimated that over one million children are held captive and sexually abused, a flower blooms in the heart of Cambodia. Documentary, 57 minutes.

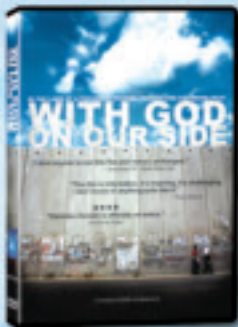
DVD - #501543D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01543 9



Thank God for Football!

Explore the heritage of the English Premier League (soccer). Football historian Peter Lupson tells the story of twelve of these clubs and the people who have made an exceptional contribution to the beautiful game. In this 11-part documentary series he takes us to the places where the clubs began over a century ago, and also visits the stadiums they occupy today. *Thank God for Football!* presents the challenging and uplifting stories of some remarkable individuals who were moved to help those rejected by society. Documentary, 157 minutes.

DVD - #501497D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01497 5



With God on Our Side

With God On Our Side takes a hard look at the theology and politics of Christian Zionism, which teaches that because the Jews are God's chosen people, Israeli government policies should not be questioned, even when these policies are unjust. Critics of Christian Zionism argue that this flawed ideology has led to ethnic discrimination and great suffering among the Palestinian people. Is there an alternative way to support the people of Israel, a way that doesn't favor one people group over another but instead promotes peace, security, and reconciliation? Documentary, 82 minutes.

DVD - #501547D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01547 7



About Miracles

About Miracles features four dramatic, true stories about modern day miracles. Told by the actual people involved and featuring gripping reenactments, these stories will amaze you. A man is robbed, then shot in the head at point-blank range and left for dead. A woman hears a voice telling her to go to the ER even though she has no physical symptoms. A student has just one week to raise thousands of dollars for a mission trip. A baby is injured in a car accident and gradually loses his sight while his parents pray for healing. *About Miracles* suggests that sometimes the only logical explanation is God. Documentary, 59 minutes.

DVD - #501546D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01546 0



Heaven in Sight: The Peter Jackson Story

Peter Jackson is an accomplished British pianist who has been blind since the age of two. In this live performance recorded before an audience in Fraserburgh, Scotland, Peter plays favorite hymns as well as classical and jazz pieces. He also shares his amazing story of faith and perseverance, revealing how his gift of spiritual sight has enabled him to overcome the limitations of his handicap and share a message of peace and hope with the world. Documentary, 100 minutes.

DVD - #501518D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01518 7



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This section features reviews of current and classic studio, independent, and foreign feature films. Each review includes pricing information, as well as running time, rating, subtitling information, and street dates for yet-to-be-released titles. Most titles reviewed here are widely available through most distributors.

★★★★ = Excellent
 ★★★ = Good
 ★★ = Fair
 ★ = Poor

Current Films

A.C.O.D. ★★

Paramount, 88 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 14

Writer-director Stu Zicherman's debut is basically a feature-length sitcom made slightly smarter and sharper than most network fare thanks to a strong cast. The title is an acronym for Adult Children of Divorce, which includes restaurateur Carter (Adam Scott)—the son of still-warring Hugh (Richard Jenkins) and Melissa (Catherine O'Hara)—who has grown up playing family peacemaker although his own relationship with Lauren (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) suggests he has serious commitment issues. After his brother, Trey (Clark Duke), gets engaged, Carter must persuade his parents to attend the ceremony with their new significant others, leading him to seek advice from his childhood therapist (Jane Lynch), who earlier used him as a subject in her studies of non-adult C.O.D.s. Naturally, this leads to emotional crisis as both Hugh and Melissa try to manipulate matters to their advantage. The film intends for us to sympathize with Carter, but the character's self-centeredness makes that difficult. *A.C.O.D.* serves up some sporadic fun in the antics of Jenkins and O'Hara, but most scenes feel arch and overblown, and the big finale is utterly contrived. A wan, ultimately unsatisfying dramedy, this is an optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Affinity ★★1/2

BFS, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$22.98

This 2008 adaptation of Sarah Waters' titular 1999 novel—broadcast on Britain's ITV and featured in a number of U.S.-based LGBT film festivals—offers a strange mix of gender

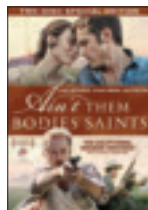


empowerment and spiritualism wrapped in a Victorian setting. In 1874 London, aristocratic Margaret Prior (Anna Madeley) seeks relief from her inner heartaches—including the death of her beloved father—by serving as a “Lady Visitor” to the Millbank women's prison. Although she envisions herself as a guiding figure to the inmates, her regal bearing and life experiences are far removed from the women she visits. Margaret quickly finds herself strangely attracted to the mysterious Selina Dawes (Zoe Tapper), who was charged in the death of a participant at a séance that she conducted. Even though the court branded her a fraud, the other inmates believe that Selina has paranormal powers. Soon, Margaret is haunted by eerie circumstances, including the mysterious appearance of flowers and a lock of Selina's hair in her bedroom. While the story ultimately drifts into an unsatisfying conclusion, this is a beautifully detailed production, and director Tim Fywell taps into the kinetic chemistry between Madeley and Tapper, which helps compensate for the wobbly plotting. A strong optional purchase. (P. Hall)

Ain't Them Bodies Saints

★★★
 MPI, 96 min., R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

Marked by ostentatiously artsy visuals, cruelly deliberate pacing, and far more concern for mood than narrative coherence, filmmaker David Lowery's sophomore effort tries to mimic the style of later Terrence Malick and unfortunately succeeds. Basically a tale of doomed young love, the story opens in small-town Texas, where robbers Bob (Casey Affleck) and Ruth (Rooney Mara) are captured following a shootout at a ramshackle farmhouse, during which Deputy Wheeler (Ben Foster) is wounded in an exchange of gunfire. Bob takes the rap and is sent off to prison, while Ruth gives birth to Bob's daughter and raises her under the watchful, caring eyes of the recovered cop and an elderly storeowner (Keith Carradine). After a few years, Bob breaks out and makes his way back to town, but three men show up gunning for him. Although this much of the tale is relatively clear, Lowery deliberately leaves many plot points obscure and unexplained. And while there's no denying that the filmmaker has true cinematic vision, his unfortunate tendency to opt for self-conscious poeticism over clear storytelling results in a movie that often looks lovely, but doesn't make much sense. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)



All Is Bright ★★

Anchor Bay, 107 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Director Phil Morrison's strangely dark comedy opens during late November in

wintry Quebec, when Dennis Girard (Paul Giamatti) is released after spending four years in prison for robbery. Trudging home, he discovers that his ex-wife, Therese (Amy Landecker), has banned him from the house because she's told their young daughter Michi that he died of cancer. Therese has taken up with Dennis's amiable ex-partner/buddy Rene (Paul Rudd), who's divorcing his wife to marry Therese. Frantic and peniless Dennis guilt-trips Rene into allowing him to team up to sell Christmas trees at huge mark-up in Brooklyn, despite a parole officer's admonition not to leave Canada. Former thieves—for whom lying, cheating, and stealing is a way of life—the pair are determined to go straight. Taking time out from persistent arguments about which of the men really deserves Therese, the morose and misanthropic Dennis befriends Olga (Sally Hawkins), a quirky Russian dentist assistant who is housesitting at her employer's brownstone. Although plagued with arthritis, Olga is an accomplished pianist, which is convenient since Dennis is determined to acquire a piano for Michi. Syrupy, predictable, and contrived, *All Is Bright* clearly evokes the desperation of hard economic times—particularly poignant around the holiday season—but this is a wistful, joyless, and ultimately forgettable Christmas story. Optional. (S. Granger)



The Angels' Share

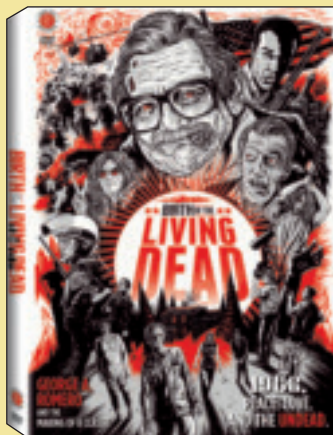
★★★
 MPI, 101 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98

Ken Loach's fanciful comedy caper movie, set in working-class Glasgow, Scotland, features a wee dash of magical realism. At the center of *The Angels' Share* is malt whisky—the title itself derives from the small amount of liquid that naturally evaporates over time in the barrel cask. Caught in a hopelessly destructive cycle of poverty, criminality, and violence, Robbie (Paul Brannigan) is a local hoodlum with a straitlaced girlfriend (Siobhan Reilly), and infant son. After Robbie is spared from prison and given 300 hours of “community payback,” his work supervisor (John Henshaw)—who enjoys his nightly tipples—decides to take him and some other hooligans on an outing to a whisky distillery. Here, Robbie not only learns about the whisky-making process but also discovers that he has a connoisseur's nose for identifying different varieties—an olfactory skill that catches the attention of Thaddeus (Roger Allam), a slick high-end broker, while also earning the respect of whisky professional Rory McAllister (real-life scotch expert Charles Maclean). At another distillery, the auction date for an extremely rare cask of Malt Mill whiskey is





FIRST RUN FEATURES PRESENTS



BIRTH OF THE LIVING DEAD

76 minutes, color, SRP: \$24.95, FRF 915809D
STREET DATE: JANUARY 7

In 1968 a young college drop-out named George A. Romero directed *Night of the Living Dead*, a low budget horror film that shocked the world, became an icon of the counterculture, and spawned a zombie industry worth billions of dollars.

"This marvelous doc looks at all the ways one low-budget, flesh-eating horror movie changed the world. It's full of juicy anecdotes that detail how Romero made necessity into the mother of nightmare invention. Grade: A." -Entertainment Weekly

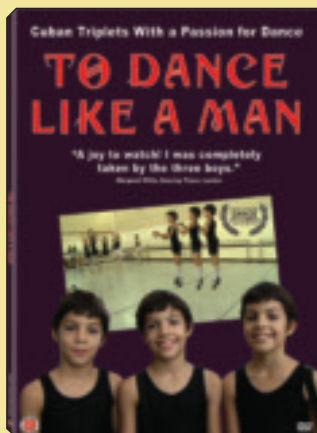


THE HAPPY HOUSE

80 minutes, color, SRP: \$24.95, FRF 915625D
STREET DATE: JANUARY 7

Their relationship on the rocks, a young Brooklyn couple heads to a remote bed & breakfast to work things out. But from the moment they arrive at the Happy House it's one disaster after another, and they soon begin to suspect they've wandered into a real life horror movie.

"Perversely unexpected humor! D.W. Young has created a puckishly diverting horror comedy with admirable poise and sneaky charm. A memorably weird cast make for some amazingly agreeable company." -Film Journal



TO DANCE LIKE A MAN

58 minutes, color, SRP: \$24.95, FRF 915823D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 4

In this child's eye view on the desire for professional success in the dance world, triplets Angel, César and Marcos, age 11, all want the same thing – a role in a major ballet production at Havana's celebrated Grand Theatre. Who will be chosen?

Featuring ballet superstar José Carreño, and shot at Cuba's National Ballet School.

"A joy to watch! The boys couldn't have been better subjects – talented, devoted, yet still child-like. It's such a wonderful film!" -Dancing Times, London



IT'S NOT ME, I SWEAR!

110 minutes, color, SRP: \$24.95, FRF 915816D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 4

When his mother decides to leave for a new life in Greece, 10-year-old hellion Leon is prepared to do anything to kill the pain of it all, from destroying the neighbors' homes to falling in love with his best friend Lea.

From Philippe Falardeau, the Academy Award nominated director of *Monsieur Lazhar*.

"A resonant coming-of-age story with elements of dark humor and childhood whimsy."
-The Globe and Mail



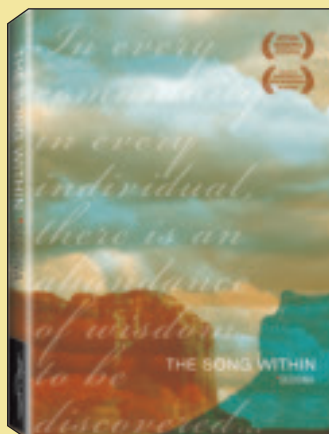
PEOPLE OF A FEATHER

92 minutes, color, SRP: \$27.95, FRF 915748D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 25

Featuring stunning footage from seven winters in the Arctic, *People of a Feather* takes you through time into the world of the Inuit and their unique relationship with the eider duck.

"Lyrical...stunning."
-The New York Times

"Artful and meditative. The film is a near mystical mix of time-lapse Arctic landscapes, marine-life photography, and interwoven imagery of present-day and historical Inuit life."
-The Georgia Straight

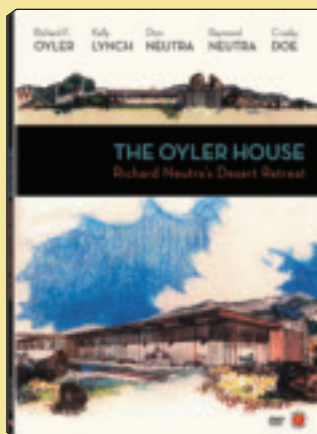


THE SONG WITHIN: SEDONA

75 minutes, color, SRP: \$24.95, FRF 354675D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 4

Meet 16 extraordinary Sedona women whose stories teach, entertain and inspire.

This gorgeous visual investigation is an exploration of the basic belief that wisdom is everywhere. Through stunning cinematography that reveals the breathtaking and mystical red rocks of Sedona, music that lifts the spirit, and monologues from women of different lifestyles, this unique film gives us an experience that inspires the humanity in us all.



THE OYLER HOUSE: RICHARD NEUTRA'S DESERT RETREAT

46 minutes, color, SRP: \$24.95, FRF 915830D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 25

In 1959, a government employee named Richard Oyler, living in the tiny desert town of Lone Pine, California, asked world-famous modern architect Richard Neutra to design his modest family home. To Oyler's surprise, Neutra agreed. Thus began an unlikely friendship that led to the design and construction of an iconic mid-century modern masterpiece.

"A most inspiring, moving, and memorable film, a must for any architecture lover."
-Daniella On Design



THE LAST ELVIS

92 minutes, color, SRP: \$24.95, FRF 915847D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 25

Most evenings in Buenos Aires, "Elvis" Gutiérrez is a star – his singing and stage presence bring back to life the King of Rock and Roll in all his glory. By day, though, Gutiérrez slaves away at a dead-end factory job and endures the scorn of his ex-wife; only his young daughter, Lisa Marie, brings any joy outside of his Elvis tribute gigs.

OFFICIAL SELECTION
SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

"A knockout, riveting performance! John McInerney is utterly compelling."
-The Hollywood Reporter

rapidly approaching—with a million-dollar payout expected. Naturally, volatile Robbie and three other ne'er-do-wells head for the Scottish Highlands, bent on staging an unlikely heist. A sweet-natured, amusing film (which won the Jury Prize at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival), this is recommended. (S. Granger)

Animals ★★1/2

Kino, 94 min., in English & Catalan w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95

Donnie Darko meets Ted in Marçal Forés' surrealistic debut film *Animals*, which centers on Pol (Oriol Pla), a psychologically troubled high school student who shares his innermost secrets with Deerhoof, a tattered teddy bear that just happens to walk and talk—or, at least in Pol's mind. This device is used as a means of dramatizing Pol's internal conflicts—particularly regarding his sexual identity, which comes to the fore when he develops a relationship with a new student, Ikari (Augustus Prew). The often tense encounters between Pol, Ikari, and Deerhoof (at one point Pol even attempts to rid himself of what Deerhoof represents by "killing" the teddy) are portrayed amidst caustic observations from another of Pol's friends, periodic interventions from the boys' coolly rationalistic teacher (Martin Freeman), and a swirl of mysterious events, including the disappearance of a classmate, and a school party that is interrupted by a menacing figure wearing a human-sized bear costume. *Animals* doesn't try to make literal sense (even the abrupt changes from Catalan to English and back again seem designed to keep a viewer at sea), but it is beautifully filmed, with lush widescreen camerawork that casts a dreamlike spell over the proceedings. What it lacks in narrative coherence, it makes up for in atmospheric richness. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Applause ★★1/2

Kino, 83 min., in Danish w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$29.95

Danish actress Paprika Steen is not exactly a household name on this side of the Atlantic, but she might have been if Martin Pieter Zandvliet's 2009 drama had received a stronger U.S. theatrical release. Steen delivers a devastating performance here as an emotionally disheveled actress trying to pull her life together. Off-stage, Thea Barfoed (Steen) is struggling with acute alcoholism and a disastrous divorce that resulted in her losing custody of her children. Professionally, she has just been cast in a plum role: Martha, in a new production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Thea winds up using Edward Albee's bitterly vicious play



to vent the anger, bitterness, and frustrations that have come from a self-destructive life, while struggling in real life to prove her value as a mother. Steen attacks this complex character with ferocity, commanding the screen with a forceful energy that is fearless in its towering rage and poignantly fragile when it comes to emotional failure. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

The Attack ★★1/2

Cohen, 95 min., in Arabic & Hebrew w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98

Addressing Arab/Israeli relations on an intimately personal scale, *The Attack*—based on Yasmina Khadra's bestselling novel—opens in a Tel Aviv hospital where Amin Jaafari (Ali Suliman), a Palestinian fully assimilated into Tel Aviv society, works as a highly respected surgeon. Someone has detonated a suicide bomb nearby, but Amin has no idea that his beautiful wife, Siham (Reymond Amsellem), was the bomber until Israeli police inform him of this terrible truth. At first he can't accept it (especially when he's interrogated as a possible accomplice), and later begins to investigate the bombing, which killed 19 people (including, of course, his wife). Amin digs deeper for the truth, eventually uncovering the identities of the Palestinian zealots who recruited Siham to be a terrorist. This present-day mystery unfolds alongside flashbacks in which we gradually learn more about Amin and Siham's marriage, which was seemingly ideal (especially as Amin's professional stature increased), although Amin is now plagued by doubt and uncertainty, forced into a reassessment of the woman he never really knew. Sad, subtle, and gripping from start to finish, this first-rate study of love and loss in a tragic situation is highly recommended. (J. Shannon)



Barbara ★★★

Kino Lorber, 105 min., in German w/English subtitles, PG-13, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

Filmmaker Christian Petzold's *Barbara* serves up an intriguing character study that lays bare the casual cruelty and utter emptiness of the East German regime before Communism's collapse in 1989. The title figure (Nina Hoss) is a nurse who has been exiled from Berlin for an ideological infraction and sent to work in a remote provincial hospital. Lodged in a small apartment where the landlady keeps close watch on her (and where she is subject to unannounced, humiliating visits from stern security agents), Barbara is standoffish and brusque with her new co-workers, although head physician Andre shares his self-built laboratory with her. Barbara's life is



only made tolerable by her occasional trysts with her West German lover, who is planning her escape to Denmark—supplying money to a man who will spirit Barbara to freedom in his tiny boat. But those plans are upended by Barbara's growing sense of comradeship with Andre, and by the hospitalization of a troubled pregnant girl who has escaped from a state work camp. Petzold might have played this material in maudlin fashion, but he resists the inclination to sentimentalize while also still effectively delivering the message that humanity survives even in the most repressive regimes through acts of kindness and self-sacrifice. An insightful and poignant film, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Big Star: Nothing Can Hurt Me ★★★

Magnolia, 111 min., PG-13, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

The story of Memphis band Big Star, whose influence surpassed their chart success, comes to life in Drew DeNicola's sensitive documentary. Since mercurial singer-songwriter Alex Chilton declined to participate, late producer Jim Dickinson talks about Chilton's time in the Box Tops, which he left in 1970, joining up with Andy Hummel, Chris Bell, and Jody Stephens to form Big Star, who took their name from a local grocery store. Recording at Ardent Studios, Big Star secured a label contract when Ardent became a Stax subsidiary, but sales of their debut, *#1 Record*, were disappointing, partly because the band's introspective brand of power-pop was out of step with the times. Bell took it so poorly he left to pursue a solo career, which would only compound his problems. The remaining members cut *Radio City*, which suffered due to the collapse of Stax, after which Chilton recorded a final album, *Third/Sister Lovers*, largely on his own. DeNicola and co-director Olivia Mori proceed to trace Chilton's subsequent career as a solo artist and producer, followed by the rediscovery of Big Star, which reached a fever pitch in the 1980s as R.E.M., the Replacements, and other alt-rock acts sang their praises. Initially, Chilton evinced little interest in revisiting his past, but a one-off gig in the 1990s led to a full-fledged revival, with Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow from the Posies filling in for Bell and Hummel. Chilton's death during filming in 2010 caught many by surprise, but he lived long enough to receive the credit he richly deserved for creating three of the finest records of the 1970s. Serving up a solid musical profile, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)



Big Sur ★★★

Arc, 100 min., R, DVD: \$20.99, Jan. 14

Writer-director Michael Polish effectively brings Jack Kerouac's post-*On the Road* 1962

autobiographical novel *Big Sur* to celluloid life, following an aging Kerouac (Jean-Marc Barr), who at the behest of fellow Beat writer Lawrence Ferlinghetti (Anthony Edwards) retreats to an isolated cabin in northern California's Big Sur in order to escape the trappings of fame, not to mention the increasing inevitability of ending up a skid-row alcoholic in San Francisco. While Kerouac's reclusive existence at Big Sur initially brings both physical and mental renewal, it isn't long before his old demons—alcohol, women, and wanderlust—return to haunt him. Edwards and Radha Mitchell (as Carolyn Cassady) don't bring as much heft to their parts as they should, but the rest of Kerouac's rambunctiously brainy entourage, including Josh Lucas as bear-like romantic Neal Cassady, are believably rounded out. Drawing upon Kerouac's own stream-of-consciousness lines from the novel, Polish is sometimes over-reliant on voiceover—distracting from the film's visual strengths—but *Big Sur* ultimately seems to capture Kerouac's slowly fragmenting mental state at the time as the doomed author comes to realize that he is trapped inside his own celebrity. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)



Blue Jasmine ★★★

Sony, 98 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99, Jan. 21

Cate Blanchett delivers an Oscar-worthy performance in Woody Allen's compassionate, yet chilling character study centered on the disgraced, discarded wife of a Bernie Madoff-like fraud. For many years, WASP-y, elegant Jasmine (Blanchett) has been the trophy wife of Hal (Alec Baldwin), a coniving, mega-rich Manhattan financier. Having changed her name from the more prosaic Jeanette years ago, she's a svelte, self-absorbed, snobbish Upper East Side socialite, living on Park Avenue and spending weekends in the Hamptons. But her lavish lifestyle falls apart when she discovers that Hal is not only dishonest but also a habitual philanderer. After he's sent to prison and the government repossesses everything, Jasmine packs her monogrammed Vuitton bags and relocates to San Francisco. Moving in with her adopted sister (Sally Hawkins)—a hard-working grocery store clerk/single mother with two young sons—unhinged Jasmine self-medicates with vodka and tranquilizers. Financially forced into taking a "menial" job as a dentist's receptionist, humbled-yet-conflicted Jasmine yearns to become someone "substantial" again, a possibility that emerges when she meets a wealthy widower/diplomat (Peter Sarsgaard) with political aspirations.



Andrew Dice Clay, Michael Stuhlbarg, Louis C.K., and Bobby Cannavale offer strong support for luminous Blanchett, who masterfully plays her fluttering, delusional, Chanel-clad character with exquisite precision. Recommended. (S. Granger)

Captain Phillips

★★★★1/2

Sony, 134 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$40.99, Jan. 21

In April 2009, four impoverished Somali fishermen hijacked the Danish container ship *Maersk Alabama*, loaded with 2,400 tons of commercial cargo and 200 tons of food aid, in the Indian Ocean off the Horn of Africa. The vessel's 53-year-old American Captain, Richard Phillips (Tom Hanks), was taken hostage by the ransom-demanding pirate leader, Muse (Barkhad Abdi), igniting a dramatic five-day siege involving a U.S. destroyer, Navy SEAL snipers, and FBI negotiators. Phillips' prescient wife (Catherine Keener) was concerned about his safety as he left their Vermont home for Salalah, Oman, in order to take command of the enormous vessel bound for Mombasa, Kenya. Worried about a possible attack, Phillips held a security drill as they neared the Somali Basin, and was initially able to take evasive maneuvers when the raiders first approached in small wooden skiffs. But the next day, the unarmed ship was boarded, and Phillips ordered his well-trained crew to hide in the engine room. "Relax," says machine-gun toting Muse. "No Al Qaeda here. Just business." Despite being abducted, bound, and trapped in a metal lifeboat, the resourceful and resilient Phillips is determined to outmaneuver Muse and his squabbling, bedraggled cohorts. Inspired by Phillips' memoir, *A Captain's Duty*, filmmaker Paul Greengrass's edge-of-your-seat action thriller is anchored by Hanks' subtly nuanced, Oscar-caliber performance. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)



Carrie ★★★

MGM, 100 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, Jan. 14

While Stephen King's 1974 novel and Brian De Palma's 1976 film are both undisputed horror classics, director Kimberly Peirce brings a contemporary dimension to her remake of this coming-of-age story, playing on the fact that teenage bullying has become a social-media-inflamed crisis. Quivering, vulnerable Carrie White (Chloë Grace Moretz) is a naïve, troubled high school outcast so overzealously sheltered by her religious fanatic mother, Margaret (Julianne Moore), that when her first menstrual period arrives after gym class, Carrie is terrified that she's dying.



The locker-room mean girls cruelly mock her, tossing tampons and screaming, "Plug it up!" Using her cell-phone to make a video, Chris Hargensen (Portia Doubleday) posts it on the web. When the gym teacher, Ms. Desjardin (Judy Greer), realizes what's happening, Carrie's classmates are reprimanded. Conflicted Sue Snell (Gabriella Wilde) has regrets, but nasty Chris is defiant, which leads to her being suspended—meaning no prom. Smugly determined to take revenge against Carrie, Chris has no idea what kind of retaliation lies in store for her; along with the onset of puberty, Carrie has just become aware of her telekinetic powers. The scary, albeit campy, humor of De Palma's film has been replaced by an insidiously pervasive sadness. Gory and gruesome, *Carrie* is a downer of a bloodbath that feels far too evocative of today's real-life violence. Optional. (S. Granger)

Clear History ★★★

HBO, 100 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Enthusiasm for *Clear History* will depend on one's enthusiasm for writer-star Larry David, who is at his *Curb*-iest here as Nathan Flomm, once a wild-maned marketing maven ("I was the brains behind Edible Arrangements") but who blew his chance at a billion dollar payday by renouncing the decision to name a new electric car "Howard" and selling back his stock in the start-up company. Of course, the Howard became a phenomenal success. Nathan, now clean-shaven, lives under a new name—Rolly DeVore—in Martha's Vineyard, where his former boss (Jon Hamm) and the latter's wife (Kate Hudson) now set up housekeeping, leading Nathan/Rolly to swear revenge. *Clear History* would have been more aptly titled *Sour Grapes*, which happens to be the title of David's ill-fated feature film directorial debut, although directing duties here go to Greg Mottola. As with *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, David's script (more of an outline) gives the A-list ensemble cast (including a nicer but no less profane Danny McBride, Michael Keaton channeling Beetlejuice, an uncredited Liev Schreiber, J.B. Smoove, and Amy Ryan) room to improvise and take the usual digressions to explore whether an apology needs to be sincere, why Rolly doesn't respond to birthday e-mails, and a prurient running joke concerning, of all things, the band Chicago. For those who dearly miss *Curb*, this is the next best thing to being there; although others for whom a little David goes a long way are advised to steer clear. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)



Closed Circuit ★★★

Universal, 96 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, Jan. 7

The basis for this intriguing legal thriller lies in a quirky British law that requires a

defendant in high-profile cases to have two lawyers who are forbidden to share classified information with one another. The story begins with a horrific truck explosion—filmed by multiple surveillance cameras—that obliterates London's Borough Market. Soon after, authorities arrest Farroukh Erdogan (Denis Moschitto), who is accused of masterminding the attack. In order to try his case, the court must consider evidence that is deemed so sensitive by MI5 that even the defendant is not permitted to hear or read it. The accused is entitled to two separate lawyers: one to defend him in public court and the other to serve as his Special Advocate in closed hearings. But the counselors cannot communicate with one another. When Erdogan's barrister commits suicide, Martin Rose (Eric Bana) is assigned to defend the alleged bomber. Problem is: Rose previously had an affair with Claudia Simmons-Howe (Rebecca Hall), who is serving as Special Advocate. Instead of removing themselves on ethical grounds, both are eager to investigate and win this case, even as government forces are busily pursuing a speedy conviction. Tautly directed by John Crowley, this timely conspiracy thriller deftly explores the potential for corruption lying at the intersection of ubiquitous technological surveillance and the sanctioned invasion of privacy. Recommended. (S. Granger)



Curse of Chucky ★1/2

Universal, 95 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98

The horror franchise about a grotesque doll possessed by the spirit of a serial killer—launched with 1988's *Child's Play*—is back with this direct-to-home-video sixth installment. Don Mancini, writer of all the *Chucky* movies and director of the last two, moderates the spoof factor of recent entries in favor of a more traditional approach. Of course, there's still a strong undercurrent of mordant humor at work, but the plot is pure simpleminded slasher, as a family is methodically massacred in a dark old house one stormy night—albeit by a nasty, wise-cracking plastic killer. The explanation for why these particular victims were chosen gives Brad Dourif, who has regularly voiced the demented Chucky, the opportunity to appear in human form in flashback. Not surprisingly, the scariest part of this lame effort to revive a better-left-dead franchise is a postscript that leaves the door wide open for further sequels. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



Dirty Wars ★★1/2

MPI, 86 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98

Based on Jeremy Scahill's book of the same

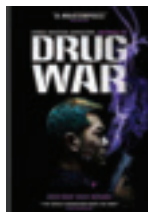
title, filmmaker Richard Rowley's *Dirty Wars* takes an accusing look at America's offensive in the so-called War on Terror. While reporting in Afghanistan, Scahill learned firsthand that a black-ops strike force called the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) was carrying out preemptive bomb attacks and assassinations on suspected Taliban targets and sympathizers. One such victim—almost certainly innocent—was an Afghan police official, and his family; in a *Catch-22*-like detail, a mystery officer tries to placate grieving clan members with the sacrifice of a sheep. Similar loose-cannon JSOC rampages in Yemen and Somalia only resulted in turning locals against the United States. In what Scahill considers a policy point-of-no-return, JSOC added to its hit list a U.S. citizen, Anwar al-Awaki, described as a Muslim cleric who was once supportive of the Bush agenda, but turned violently against America after the invasion of Iraq. While JSOC and its commander, Admiral William McRaven (portrayed as quite a fiend here), stepped from the shadows to widespread approval after the killing of Osama bin Laden, Scahill warns that this type of war—without borders or rules of engagement—is an unwinnable one. While *Dirty Wars* doesn't really address the fact that the enemy isn't exactly playing by the Geneva Convention rules either, the issues that Scahill raises cannot be lightly dismissed. Sure to spark discussion, this is highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)



Drug War ★★

Well Go USA, 107 min., in Chinese w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

In Johnnie To's tense and stylish *Drug War*, set in mainland China, drug dealers do whatever it takes to distribute product, while cops do the same to bring them down. After matinee-idol-handsome meth manufacturer Timmy Choi (Louis Koo) crashes his car, stone-faced Captain Zhang (Sun Honglei) and his officers round up the dealer's mules, but have no idea who the kingpin is behind the cartel. Knowing that a death sentence is in the wings, Choi turns informer in exchange for lighter treatment, teaming up with Zhang, who poses as a fellow drug lord, in order to get the drop on "Uncle Bill." Zhang burrows so deeply into his new role that he grows unstable in his impersonation of Choi's cackling associate, Haha (Zhang even snorts cocaine to fit in, but becomes violently ill). Although one guy is on the right side of the law, and the other is not, it is the recently widowed Choi who comes across as the slightly more sympathetic protagonist. While the *Heat*-like shootout at the end—meant to convey the futility of the war on drugs—doesn't



completely work, this is still one of filmmaker To's stronger efforts. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Enough Said ★★★

Fox, 93 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 14

Writer-director Nicole Holofcener examines the pitfalls of middle-age romance as vulnerable and emotionally conflicted single parents cope with empty nests in this dramatic comedy, starring the late James Gandolfini. Energetic Eva (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) is a massage therapist who totes her bulky table around West L.A., making house calls. Now divorced, she's sad that her beloved teenage daughter (Tracey Fairaway) is departing for Sarah Lawrence College. At a cocktail party, Eva meets two pivotal people: Marianne (Catherine Keener), a cool, chic, yet condescending poet, and Albert (Gandolfini), an easygoing, down-to-earth divorced father whose daughter (Eve Hewson) is heading to Manhattan to study fashion design. Eva soon becomes Marianne's confidante, dutifully listening to her bitter litany of complaints about her former husband. She also becomes Albert's girlfriend—before realizing that Marianne is Albert's ex-wife. A subplot intertwines Eva's daughter's confused best friend (Tavi Gevinson) with Eva's own BFF (Toni Collette), a shallow, self-absorbed therapist struggling with personal issues. Gandolfini delivers a sympathetic, self-deprecating performance that nicely captures the sensitive nuances of a man yearning for someone he can love. Louis-Dreyfus, by contrast, too often falls back on facial grimaces and sitcom timing. Still, overall, *Enough Said* delivers insightful, wryly amusing social commentary on the subject of contemporary suburban anxiety. Recommended. (S. Granger)



The Falls: Testament of Love ★★★

Breaking Glass, 120 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Jon Garcia's sequel to his touching and entertaining 2012 drama *The Falls* revisits the two lead characters five years later. R.J. (Nick Ferrucci) and Chris (Ben Farmer)—who met as young Mormon missionaries, fell in love, and dealt with the wrath of their church and families—have now gone separate ways. R.J., an editor at a Seattle magazine, is in a longstanding relationship with another man, while Chris has not only renounced his gay identity and reconciled with his parents and Mormon elders, but also lives with a wife in Salt Lake City. When a funeral once again brings them face-to-face, sparks fly but Chris's denial and fear prove to be formidable obstacles. Things grow even more tense when R.J.



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THE ROCKET

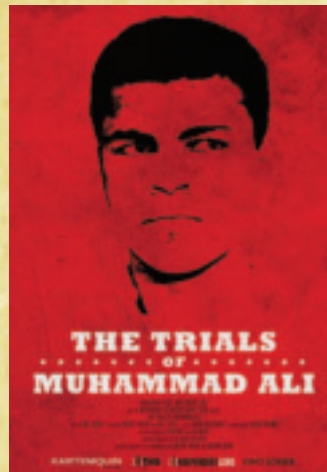
After a calamity-filled journey with his family and friends through Laos, a land scarred by the legacy of war, a boy who is believed to bring bad luck enters an exciting but dangerous competition to build a giant rocket, hoping to prove that he is not cursed.

"Enthralling." - Screen International

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From joining the Nation of Islam, to his refusal to serve in the Vietnam War to protest racial inequality, to his global humanitarian work, Muhammad Ali remains an inspiring and controversial figure. The film examines how he risked his fame and fortune to follow his faith and conscience.

"Invigorating... brings the long-forgotten controversy to life."

- The Hollywood Reporter

"The best Muhammad Ali doc I've ever seen." - Dave Zirin, The Nation

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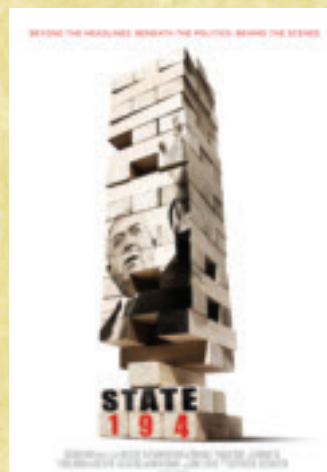
THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE

23.5 million Americans live in long-term recovery from alcohol and other drug addiction. Deeply entrenched social stigma and anonymous 12-step groups have kept recovery voices silent and faces hidden for decades - until now. Courageous addiction recovery advocates are starting to tell their true stories and demand policy change.

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STATE 194

In 2009, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad launched a plan to demonstrate that his people were deserving of statehood, inspiring them to change their destiny and seek UN membership. Since then, they've made remarkable progress, but the political quagmire—and Fayyad's recent resignation from office—may destroy the most promising opportunity for peace in years.

"An intelligent, evenhanded Israeli documentary..." - The New York Times

"Inspiring." - Variety

(With PPR \$349 • Without PPR \$149)

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later shows up at Chris's house, determined to help his ex-partner face the fact that he is gay. Over time, Chris's resistance cracks, bringing him back into R.J.'s arms and on a collision course with his spouse and community. *Testament of Love* is darker than the original film, although Garcia and his compelling lead actors have produced another powerful movie. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

The Family ★★

Fox, 111 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



French director Luc Besson has assembled a star-studded cast for this mobsters-in-hiding comedy revolving around Giovanni Manzoni (Robert De Niro), who ruthlessly ratted out the Brooklyn Mafia and will now spend the rest of his life in the FBI's Witness Protection Program. Unfortunately, Manzoni keeps blowing his cover, which continually frustrates his dyspeptic handler (Tommy Lee Jones). Along with his dysfunctional family, Manzoni has just been relocated to a small village in Normandy, France. Under the assumed name of Blake, the Manzonis face yet another set of re-adjustment issues. Manzoni's wife (Michelle Pfeiffer) not only can't find peanut butter in the food mart but she's rudely informed that local grocers don't like to stock American products. Infuriated at the disrespect, she perhaps overreacts—blowing up the place. Meanwhile, the manipulative Manzoni offspring (Dianna Agron, John D'Leo) quickly size up their new schoolmates and embark on their own schemes. Instructed to stay out-of-sight, Giovanni discovers an old manual typewriter and decides to write a tell-all memoir. Meanwhile, back home, imprisoned Mafia dons dispatch contract killers to exact retribution. Adapted from Tonino Benacquista's novel *Malavita*, the weak, uneven script here never settles on a consistent, cohesive tone, careening from facetious and amusingly amoral to far-from-comedic carnage. Optional, at best. (S. Granger)

Good Ol' Freda ★★1/2

Magnolia, 87 min., PG, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98



As a footnote in the annals of Beatlemania, *Good Ol' Freda* offers no new revelations or delectable dish about the Fab Four's heyday, but it does serve up some adorable anecdotes about life outside the limelight for "the boys," as reported by Freda Kelly, the Beatles' secretary and fan club manager, who earned the title moniker by being their protective teenage mother hen. Now in her late 60s, Freda fondly, sometimes wistfully, and always coyly remembers what it was like to be both a devoted fan and a key figure in the organization for 11 years. As a 16-year-old Liverpoolian,

Freda was recruited from the fawning crowds packing the Cavern Club by Beatles manager Brian Epstein to work in his office, and then to take charge of the massive amounts of fan mail. All of it was answered, sometimes with a signed picture, sometimes with an authentic scrap of worn shirt or lock of hair. Ryan White's lackadaisical documentary focuses on how the shy, loyal, trustworthy young girl became, in her own way, the "first" fifth Beatle. Freda stresses throughout how fun it all was, even when things got "mental" thanks to the ever-increasing fan club membership. Freda had a very close personal relationship with "Eppie," as they called Epstein, as well as Paul, John, George, and Ringo—who all refused to let her quit when operations moved to London. In between reminiscences, Freda shows off some of her priceless memorabilia, but often demurs with a bashful smile when pushed for tastier tidbits. Likely to appeal to Beatlemaniacs, this so-so documentary is a strong optional purchase. (T. Fry)

I Used to Be Darker

★★★★

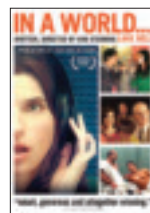
Strand, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Jan. 28



A slice-of-life drama in which a family implodes, after which its members begin rebuilding new lives, *I Used to Be Darker* is the kind of work in which events unfold with the randomness of daily reality. The central character, Taryn (Deragh Campbell), is an Irish girl who makes her way to an aunt (Kim Taylor) and uncle (Ned Oldham) in Baltimore, only to find that the couple—professional musicians—are breaking up, leaving their own teen daughter, Abby (Hannah Gross), angry and miserable. Taryn has an unspoken problem of her own (which eventually becomes clear), but for most of the film she is buffeted by the conflicts at Hannah's house, until later (and unexpectedly) finding herself under a different roof with her aunt's bandmates. Writer-director Matthew Porterfield treats all of his scenes as if they were randomly-drawn cards from a deck, lending an organic feel to the presentation. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

In a World... ★★★★★

Sony, 93 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99, Jan. 21



Writer-director-star Lake Bell's *In a World...* takes a behind-the-curtain peek at Hollywood's highly competitive voiceover profession. Haplessly neurotic Carol Solomon (Bell) is a dialect coach and aspiring voiceover artist whose chauvinistic, egocentric father (Fred Melamed) is one of the industry's sonorous greats. Rather than encouraging Carol, he constantly demeans her, claiming that "the industry does not crave a female sound."

Instead, he mentors arrogant Gustav Werner (Ken Marino), who—not realizing who she is—seduces Carol after an industry party. Meanwhile, Carol's encouraged by a nerdy post-production audio engineer (Demetri Martin) who not only adores her but pushes big business her way. All of this is happening when Carol moves out of her father's apartment and crashes with her sister (Michaela Watkins) and brother-in-law (Rob Corddry), who are in a marital crisis. Carol, Sam, and Gustav eventually become engaged in a toxic rivalry, vying with each other to land the trailer for a huge movie franchise, *The Amazon Games*—and thereby utter the "In a world..." phrase made famous by the legendary real-life Don LaFontaine, who died in 2008. Also featuring Eva Longoria, Tig Notaro, Nick Offerman, Alexandra Holden, and Geena Davis, this savvy, screwball, feminist comedy is recommended. (S. Granger)

Informant ★★★★★

Music Box, 81 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95



Writer-director Jamie Meltzer's documentary presents a complex and compelling portrait of radical left-wing activist Brandon Darby, who would later turn into an FBI informant and Tea Party conservative. The film chronicles this radical shift from left to right with admirable neutrality, but as the tale progresses—with Darby's participation—it's becomes harder to avoid the conclusion that the Austin, TX-based Darby is a two-faced rat who betrayed his admiring followers. Movie-star handsome and charismatic, Darby was hailed as a hero in 2005, when he led numerous relief efforts in Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans. He subsequently founded the Common Ground Relief organization, furthering his credibility with left-wing activists everywhere. But the honeymoon didn't last: in 2008, Darby's cooperation with the FBI led to the arrest of two young protesters at the Republican National Convention. Drawing on numerous interviews with Darby and a variety of others on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, Meltzer winds up with a damning indictment of Darby as a turncoat—although conservatives and Tea Party members will no doubt draw the opposite conclusion. The film's use of re-enactments (including Darby playing himself) is questionable, but Meltzer has effectively created a *Rashomon*-like study of broken trust, media celebrity, and the steady corrosion of civil liberties, particularly the ethical stretching involved in secret governmental surveillance of U.S. citizens. Recommended. (J. Shannon)

Insidious: Chapter 2 ★1/2

Sony, 106 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$40.99

Picking up right where the original left

off, *Insidious: Chapter 2* finds the troubled Lambert family trying to uncover a mysterious childhood secret that has malevolently connected them to a shadowy netherworld. Having just rescued their son, Dalton (Ty Simpkins), from the fiendish forces of the spirit realm, mom Renai (Rose Byrne) and dad Josh (Patrick Wilson) must face the consequences: namely, the murder of Elise (Lin Shaye), the strangled family friend/medium who—along with her goofy, paranormal investigating cohorts—helped get Dalton back. Of course, there are plenty of bizarre, unwelcome occurrences, such as a self-playing piano, baby toys tossing themselves around, and Dalton's conversations with something in the closet. It seems that both Dalton and Josh have the ability to astral project into a place between life and death that is populated by ghouls looking for a healthy body to occupy. Josh's mother (Barbara Hershey) helps the family track down an old man who knows more about both the dimension called "the Further" and the demonic creature that has now taken possession of Josh's body for nefarious purposes. Utilizing every cheesy cliché in the ghost-buster genre, returning director James Wan's tedious and repetitive low-budget chiller is not recommended. (S. Granger)



Ip Man: The Final Fight

★★★

Well Go USA, 101 min., in Cantonese w/English subtitles, PG-13, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

Not to be confused with the *Ip Man* and *Ip Man 2: Legend of the Grandmaster* films starring Donnie Yen, *Ip Man: The Final Fight* is part of a series of mythologizing, high-profile, martial-arts epics centered around a real-life martial-arts teacher (including director Herman Yau's 2010 *The Legend is Born: Ip Man*). The schizoid narrative—a mix of straight bio-pic and fight scenes—covers the hero's life from middle age to death, with some agreeably seasoned actors handling the chopsocky stuff. Scholarly-looking Master Ip Man (Anthony Wong) arrives in Hong Kong in 1950, practically penniless following World War II. He establishes a low-profile school teaching the Wing Chun style, and endures a bittersweet separation from his wife, who cannot adapt to the crowded metropolis. After becoming a widower, Master Ip scandalizes his pupils by keeping company with a showgirl who is attracted by his kindness. Much of the saga follows the pupils in their separate travails—in labor-union unrest, police corruption, and triad-fixed boxing matches—but late in the drama we get a glimpse (not much more) of Master Ip's most renowned student, the iconic Bruce Lee (over whose stardom Ip Man seems to have mixed



feelings). While both the acting and action are solid, the real standout here is a sprawling, impeccably detailed, nostalgic recreation of the British-occupied Hong Kong of yesteryear. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Jump ★★★

Breaking Glass, 80 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Set on a New Year's Eve in Derry, Northern Ireland, *Jump* finds the lives of five twentysomething men and women affected by the disappearance of a young man who angered a local mobster (Lalor Roddy). The latter's daughter, Greta (Nichola Burley)—haunted by her mother's death and distressed by her father's misdeeds—is interrupted during a suicide attempt by Pearse (Martin McCann), a brother of the missing man. Bloodied from a beating by the mobster's henchmen (for being too inquisitive about his sibling), Pearse is bent on revenge, but falls for Greta. Meanwhile, Greta's friends, Marie (Charlene McKenna) and Dara (Valene Kane), unaware of the suicide plan, celebrate the start of a new year. And then there's the murder of Pearse's cousin, a crime involving small-time crook Johnny (Richard Dormer), who has been reluctantly dragged into efforts to silence Pearse. The fateful intersections of these characters—most of whom are strangers to one another—are smartly played out in this film by Kieron J. Walsh. Yes, coincidences abound, but there's a welcome aura of absurdity to the rainbow of tones (grim, silly, romantic) found in this chamber piece featuring an appealing cast. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



Lee Daniels' The Butler

★★★★1/2

Weinstein, 132 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.99, Jan. 14

Inspired by Wil Haygood's 2008 *Washington Post* article about a White House steward who served eight U.S. Presidents, filmmaker Lee Daniels' *The Butler* stars Forest Whitaker as soft-spoken Cecil Gaines, an engaging amalgamation of several butlers who worked at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. As a youngster in Georgia, Gaines witnessed the rape of his mother (Mariah Carey) and shooting of his father. Trained as a domestic servant by the cotton plantation's elderly matriarch (Vanessa Redgrave), Cecil was told: "The room should feel empty when you're in it." Gaines perfects his dignified, white-gloved skills at posh hotels until he's asked to join the White House staff. As a silent, first-hand witness to history, he dutifully serves each First Family from 1957 to 1986. His steadfast devotion infuriates his frustrated, alcoholic wife (Oprah Winfrey) and alienates his rebellious elder son (David Oyelowo), who



joins the Civil Rights movement. Cuba Gooding Jr., Lenny Kravitz, and Terrence Howard shine in supporting roles, as does Jane Fonda in a cameo as Nancy Reagan, but Robin Williams, John Cusack, Liev Schreiber, and Alan Rickman fare less well as Eisenhower, Nixon, Johnson, and Reagan, while James Marsden and Minka Kelly impersonate the Kennedys. Although the parade of famous faces can be distracting, this is ultimately a challenging and haunting historical epic. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)

Margarita ★★★

Wolfe, 91 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

A big hit on the LGBT film festival circuit, co-directors Dominique Cardona and Laurie Colbert's Canadian dramedy *Margarita* is an entertaining indie effort that succeeds on the strength of its ensemble cast and low-budget charm. The title character is an undocumented Mexican nanny (Nicola Correia Damude) who has worked many years for an upscale Toronto couple (Patrick McKenna, Claire Lautier) whose tomboy-teen daughter, Mali (Maya Ritter), loves Margarita like a sister. But on the personal side, Margarita's girlfriend, Jane (Christine Horne), is hesitant to commit when they're both so young (at 24), and when she's faced with the threat of deportation, Margarita makes preparations to return to Mexico, although circumstances take a turn for the better. It's a featherweight drama, leavened with gently amusing comedy (Canadian TV star McKenna scores a few good laughs as the well-meaning husband on the verge of financial disaster), but *Margarita* manages to keep the viewer emotionally invested in the fortunes and futures of its small, appealing cast of characters. Recommended. (J. Shannon)



Mary and Martha ★★★

HBO, 95 min., PG, DVD: \$19.98

Screenwriter Richard Curtis (*Love Actually*) and director Phillip Noyce (*Patriot Games*) bring sensitivity and energy to this well-crafted story about two mothers—Mary (Hilary Swank), an American, and Martha (Brenda Blethyn), who is British—both of whom lose sons to malaria in South Africa. Bonding through grief, the women meet and channel their emotions into activism on behalf of children susceptible to the disease. The challenge comes when Mary and Martha must decide where to go next with their desire to help: the only direction appears to be up—into the halls of power where politicians can loosen purse strings for research and aid. Swank and Blethyn boast fine chemistry in this HBO-aired cable movie partially inspired



by true events, while James Woods makes a strong impression as Mary's estranged father. A handsome film that benefits from Noyce's trademark eye for landscapes and gripping action, *Mary and Martha* effectively tells a dignified tale of emotional survival. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Matt's Chance ★★★1/2

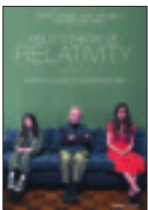
Osiris, 95 min., not rated, DVD: \$16.98



The biggest surprise in Nicholas Gyeney's dark indie comedy is Edward Furlong (whose star wattage quickly dimmed following his breakout child actor role in 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*) as the titular down-on-his-luck slob, who becomes obsessed with seeking revenge after discovering his pregnant fiancée in bed with another man. Furlong brings a sublime mix of angst, anger, and comic agitation to his character, and he is truly hilarious in a sequence in which his appearance in a giant bunny costume at a kiddie birthday party generates a *Lord of the Flies*-worthy response from the youngsters. Adding to the fun is Bill Sore as a Russian gangster who winds up making Matt's bad situation much, much worse. And three old-timers are on hand in winning supporting comic roles: Gary Busey as a pawn shop owner; Lee Majors as a barber; and Margot Kidder as a not-very-glamorous stripper. Gyeney's direction keeps this energetic, entertaining film moving at a crisp pace. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Molly's Theory of Relativity ★★

Adopt, 102 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95



Writer-director Jeff Lipsky's extremely small-scaled domestic comedy-drama stars Sophia Takal as Molly, a jobless young astrophysicist living in a small New York apartment with her husband, Zak (Takal's real-life husband, Lawrence Michael Levine), who is working two low-paying jobs in order to support them. On Halloween night, the couple are visited by a slew of guests—Zak's father (from whom Zak is estranged over money), a precocious neighbor girl dressed as Albert Einstein (along with her mute grandfather, who is introduced as Boris Pasternak), the ghosts of Molly's mother and grandmother, and a little boy who may or may not be imaginary. The visitors all share secrets, memories, fears, and life lessons, which are apparently designed to emphasize the importance of family. While there are a few penetrating observations in this film that features graphic nudity and sex, almost all of the dialogue sounds as though it were coming out of Lipsky's word processor rather than from the mouths of real human beings, so the characters never seem to be more than

puppet mouthpieces. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones ★★

Sony, 130 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$40.99



Based on the 2007 first novel in Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* YA fantasy series, *City of Bones* is set in a world much like our own, except that vampires and werewolves make up part of the populace. Clary (Lily Collins), who lives in Brooklyn with her mother, Jocelyn (Lena Headey), has no idea that such creatures exist until the night she and her friend, Simon (Robert Sheehan), meet Jace (Jamie Campbell Bower), a Shadowhunter who identifies Clary as a member of his half-angel tribe that lives to fight evil. When Jocelyn—who neglected to tell Clary about her nature—goes missing, the trio set out to track her down before a turncoat Shadowhunter (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) can get hold of her magical chalice and wreak havoc. Along the way, they receive help from some—including a mentor (Jared Harris) and a witch (CCH Pounder)—and hindrance from others, such as disgusting demons and ravenous bloodsuckers. To Simon's chagrin, Clary and Jace also fall in love. Unfortunately, director Harald Zwart's film is bogged down by a sprawling plot, awkward dialogue, and a silly *Star Wars* twist. Optional, at best. (K. Fennessy)

Mr. Angel ★★★

Breaking Glass, 68 min., not rated, DVD: \$21.99



Even in a media realm fecund with docu-portraits of porn stars and sex workers, Buck Angel emerges as one heckuva subject. The massive, bald, well-spoken bodybuilder—who lives with his body-piercing-specialist wife, Elayne, in Mexico (they claim to be among the alarmed Americans who actually did flee the U.S. because of George W. Bush)—resembles a rippling-muscle pinup. But Angel was born female, and found jobs as a blonde glamour model. Despite self-identification as a man, male-hormone treatments, and breast-removal surgery, Angel chose to keep "his" vagina, which he has used extensively in his porn film career (in the international marketplace, Angel is unique, catering to fantasy-fetishes that most of us didn't even know existed). One may or may not accept the premise of Dan Hunt's documentary—namely, that Angel is a heroic "sex educator," bearing a message of transgender tolerance and acceptance that he even takes to Yale University. But the film is no tabloid-sideshow, instead emphasizing heavy emotional territory as the sympathetic Angel talks about wrestling with his

sexuality, early addiction, suicide attempts, and long estrangement from his straitlaced family (especially a father still struggling to accept all of this). No hardcore imagery is presented (Buck's infamous genitalia is revealed only in promotional still photos), but this is definitely an adult LGBT title, albeit with wider appeal, featuring interviews with talk show host Wendy Williams, columnist Dan Savage, and porn actress Sasha Grey. A festival circuit favorite that premiered at SXSW, this is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Mulan: Rise of a Warrior ★★★

Funimation, 115 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, TV-MA, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.98



Many Americans are only familiar with the Chinese legend of Mulan because of the 1998 Disney animated movie. Set in the year 450 A.D., this Chinese live-action feature film stars Zhao Wei as Hua Mulan—headstrong daughter of a retired general—who disguises her gender in order to join the military. Over the years, Mulan proves herself to be among the finest soldiers in the land, eventually rising to the rank of general. Although her dedication to military duty is without question, Mulan's potential weakness lies in her unrequited love for fellow soldier Wentai (Chen Kun). Under the crisp direction of Jingle Ma, *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* boasts rich production design and stunning battle sequences that recall the extravagant epics of old-school Hollywood. And while the beautiful Wei may not look like the stereotypical Chinese general (it is unintentionally amusing that no one can guess her real gender), she invests her performance with enormous energy. Delivering a satisfying action-adventure tale, this is recommended. (P. Hall)

Museum Hours ★★★

Cinema Guild, 107 min., in English & German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95



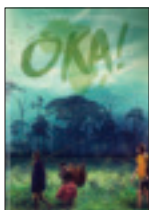
The intersection of art and life lies at the center of Jem Cohen's ruminative *Museum Hours*, which focuses on the relationship between a Canadian woman visiting Vienna and a guard at the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Driven more by mood than plot, the film opens with Johann (Bobby Sommer) watching the disparate museum visitors looking at the art exhibitions, describing in contemplative, wistful, and wry voiceover his attitudes toward his job, life, and the artifacts he helps protect. Anne (Mary Margaret O'Hara), a plain middle-aged woman, strikes up a conversation with Johann and asks directions to a local hospital where her cousin is a patient. Johann eventually becomes Anne's budget tour-guide, even ac-

companying her on visits to the hospital. But while this personal aspect is charming, Cohen's real focus is on the museum, both the masterpieces on the walls and the people who visit and then go about their business outside—juxtaposing contemporary scenes of Viennese life with lovingly photographed paintings. Cohen seems to be suggesting that while art imitates life, the reverse can also be true. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Oka! ★★★

Well Go USA, 105 min., in English, French & Aka w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

A sweet-natured tale of personal and cultural exploration in Central Africa, filmmaker Lavinia Currier's *Oka!* is based on an unpublished memoir by ethnomusicologist Louis Sarno. In the late 1980s, Sarno traveled from New Jersey to Africa to record the traditional music of the forest-dwelling Bayaka Pygmies of Yandombe. Sarno's alter ego here is Larry (Kris Marshall), who journeys to Yandombe despite a failing liver and other threats to his health. After arriving, Larry immerses himself in Bayaka culture so deeply that he decides to stay on, recording music and falling in love with a young Bayaka woman. It's not all happily ever after, however: the local Bantu mayor (Isaach De Bankolé) is involved in shady deals with a Chinese logging firm that threatens to decimate the forest, and he's also planning to frame the Bayaka for poaching elephants. Rather than pursue a political agenda, however, Currier favors a more lighthearted, loosely plotted character study, beautifully shot by Conrad W. Hall (son of the late, great cinematographer Conrad Hall), filled with enough tribal music, dance, language, and jungle wildlife to make *Oka!* (the Aka language word for "Listen!") a memorable travelogue in sight and sound. A lively, uplifting film, this is recommended. (J. Shannon)



Old Goats ★★★

Music Box, 94 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Jan. 21

This sweet and mischievous comedy revolves around the unlikely friendship between three old men, who play themselves within a fictional framework. Dave (David Vander Wal) is a financially comfortable retiree resisting pressure from his controlling wife to buy a condominium in another state and move away from their longtime home. Part of Dave's denial strategy is to spend a lot of time driving Bob (Bob Burkholder) around on errands—the latter being a randy, opinionated, foul-mouthed veteran who is writing a memoir about his virile youth and sexual conquests. Bob champions Britt (Britton Crosley),



who announces grand plans to tour the world in his boat but is in fact a semi-dysfunctional loner living in squalor. The ties between these fellows become even more interesting as Britt acquires a doting girlfriend (for whom he may never be truly ready), Bob begins to settle down, and Dave resigns himself to a retirement plan he doesn't want. Writer-director Taylor Guterson remains rigorously true to the destinies of his characters, eschewing easy attempts at fairy-tale endings for these endearing guys and instead allowing them to stew (as must we all) in their own juices. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Only God Forgives ★1/2

Anchor Bay, 90 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.99

Nicolas Winding Refn's follow-up to *Drive* reunites him with star Ryan Gosling for a cross-cultural tale of American criminals in the Thai underworld. Julian (Gosling) is a reluctant gangster, pushed by his crime-lord mother, Crystal (Kristin Scott Thomas), to avenge the murder of his older brother, a drug smuggler who used a boxing club as a cover and got his kicks from torturing and killing child prostitutes. "I'm sure he had his reasons," says Crystal (without a trace of irony), as she hires hitmen to go after Chang (Vithaya Pansringarm), the avenging street cop who killed her son. *Only God Forgives* is a very lurid and violent film, serving up an abstract passion play set in the slums of Bangkok, bathed in intense greens and reds. Gosling walks through all this as if in a trance, while the cop exacts his own brand of Old Testament justice with a sword he pulls out of his back collar like a diminutive samurai superhero, afterward heading to the karaoke club to sing away his sins. A pulp fiction revenge fantasy, full of extreme violence, sexual depravity, and desperate poverty—with Gosling playing something of a romantic dropped into the family drug business—this film is beautiful to look at, but is ultimately just B-movie exploitation with pretensions to artistic grace. Not a necessary purchase. (S. Axmaker)



Pablo ★★★1/2

Breaking Glass, 93 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Richard Goldgewicht's documentary profile looks at Cuban-born graphic designer Pablo Ferro, who (following a brief stint with comic books) revolutionized the style of TV commercials during the early '60s and did the same for film credit sequences and trailers. Ferro collaborated with Stanley Kubrick on *Dr. Strangelove* and *A Clockwork Orange*, while also developing continuing professional relationships with Norman Jewison (Ferro created the memorable opening for *The Rus-*



sians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming) and Hal Ashby (with whom he became a close friend as well as colleague). As a homage to the machine-gun collages Ferro often employed, Goldgewicht constructs *Pablo* as a visually striking cascade of different media—including film clips, stills, graphics, and animation—with excerpts from interviews of Ferro, many of which are tied to an animated sequence showing the artist being shot at the front door of his apartment—an attack that has left him in chronic pain (and searching for a way to afford a personal sauna). Additional interview clips feature Jewison, Beau Bridges, George Segal (who starred in the only feature Ferro ever directed), and Leonard Maltin, as well as family members—including children from whom he's sometimes been estranged—and friends. Narrated in deadpan style by Jeff Bridges—who clearly relishes delivering digressive little history lessons on TV commercials, trailers, and credit sequences—this is an informative and entertaining portrait of an offbeat influential artist. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Paradise: Hope ★★★

Strand, 91 min., in German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Jan. 14

Paradise: Hope is the final film in Austrian director Ulrich Seidl's loose, semi-improvised trilogy that also includes *Paradise: Love* and *Paradise: Faith* (both reviewed in VL-9/13). This last film features a tenuous connection to *Paradise: Love*, which was about Austrian female sex-tourists in Kenya, since while her single mom is away on an African adventure, overweight adolescent Melanie (Melanie Lenz) is sent to a "diet camp" in the Austrian hinterlands. In between exercise regimens and bonding with her roommates in secret food raids on the cafeteria, Melanie develops a severe crush on one of the principal faculty members, a trim, middle-aged, nameless doctor (Joseph Lorenz). Troublingly, the man returns her fascination, meeting in his office for wordless glances and secret touching (sessions that threaten to grow ever more erotic and dangerous), a quasi-affair that is an open secret to the other girls. Some may find Seidl's muted resolution a cop-out compared to the directly confrontational narratives in his two other films, but it meshes nicely as part of the set. Despite the diet camp angle, the hefty Teutonic maidens here—played by non-pros—seem perfectly and refreshingly comfortable in their own ample, non-Hollywood skins. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)



Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters ★★

Fox, 107 min., PG, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99

Since three years have passed since the arrival of *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The*

Lightning Thief—adapted from the first book in Rick Riordan's bestselling YA fantasy series—early exposition reminds us that Percy (Logan Lerman) is the half-human son of the sea god Poseidon. When Camp Half-Blood, the teenage demigods' woodsy refuge, is suddenly imperiled, Percy and friends Grover (Brandon T. Jackson) and Annabeth (Alexandra Daddario) embark on a quest to retrieve the fabled Golden Fleece from the Sea of Monsters (aka the Bermuda Triangle) in order to restore the Camp's protective barrier. They're joined by Percy's half-brother, Tyson (Douglas Smith), an insecure, sweet-natured Cyclops with one huge CGI eye. Not surprisingly, the group finds itself in a rivalry with the highly competitive, self-centered Clarisse (Leven Rambin), who has joined forces with Luke (Jake Abel), the roguish, resentful son of Hermes. Combative Luke is determined to use the Fleece's restorative powers to resurrect evil Cronos, the vengeful Titan, who was vanquished centuries ago. Directed by Thor Freudenthal, this second installment sees the return of Stanley Tucci as wine-loving Camp director Dionysus, Anthony Head as the centaur Chiron, and Nathan Fillion as Hermes—the god of travelers, messengers, and thieves, now serving as manager of a UPS store. Notable special effects here include the fire-breathing Colchis Bull, a supernatural taxi ride with three haggling Graeae, a seafaring Hippocampus, and a climactic battle with the Cyclops guarding an abandoned amusement park called Circeland. Overall, however, this is a disappointingly uninspired film that just doesn't live up to the far superior novel. Optional. (S. Granger)



Phil Spector ★★

HBO, 92 min., TV-14, DVD: \$19.98

Although this made-for-HBO movie is clearly based on the trial of famed music producer Phil Spector, who was indicted for the murder of B-movie actress Lana Clarkson in 2003, writer-director David Mamet insists that it is a work of fiction. Not surprisingly, *Phil Spector* feels like a Mamet play, full of dialogue that combines philosophical arguments with psychological explorations. Al Pacino paces and rants throughout as Spector, the philosopher king in cartoonish hairdos and clothes—a flamboyant, eccentric celebrity driven as much by his own ego as he is by indignation over being accused of murder. Spector comes across as a canny professional with insights into culture who is oblivious to the way that the world views his behavior and attitudes. Helen Mirren costars as attorney Linda Kenney Baden,

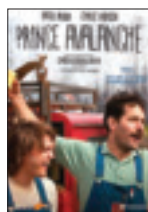


who is fascinated by Spector and convinced there is enough doubt in the evidence to find him not guilty. In fact, the script makes precisely that case—i.e., the evidence is inconclusive at best—and Mamet suggests that Spector is a scapegoat for other celebrity murder trials, thereby stacking the deck for an interpretation of Spector as martyred innocent without actually stating his belief in Spector's innocence (although Mamet has said so elsewhere). Unreliable as a biographical drama and less compelling than Mamet's best plays and screenplays, the film nevertheless boasts a certain freak show curiosity due to Pacino's over-the-top performance. An optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Prince Avalanche ★★★

Magnolia, 94 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

Following a trio of mediocre studio comedies (*Pineapple Express*, *Your Highness*, *The Sitter*), writer-director David Gordon Green returns to his indie roots with this strangely affecting comedy-drama, set in a burned-out forest in rural Texas. In what amounts largely to a two-man show, Paul Rudd and Emile Hirsch star as Alvin and Lance, respectively, a pair of road maintenance workers who paint center stripes and install mileage markers along a stretch of remote asphalt in an area devastated by a recent blaze. Alvin, who is endlessly driven to improve himself and meticulously plans out every detail of his future, landed the job for Lance—his girlfriend's brother—who is only interested in good times. Stuck together in makeshift campsites along the route, the two bicker and complain, and are occasionally visited by a grizzled trucker (Lance LeGault) who offers them advice concerning women (and some whiskey). A turning point in what passes for a plot here occurs when Lance goes off for a weekend and returns with bad news for both himself and Alvin—leading to a drunken bonding session as they sympathize with each other's plight. *Prince Avalanche* is like *The Odd Couple* in the great outdoors, replete with sometimes amusing and sometimes revealing dialogue. An alternately funny and sad rumination on the fragility of human affairs that also suggests the possibilities of new beginnings, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)



R.I.P.D. ★1/2

Universal, 96 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98

Adapted from a comic-book, this unholy mash-up of *Men in Black*, *Ghostbusters*, *Ghost*, and the short-lived CW series *Reaper* stars Ryan Reynolds as Nick, a Boston cop killed during a drug raid by his nefarious partner, Hayes



(Kevin Bacon). In the afterlife, Nick is given the opportunity to redeem himself by working for the Rest in Peace Department, where he is tasked with bringing in (or annihilating) so called "Deados," deceased folks who refuse to "move on" to the lower depths. Partnered with Roy (Jeff Bridges)—a garrulous Wild West lawman—Nick has to learn the ropes for taking down these malefactors, who (when confronted) turn into bulbous, smelly, destructive, cartoonish beasts. Nick is also driven to try to reconnect with his widow Julia (Stephanie Szostak), despite the fact that to humans he appears in the form of an elderly Chinese man. And, of course, he wants to bring down Hayes, who is not only romancing Julia but also plans to release all the souls from hell in order to take over the world. Initially, Nick and Roy are predictably like oil and water, but they manage to bond and—in a splashy, over-the-top finale—avert Armageddon. Bridges steals what little show there is in *R.I.P.D.* with his broad, oversized turn, but Reynolds is bland and Bacon does little more than flare his nostrils. The cheesy special effects here aim for loopy and cool but wind up being silly, gross, and boring. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Romeo and Juliet in Yiddish ★★1/2

Nancy Fishman Film Releasing (avail. from www.amazon.com), 92 min., PG-13, DVD: \$24.95

While the title might suggest a performance of Shakespeare's play in Yiddish, only a few scenes are included in this complicated, overly cute, and clumsily executed comedy written and directed by Eve Annenberg, who also stars as Ava, a graduate student assigned to update an old Yiddish translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by her professor. Stymied by the Elizabethan language, Ava hires three goofy young men to help out—ultra-orthodox-raised Jews who are making a living on the streets through whatever scams they can pull off (including stiffing their own lawyer with a bad check). A convenient dose of magic thrusts the four into the play—the boys as Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio, with Ava as Juliet's nurse—in which the rival families have become hostile Hasidic sects, and the ball where Romeo first encounters Juliet is a Purim celebration. Selected scenes are played in Brooklyn settings—a fire escape instead of a balcony, with subway ramps replacing Verona's streets—and a rabbi stands in for Friar Laurence. It's an amusing enough conceit, but the various plot threads are never successfully woven together and the straining-for-laugh cast is strictly amateur. The film does boast moments of genuine charm, but overall this is a better concept than an actual movie. Optional. (F. Swietek)



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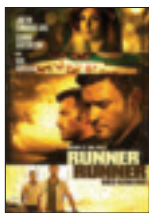
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Runner Runner ★★

Fox, 92 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, Jan. 7

Set in the world of online gambling, *Runner Runner* stars Justin Timberlake as Richie Furst, a mathematically adept Princeton grad student who used to work on Wall Street but (unlike his bosses) lost everything in the 2008 meltdown. Now he collects a commission for directing fellow Ivy Leaguers to a poker website. Following a cease-and-desist threat of expulsion from Dean Monroe (Bob Gunton), Richie bets his tuition bankroll on a round of digital Texas Hold 'Em—which, against all odds, he loses. Believing he's been swindled, Richie travels to Costa Rica to confront the online poker company's CEO, Ivan Block (Ben Affleck), who conveniently lives offshore and outside federal jurisdiction. Ivan offers Richie a lucrative job, ostensibly grooming him as a protégé. Also on hand is flirtatious Rebecca (Gemma Arterton), who may or may not be Ivan's exclusive arm candy. Before long, Richie grows suspicious of his devious, obviously corrupt boss, and when an FBI agent (Anthony Mackie) pressures him to turn informant to take down Ivan on criminal charges, he is faced with a high-stakes moral dilemma. Unfortunately, director Brad Furman's film suffers from a sketchy, stilted, and contrived script. Optional, at best. (S. Granger)

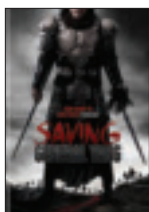


Saving General Yang

★★★1/2

Well Go USA, 107 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

Filmmaker Ronny Yu's rousing battle epic tells a cherished morality tale from Chinese history, one involving the seven sons of General Yang. Yu's approach is aptly grand-scale—big as folklore itself—but avoids the outlandish wire stunts that would have pushed the material into martial-arts fantasy. Set within the 10th-century Song Dynasty, the story finds the Emperor's realm being attacked by traditional enemies, the Khitan. During the battle, the Emperor's noble general, Yang Ye (Adam Cheng), is wounded by a poison arrow and deliberately left stranded deep in enemy territory in order to lure out his seven young sons on a rescue mission that will pit them directly against a vengeful Khitan commander. A holy man predicts that six sons will return home, but that prophecy ultimately takes on a different meaning, as the sacrifices made by the Yang clan grow more painful and extreme. The title—which obviously echoes Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*—is no mere commercial gimmick but instead exceptionally fitting for this war story that

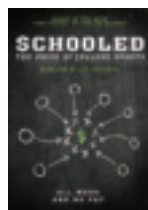


takes place nearly a millennium earlier. Highly recommended. (C. Cassady)

Schooled: The Price of College Sports ★★1/2

Strand, 87 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

Filmmakers Ross Finckel, Jon Paley, and Trevor Martin's revealing documentary—narrated by Sam Rockwell—explores arguments that college athletes should be paid for playing sports, including (and perhaps especially) those attending school on a sports scholarship. If that sounds counterintuitive, consider the conditions under which college athletes play. Various former and current National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) players interviewed here point out that schools are a de facto farm club for dozens of professional sports, but those not chosen potentially give up prime years of earning power in order to work for free while the NCAA takes in enormous profits. College athletes have no choice but to grant their skills, likenesses, and much else for the financial gain of institutions, while stipends for food are so low that many student players often don't have enough to eat. Administrators, coaches, and schools reap billions from games, marketing deals, video games, TV revenue, and more while athletes are monitored constantly and endure severely restricted personal liberties as spelled out by over 400 NCAA rules. Why don't more amateur athletes speak out? Because they need to remain eligible to go professional one day, a status that easily changes when the NCAA and colleges grow disenchanted with a student. Based on Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Taylor Branch's 2011 e-book *The Cartel* (which grew out of his *Atlantic Monthly* magazine article "The Shame of College Sports"), this hard-hitting film is highly recommended. (T. Keogh)

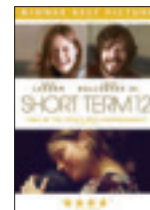


personal woes. Directed by Jacob Goldwasser, this 2007 film grows somewhat funnier as the ladies' scheme unravels, and there are a couple of comic motifs—especially Irena's tendency to settle confrontations with martial arts moves—that warrant a laugh. But for the most part this is a disappointing comedy. Optional. (T. Keogh)

Short Term 12 ★★★

Cinedigm, 96 min., R, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.95, Jan. 14

Written and directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, this poignant psychological drama about troubled teens earned accolades at film festivals worldwide. Twentysomething Grace (Brie Larson) is a group supervisor at a live-in foster-care facility for at-risk kids. Working with her supportive, longtime boyfriend, Mason (John Gallagher Jr.), and new employee, Nate (Rami Malek), Grace does her best to comfort troubled residents, such as nearly-18-year-old Marcus (Keith Stanfield), who is terrified about living on his own for the first time, and can only express his fear and fury in a rap song. But it's the arrival of violently angry Jayden (Kaitlyn Dever)—who writes and illustrates a revelatory fable about an octopus and a shark—that pressures Grace into not only acknowledging her own difficult past but also coming to terms with her unanticipated future. Grace, Mason, and Nate aren't therapists; as counselors, their job is to create a safe environment and keep the damaged adolescents under their protection from hurting themselves and others. But sometimes they perceive more than the mental health professionals, so tension naturally escalates when their evaluations and suggested treatments don't align with the observations of vigilant staffers. Basing the sensitive story on his own experience working at a similar institution, Cretton's direction is realistic and unsentimental. Recommended. (S. Granger)



She's Got It ★★

SISU, 87 min., in Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

A sometimes cute but slow-moving comedy from Israel, *She's Got It* is a heist movie with a battle-of-the-sexes twist. Malka (Dorit-Bar-Or) is a combative shop steward at a clothes factory who becomes incensed when management lays off a number of female employees, including her good friend, Irena (Evelyn Kaplun). Meanwhile, Malka's sister, Yafit (Yael Poliakov), begins dating a security guard who is in cahoots with Irena's printer husband to rob a casino and substitute the stolen cash with counterfeit money. When the three women get wind of the plot, they decide (along with Malka's husband) to step in and take the money for themselves as a balm for unemployment and



A Single Shot ★★

Well Go USA, 116 min., R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98, Jan. 14

Despite the title, there are two decisive rifle shots in David M. Rosenthal's *A Single Shot*, but the mirroring of a destructive bullet with a redemptive round merely underscores the schematic quality of this slow-moving piece of noir-ish backwoods pulp. Venturing out from his trailer looking for deer, shaggy poacher John Moon (Sam Rockwell) fires into the rustling brush, killing a girl. Searching her belongings, John finds a pile of cash. He conceals the corpse and appropriates the money, hoping to use it to win back his estranged wife, who left along with their young son. Naturally,



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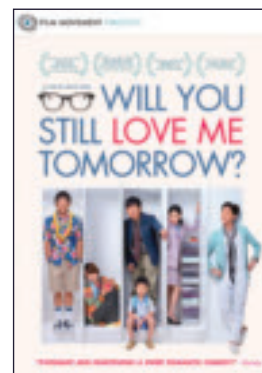
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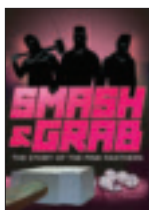
that plan goes awry almost immediately and Moon soon finds himself in the crosshairs of the dead girl's nasty partners: Obadiah (Joe Anderson), an ex-con sporting tattoos and a mean attitude, and his even more menacing colleague, Waylon (Jason Isaacs). Also on hand are Jeffrey Wright as John's booze-ridden old friend (a man with a secret) and Ophelia Lovibond as a sweet neighbor who serves as a damsel-in-distress. Optional. (F. Swietek)

Smash & Grab: The Story of the Pink Panthers

★★★1/2

Music Box, 89 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95

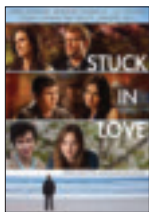
Filmmaker Havana Marking's documentary focuses on the notorious Pink Panthers: a network of master thieves who have stolen \$300 million worth of jewels in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East since 2000 with stunning efficiency. Although not condoning these crimes, *Smash & Grab* presents the Panthers' story as if it were a Hollywood thriller, mixing interviews, animation, and reportage, as it tells the strange tale of the Panthers' emergence from the horrors of Yugoslavia's disintegration in the 1990s, a time when a black market for stolen jewels evolved among Serbian refugees. Security camera footage from numerous jewelry stores across Europe captures the Panthers at work, briskly and boldly driving speeding cars through shop entrances, snatching what they came for, and disappearing again—all in the space of 20 seconds. Fascinating details are offered, such as the Panthers' use of beautiful, wealthy-looking women to perform reconnaissance in jewelry stores months before a hit. Perhaps most interesting of all are interviews with several police detectives from various countries, each of whom has been on the Panthers' trail for years without success. Even the cops, it turns out, have a grudging admiration for these successful bandits. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)



Stuck in Love ★★1/2

Millennium, 96 min., R, DVD: \$28.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99

A divorced novelist and his family grapple with issues in Josh Boone's directorial debut. Bill Borgens (Greg Kinnear), who putters around an enviable beach house, pines for his ex-wife, Erica (Jennifer Connelly), while enjoying trysts with a married neighbor (Kristen Bell). It isn't exactly a rough life, but it is a fairly empty one. His 16-year-old son, Rusty (Nat Wolff), a Stephen King fan, divides his time between Bill and Erica (who has since remarried). Aspiring writer Rusty pursues Kate (Liana Liberato), the girl of his dreams, after

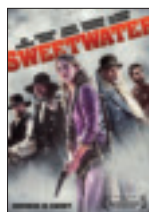


she compliments one of his poems—even though she has a boyfriend and a drug problem. At Thanksgiving, Rusty's pretentious sister, Sam (Lily Collins), a 19-year-old college student, informs her father and brother that she has just published her first novel, sparking jealousy in Bill, who's suffering from writer's block, and Rusty, who's just getting started, but she leaves her mother out of the picture, since she holds Erica responsible for her parents' split. Sam also does her best to fend off the advances of nice-guy classmate Lou (Logan Lerman), because she prefers no-strings relationships, although she softens once she sees the way he cares for his terminally ill mother. As the characters let down their guards, relationships thrive, along with expected roadblocks. Boone has assembled a fine cast for this occasionally absorbing, if tonally inconsistent film, but all of them have done better work elsewhere. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennesy)

Sweetwater ★★

Arc, 95 min., R, DVD: \$20.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Presumably, sibling directors Logan and Noah Miller intended this oddball oater to be a gender-bending homage to the spaghetti Westerns of Sergio Leone in which Clint Eastwood's "Man with No Name" took vengeance on those who wronged his family. The villain here is a religious fanatic named Josiah (scenery-chewing Jason Isaacs), who apparently will kill anyone threatening his iron control over the titular town, which he has turned into a 19th-century cult commune. One of those who are murdered happens to be the rancher-husband of Sarah (January Jones), an erstwhile hooker who turned over a new leaf when she married, but now suffers both loss and humiliation at the hands of the lascivious Josiah and his minions. Understandably, Sarah takes up her guns to systematically wipe out all malefactors. A third major player in this revenge tale is outsider Sheriff Jackson (Ed Harris, doing a sort of Gabby Hayes imitation)—sent to investigate disappearances in the vicinity—who is drawn into the fray. For some reason this pulp nonsense attracted notable actors, but while the Millers clearly intend this to be at least partly a spoof, their ridiculously overwrought saga induces the sort of laughter that arises from derision rather than amused appreciation. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



Tabu ★★1/2

Adopt, 118 min., in Portuguese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95

Not to be confused with the same-named 1931 F.W. Murnau classic, Portuguese writer-director Miguel



Gomes's *Tabu* is a two-part story that takes considerable artistic risks, and often, but not always, succeeds. The first part, "Paradise Lost," set in Lisbon just after Christmas, introduces a cantankerous elderly woman named Aurora (Laura Soveral) who seems to have little contact with reality, and her well-intended neighbor and only true friend, Pilar (Teresa Madruga). When Aurora is hospitalized, she gives Pilar the name and address of a man named Gian Luca Ventura (Henrique Espírito Santo). The second part, "Paradise," switches to 50 years earlier, during Portugal's colonial occupation in Africa, and is narrated through the recollections of Gian Luca, who was the best friend of Aurora's husband, a farmer whose fortunes were threatened by efforts to bring independence to the Portuguese colonies. The young Aurora (Ana Moreira) and Gian Luca (Carlotto Cotta) fall in love, creating an emotional tumult within the growing chaos surrounding them. Gomes structures *Tabu* with a bare minimum of dialogue and a flourish of artistic touches—most notably moody black-and-white cinematography capturing the lovers' range of emotions and the elderly Aurora's isolation—but the film's style doesn't always work, and the soundtrack's Phil Spector-penned pop tunes are more distracting than dramatic. Still, this interesting experimental film that dares to be different should be considered a strong optional purchase. (P. Hall)

Thérèse ★★

MPI, 110 min., in French w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$24.98

Beautifully designed and photographed, this French import tells an almost relentlessly depressing tale of a 1920s bourgeois family and the woman who threatens its stability with her doomed, embittered longing for love. The script—co-written by director Claude Miller (who died shortly after the film was completed) and based on the 1927 novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux* by François Mauriac—serves up a series of downbeat episodes over a decade amidst gorgeous country landscapes and heavy-handed social commentary. Thérèse (Audrey Tautou) submits to an arranged marriage in order to bring the land owned by two families together—much in the way that kingdoms once forged alliances by trading princesses. Her husband (Gilles Lellouche) is an uptight aristocrat and the victim of Thérèse's clumsy attempt at murder (Thérèse also may or may not be responsible for devastating fires in their vast pine forests). The reasoning behind her increasingly morose alienation has to do with class subversion and possibly envy over the love that she sees her childhood friend Anne find (and then lose). Contrary to her most famous screen persona in *Amélie*, Tautou here is sullen and ashen, smoking



endless cigarettes while falling deeper into catatonic despair. A bleak, if also closely observed, portrait of emotional devastation, this is optional, at best. (T. Fry)

The To Do List ★★

Sony, 104 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99

What separates this coming-of-age comedy about a high school kid discovering sex from countless others is that it is presented entirely from the perspective of a teenage girl. Aubrey Plaza (*Parks and Recreation*) stars as class valedictorian Brandy, a straitlaced, somewhat snooty, brainy girl who suddenly becomes concerned by the fact that she has no experience with boys or sex. With the help of her best friends she makes a list of sexual experiences to have during her last summer before heading off to college. Number one on the list is a dumb-blond hunk (Scott Porter) who also works at the public pool where Brandy is employed. *The To Do List* is set in 1993, which gives filmmaker Maggie Carey plenty of opportunity to have fun with the nostalgia of the age before Internet searches (Brandy has to look up every sexual term she encounters in encyclopedias and dictionaries, which adds to the comic confusion). While the female perspective is refreshing, this is still a rather clumsy and not particularly clever adolescent comedy without much insight into the joys, complications, and expectations of sex. So despite a good supporting cast that includes Bill Hader, Rachel Bilson, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Andy Samberg, and Donald Glover, with Connie Britton and Clark Gregg as Brandy's parents, this is not a necessary purchase. (S. Axmaker)



Turtle Hill, Brooklyn ★★★

Breaking Glass, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

Written by its two lead actors, *Turtle Hill, Brooklyn* is a bittersweet dramedy about a couple, Will (Brian W. Seibert) and Mateo (Ricardo Valdez), who are on the verge of either coming apart or growing closer on the day of Will's 30th birthday. A large ensemble cast plays the principals' friends and family, who arrive for a daylong party, where various dramas play out while guests sort through their own relationship laundry. Fortunately, director Ryan Gielen is working with a bunch of good actors, who keep the movie from turning soapy—bringing invention to the characters and keeping the nonstop dialogue fresh. Although there is an occasional hint of smugness to the script, as Seibert and Valdez seize a couple of opportunities to make a political point (a scene featuring a politically conservative, Log Cabin Republican gay man in a heated exchange

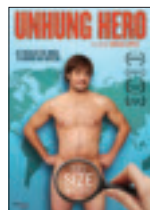


with Will seems particularly gratuitous), the story for the most part stays focused on relationship gaffes and the family pressure Will is experiencing to seek "help" for his sexuality. A low-key, tender tale of partners trying to figure out how to stay together, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

Unhung Hero ★★1/2

Breaking Glass, 84 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

"I look like a big, dumb idiot. People aren't going to take me seriously." So says Patrick Moote—aspiring actor/standup comic in costume as a weiner—who embarks on a personal journey due to his professed small penis to explore whether "size matters." Patrick's rejected marriage proposal on the big screen at a UCLA basketball game is ascribed to his girlfriend being disgruntled over his dimensions. In director Brian Spitz's *Unhung Hero*, Patrick delves into the \$5 billion penis-enhancement business (in which South Korea currently predominates). Unsatisfied by pills, pumps, and "jelqing" exercises, Patrick travels to investigate a Malaysian condom manufacturer, a Korean sex theme-park, Taiwanese penile martial-arts, and tribes in New Guinea, all ostensibly tied to Patrick's plight. Some information is enlightening—phallus length, says an anthropologist, is a modern obsession stoked by porn and hype; in reality, our ancestors were much more concerned about virility and fertility. But a lot of this documentary comes across as schtick-y, and even sex columnist/author Dan Savage voices skepticism about Moote's movie project. Not surprisingly, the film features male-member nudity (not Patrick's, however), but—surprisingly—the legendary endowment of adult-film star John Holmes (inspiration for *Boogie Nights*) goes unmentioned. Given the offbeat topic, this should still be considered a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)



Violet & Daisy ★★

Cinedigm, 88 min., R, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.95

A pair of young women working as contract killers in order to support their taste for fun vacations and fashionable attire might sound like a good premise for a cheeky movie. Certainly the opening sequence—in which Violet (Alexis Bledel) and Daisy (Saoirse Ronan), dressed as pizza-delivering nuns, take out a gang of mobsters—boasts a certain flair. But writer-director Geoffrey Fletcher can't sustain the idea in this film that quickly degenerates into a tedious talkathon centered on the girls' next target, a sad-sack who has stolen mob money. It turns out that the potential victim is terminally ill and trying to commit suicide-



by-assassin, at which point *Violet & Daisy* devolves into a sort of existential dialogue in which the three characters reveal their personal demons. Conversation alone isn't enough, of course, so Fletcher keeps inventing incidents—a trip to buy bullets, the arrival of another group of killers—to string out the running-time. Despite its weaknesses, *Violet & Daisy* is notable for featuring one of the last performances by the late James Gandolfini as the girls' target, putting his hand-dog manner to use as the doomed, good-hearted lug—the very antithesis of Tony Soprano—who actually bakes homemade cookies for his guests. Unfortunately, Gandolfini's turn is overshadowed by the absolute artificiality of the narrative. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

With Love... From the Age of Reason ★★★

First Run, 89 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

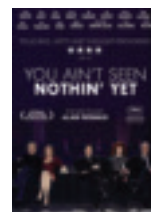
Sophie Marceau delivers a grand performance in director Yann Samuël's interesting dramedy, starring as high-powered executive Margaret, who begins receiving letters that she wrote to herself as a child. The missives (coupled with drawings and other creative materials)—all meant to one day remind Margaret of the hope, magic, and love that once defined her—were made by little Margaret in anticipation of her heart hardening after years of scarcity and the loss of her closest friend (played by Jonathan Zaccaï as an adult). Michel Duchaussoy is golden as the aging notary who agreed to keep the letters for young Margaret decades ago and then deliver them to her when the time was right. His scenes with Marceau offer a striking series of emotional contrasts, especially since Margaret has become a corporate shark who is almost in a state of amnesia regarding her rugged but whimsical youth. Also memorable are performances by Marton Csokas as Margaret's loving but alarmed husband, and Thierry Hancisse as her long-suffering but funny assistant. Besides Marceau, the other magical aspect here is the special effects, which heighten the imaginative element resident in all of those letters reminding Margaret to love herself. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet ★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 115 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95

After wealthy and successful stage director Antoine d'Anthac dies (very likely a romantic suicide), his butler enacts his last wish by inviting troupers from d'Anthac's past achievements (real-life thespians of the Comédie Française portray themselves

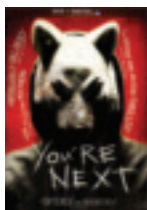


here, including Michel Piccoli and Hippolyte Girardot) to watch a new video of d'Anthac's greatest triumph: a modern-dress take-off on Orpheus and Eurydice (the "Antoine d'Anthac" piece is actually playwright Jean Anouilh's 1941 *Eurydice*). In veteran French filmmaker Alain Resnais's latest, this film-within-the-film (done by another director altogether, Bruno Podalydès) spurs the assembled mourners to fall back into their old stage roles—sometimes with two of them essaying the very same part—in semi-disassociated scenes that seem to cross-reference relationships to each other and with the mysterious d'Anthac, a master of "coupe de theatre." Exceedingly handsome staging and production values may mollify viewers who might otherwise find this obtuse and unfathomable. An offbeat foreign film by a legendary auteur, this is a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

You're Next ★★½

Lionsgate, 94 min., R, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$24.99, Jan. 14

This satirical gory slasher combines a dysfunctional family reunion with the random violence of a home invasion. It's fortunate that Erin (Sharni Vinson), a resourceful teaching assistant, was raised in a survivalist compound in the Australian Outback, because she's about to meet her boyfriend and former professor Crispian's (AJ Bowen) squabbling Davison family and significant others, who are gathering to celebrate his parents' 35th wedding anniversary at the latter's posh, English Tudor-style manor house. After a shocking prologue that introduces the masked intruders, the Davison's isolated country estate is suddenly invaded by unknown attackers wearing weird animal masks and wielding crossbows. What Crispian's mother Aubrey (Barbara Crampton), father Paul (Rob Moran), sister Aimee (Amy Seimetz) and feuding brothers Felix (Nicholas Tucci) and Drake (Joe Swanberg) don't realize is that their neighbors have already been slaughtered...and, according to the writing (in blood) on the wall, they're next on the siege slate. Director Adam Wingard keeps the shocks coming, playing much of the inherent creepiness here for laughs, although the one-by-one elimination plot is utterly predictable. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)



Zaytoun ★★★

Strand, 110 min., in English, Hebrew & Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Feb. 18

Set in 1982 Beirut, Lebanon, during a cross-border conflict with Israel, *Zaytoun* stars Stephen Dorff as Yoni, an Israeli



pilot who survives a crash landing during a bombing raid. Taken prisoner by armed Palestinians, Yoni meets 12-year-old Fahed (Abdallah El Akal), an orphan who faces the dangerous ostracism felt by all Palestinians in the city. Harboring a strong desire to see his late parents' village again, Fahed frees Yoni in exchange for the latter's help in getting to his family's original home. *Zaytoun* soon develops into a kind of buddy movie with international consequences, especially after Yoni—who becomes a father figure to young Fahed—brings the boy back with him to his military base. Escaping from a series of dire circumstances, the pair get to know and care about each other on the journey. Both Dorff and El Akal bring intensity to their roles, balanced by bouts of mirth and warmth, in this accessible drama from director Eran Riklis that also sheds light on the misery of Beirut during that time, when a bright, urbane Lebanese downtown was turned into the bombed-out blight of the Palestinian quarter. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Classic Films

Autumn Sonata

★★★★½

Criterion, 93 min., in Swedish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95

Reflecting on *Autumn Sonata* in a memoir written years later, filmmaker Ingmar Bergman realized that some critics were probably right in saying that this 1978 film was "Bergman doing Bergman." A wrenching and magnificent mother-daughter portrait, *Autumn Sonata* stars Ingrid Bergman, who brings glamour and authority to the role of Charlotte, a famed pianist who all but abandoned daughters Eva (Liv Ullmann) and Helena (Lena Nyman) to pursue her career. After a seven-year absence, Charlotte visits Eva and superficialities quickly give way to terrible recriminations as the latter unleashes a torrent of resentment and outright hatred on several painful topics, including the severely disabled Helena, who now lives with Eva and her husband, Viktor (Halvar Björk), after having been institutionalized by Charlotte. Sven Nykvist's exquisite cinematography relies on close-ups of faces twisted by emotion as the director cuts deftly from the unflinching present to still-life memories of the past, all rendered in painterly compositions and burnished autumnal color schemes. Re-issued on DVD and bowing on Blu-ray, this Criterion Collection release features extras including a 2003 introduction by Bergman, audio commentary by Bergman expert Peter Cowie, interviews with Ullmann and Ingrid



Bergman, and an engrossing three-and-a-half hour "making-of" documentary capturing scenes ranging from early rehearsals to on-set conflicts between the two Bergmans. Highly recommended. (T. Fry)

The Best Years of Our Lives ★★★

Fox, 170 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$19.98

Winner of seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Screenplay, William Wyler's brilliant drama about domestic life after World War II remains one of the all-time classics of American cinema. Inspired by a pictorial article about returning soldiers in *Life* magazine, the story focuses on three war veterans (Fredric March, Dana Andrews, and Harold Russell in unforgettable roles) and their rocky readjustment to civilian life in their Midwestern town of Boone City. Capturing the contradictory moods of America in the mid-to-late 1940s, this epic drama spans a complex range of emotions, from joyous celebration and happy reunion to deep-rooted ambivalence and reassessment of personal priorities. A movie milestone when it was first released in 1946, *The Best Years of Our Lives* still packs a punch with powerful, timeless themes. Bowing on Blu-ray with an excellent transfer, extras include interviews with costars Virginia Mayo and Teresa Wright, and an introduction by Mayo. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (J. Shannon)



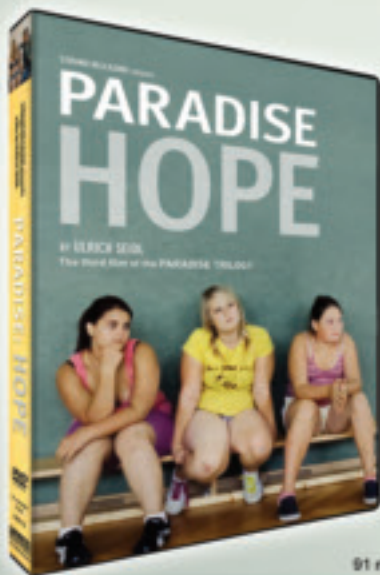
The Big Combo ★★★

Olive, 87 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Joseph H. Lewis was one of the most distinctive low-budget stylists of the 1940s and '50s, a filmmaker who—at his best—was able to overcome budgetary limitations and conventional scripts with shadowy atmosphere, striking images, startling set-pieces, and obsessive characters on the edge. This 1955 production brings film-noir style and attitude to a crime drama starring Cornel Wilde as Lt. Leonard Diamond, a driven cop who hounds preening mobster Mr. Brown (Richard Conte), the latter an arrogant kingpin who has made chilly blonde debutante Susan Lowell (Jean Wallace) his emotional slave. Brian Donlevy is Joe McClure, a Brown cohort with a hearing aid (a detail used in one of the picture's distinctive torture scenes), while Lee Van Cleef and Earl Holliman are buddy-team hired killers Fante and Mingo, who are also working for Brown. Lewis turns the tale into a personal battle between the obsessive lawman and the megalomaniac criminal in an abstract vision of big-city America that is created from stock sets, slashes of light, and pools of



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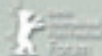
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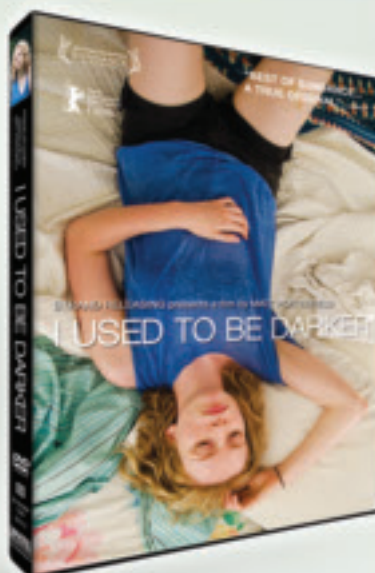
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90 Minutes | In English, Hebrew, Arabic with English subtitles | Not Rated



darkness—all courtesy of cinematographer extraordinaire John Alton, who helps create an austere, eerily empty yet simultaneously claustrophobic world that is drenched in death and doom. Newly remastered for DVD and bowing on Blu-ray, this fine film from the late years of the noir era is recommended. (S. Axmayer)

The Big Parade ★★★★★1/2

Warner, 151 min., not rated,
DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$27.98



An undisputed silent classic, King Vidor's 1925 World War I drama capturing the horror and costs of war stars John Gilbert as spoiled American rich kid James Apperson, who sneers at service but joins up after witnessing the excitement of a recruitment parade. In a standard platoon-movie set-up, disparate characters from all walks of life go into basic training and find camaraderie in their dreams of glory, with plenty of romantic competition for a French peasant girl named Melisande (Renée Adorée), and lots of slapstick gags. The tone changes, however, once they're sent to the frontlines in France, a no-man's land of snipers, machine gun nests, and a bombed-out moonscape of mud and trenches and fallen dead. Vidor's direction is sophisticated and visually rich, with delicate portraits of romantic hope countered with harrowing images of death and destruction. Although Vidor leans on humor and even rewards viewers with an uncomplicated happy ending, *The Big Parade* is the first anti-war masterpiece of American cinema. Featuring a strong score compiled and conducted by Carl Davis, this hugely popular film was the top-grossing silent motion picture of the era. Debuting on DVD and Blu-ray with a luminous transfer from a restored print, extras include audio commentary by film historian Jeffrey Vance, archival audio clips of Vidor, and a vintage studio tour. Packaged in a digi-book with notes, stills, art, and advertising material, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Billy Rose's Jumbo ★★★★★

Warner, 127 min., not rated,
Blu-ray: \$21.99



This 1962 musical extravaganza, perhaps best remembered for Jimmy Durante's signature "What elephant?" gag (and for being referenced in John Kennedy Toole's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1980 novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*) marked the end of an era. It was Doris Day's last musical, Durante's final leading screen role, and Busby Berkeley's swan song as a film choreographer. Based on the 1935 Broadway musical (in which Durante also starred), *Billy Rose's Jumbo* centers on the misfortunes of the financially struggling Wonder Circus, whose main attraction

is the eponymous giant pachyderm. Durante stars as circus owner Pop Wonder, with Day as his daughter, and force of nature Martha Raye as Lulu the fortune teller, who wonders whether marriage to Pop will ever be in her future. Stephen Boyd costars as the handsome new arrival, sent by his father (Dean Jagger)—a rival circus owner—to undermine the Wonder Circus. Even when I saw this as a kid, I thought Boyd (*Ben-Hur*) was out of his element in a musical comedy, but Durante, Day, and Raye are seasoned pros. Perhaps not the greatest show on Earth (it bombed at the box office), *Billy Rose's Jumbo* is still a lot of fun, with some great songs—including the Rodgers and Hart standards "This Can't Be Love" and "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World"—and fine vintage circus acts. Bowing on Blu-ray, extras include the 1953 Tom and Jerry cartoon "Jerry and Jumbo," and the 1933 Rodgers and Hart musical short "Yours Sincerely." Recommended. (D. Liebenow)

David Copperfield ★★★★★1/2

Warner, 131 min., not rated,
DVD: \$21.48



Charles Dickens' sprawling, semi-autobiographical novel was squeezed into this vivid and handsome 1935 MGM production. Produced by David O. Selznick and directed by George Cukor, the tale follows David from birth and boyhood (played by child star Freddie Bartholomew) to his becoming a young man (Frank Lawton). Some scenes from the source were necessarily cut, but the film is largely faithful and is brought to life with distinctive performances (the boast of a "star cast of 65 players" is only a slight exaggeration). Not so much star-studded as well-populated from the deepest pool of Hollywood studio character actors, *David Copperfield* features Edna May Oliver as the eccentric but generous Aunt Betsey; Basil Rathbone as David's cold, stern stepfather; and Roland Young (usually cast in comic roles) as the obsequious villain Uriah Heep; as well as supporting turns by Lionel Barrymore, Elsa Lanchester, Lewis Stone, and Maureen O'Sullivan. The most inspired casting here is W.C. Fields, who is marvelous as the hearty and loyal Micawber, a far cry from the sly, sour curmudgeon that Fields was famous for playing in his comedies. Previously available on DVD in a boxed set—long out of print—it's now part of the Warner Archive manufacture-on-demand collection, with extras including two vintage shorts and a classic cartoon. Highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Eyes Without a Face ★★★★★

Criterion, 90 min., in French w/English subtitles,
not rated, Blu-ray: \$39.95

Georges Franju's perverse 1959 French horror film is at once lyrical, haunting, and deviant—an elegant classic of sadism and

shadowy grace. Famed plastic surgeon Dr. Génessier (Pierre Brasseur), wracked with guilt over disfiguring his once-lovely daughter, Christiane (Edith Scob), in a car wreck, lures young women to his secluded mansion with the help of his mistress, Louise (Alida Valli), in order to perform brutal, bloody experiments upon them, sacrificing their beauty and lives to restore Christiane's face. Christiane wanders like a lost fawn through the house, her scarred visage hidden behind a blank mask that exposes only her sad, lonely eyes, and as each attempted skin graft fails, she slips further into despair and disconnection. Franju employs Génessier's sadistic undertakings to create an eerie poetry reminiscent of Jean Cocteau's fantasy imagery, culminating in an astonishingly brutal yet beautiful finale. Previously available on DVD, *Eyes Without a Face* has been newly remastered and debuts on Blu-ray, with extras including Franju's 1949 short documentary "Blood of the Beasts" (looking at Paris slaughterhouses), new and archival interviews, excerpts from a 1985 documentary on the film's screenwriters (Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac), and a booklet with essays. Recommended. (S. Axmayer)



The Fly ★★★★★

Fox, 94 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$24.99



The 1958 original version of *The Fly* serves up a mix of science fiction and monster movie, framed by the domestic drama of a happy family shattered by reckless experimentation. David Hedison stars as Andre Delambre, an obsessive scientist who creates a matter-transference device and tests it on himself, resulting in a swap of body parts with an insect trapped in the machine. Directed by Kurt Neumann and presented largely in flashback, the film looks lavish thanks to the CinemaScope widescreen color format. The monster makeup is hidden for most of the running time, but then slowly revealed in shock scenes that send Delambre's wife, Helene (Patricia Owens), off screaming. But there are other startling moments, including an inspired fly's-eye-view kaleidoscope shot, and the metal-press insecticide that opens the film with a bloody splash. The focus, however, is on the ordeal of Helene, who goes on a mad hunt for the part-human fly that has escaped Andre's lab. Vincent Price costars as the loyal brother-in-law dedicated to looking after Helene and her son, and Herbert Marshall is the police inspector. *The Fly* has aged, of course, and some of the dialogue (scripted by future bestselling novelist James Clavell) is stilted and silly, but it's one of the more creative examples of 1950s sci-fi horror and an iconic genre film of the era. Debuting

on Blu-ray, extras include audio commentary with Hedison and film historian David Del Valle, a retrospective featurette, a *Biography* episode on Price, and a Fox Movietone News short. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

High Plains Drifter

★★★★1/2

Universal, 105 min., R, Blu-ray: \$19.98

Clint Eastwood's second film as a director (and his first Western) offers a variation on the "Man with No Name" theme, starring Eastwood as a drifter known only as "the Stranger," who rides into the desert town of Lago and is quickly attacked by three gunmen. Recovering with the aid of a local little person (a memorable role for Billy Curtis), the Stranger is hired by the intimidated townsfolk to fend off a band of violent ex-convicts. After teaching the citizens self-defense and instructing them to paint the entire town red and rename it "Hell," the Stranger vanishes, but reappears when the marauding criminals arrive, delivering justice while also teaching the townsfolk a harsh lesson about moral obligation. Is the Stranger a figure from their past or a kind of supernatural avenger? Combining humor with action, 1973's *High Plains Drifter* is simultaneously both a serious and tongue-in-cheek tribute to the Westerns that made Eastwood a household name. Shining on Blu-ray—albeit with only a trailer as a supplement—this is highly recommended. (J. Shannon)



The Hitch-Hiker

Kino, 71 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Actress Ida Lupino was one of the only women directing American movies in the 1940s and '50s, and this independent 1953 production—inspired by the true story of an escaped killer who murdered his way down the West Coast—takes her into a distinctively masculine film noir thriller world. Roy Collins (Edmond O'Brien) and Gilbert Bowen (Frank Lovejoy) are married men on a fishing vacation that detours into Tijuana, where they end up in a hostage situation after fugitive convict Emmett Myers (William Talman—most famous for playing Hamilton Burger to Raymond Burr's Perry Mason) hitches a ride and forces them to drive him to the Gulf Coast. O'Brien and Lovejoy are convincing as middle-class guys in a nightmarish situation, and Talman is intimidating as a psychotic killer with a sadistic sense of humor and a scarred eyelid that never fully closes—even when he's asleep. The result is a sweaty, lean thriller that plays out almost entirely on desolate dirt roads and dusty rural highways, with California's striking, boulder-strewn Alabama Hills standing in



for Mexico. One of the best low-budget film noirs of the era, and the only classic of the genre directed by a woman, *The Hitch-Hiker* slipped into the public domain years ago, resulting in numerous poor-quality releases over the decades on tape and disc. This edition, mastered from an archival 35mm print from the Library of Congress, shows minor damage but is otherwise a major improvement and is now the definitive home-video presentation. Extras include an image gallery. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

I Married a Witch

Criterion, 77 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

René Clair's sexy American rom-com ghost story is a delightful and deftly made 1942 trifle with Veronica Lake at her best as Jennifer, a 17th-century witch who's resurrected hundreds of years after being burned alive by the Puritans. Jennifer's released spirit (visualized as a plume of smoke) finds a comely body and decides to wreak havoc on the life of gubernatorial candidate Wallace Wooley (Fredric March)—descendent of Jonathan Wooley (also played by March), the man who sent her to the stake—on the eve of his impending marriage to the hard, cold, spiteful Estelle (Susan Hayward). When Jennifer's love potion backfires, however, she finds herself falling in love with the mortal. For all of the playful fantasy and cheekiness, there's also an unexpected gallows humor running beneath the energetic comedy and rapid-fire gags, as well as a very adult sensibility to Jennifer's flirtations. Preston Sturges had a hand in the production, but it's the light touch and continental maturity of French director Clair that stir the ingredients into such a piquant cocktail. A beloved minor classic, *I Married a Witch* finally debuts on DVD and Blu-ray with a strong image (despite some brief sections with print damage), and extras including an archival audio radio interview with Clair, and a booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Intolerance

Cohen, 2 discs, 168 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.98, Blu-ray: \$49.98

D.W. Griffith's 1916 follow-up to *Birth of a Nation* serves up a diatribe against prejudice that spans centuries and continents in a quartet of stories from different epochs that form an intertwined narrative even more ambitious than its influential (and controversial) antecedent. Populated by characters with names such as "Boy" (Robert Harron), "Dear One" (Mae Marsh), and "Musketeer of the Slums" (Walter Long), *Intolerance* begins with the modern story of a young couple in hard times caught



up with gangsters, as the husband is being sent to the gallows for a murder he didn't commit. The thread then weaves back to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre—a vicious act of religious persecution in 16th-century France—then moves on to the story of Christ, and finally unspools a lavish tale involving enlightened royalty, scheming priests, and a poor Mountain Girl (Constance Talmadge) in ancient Babylon. This last sequence is the most spectacular, with monumental staging, live elephants, and a dynamic camera that at one point swoops through the entire set. An image of a serene Eternal Mother (Lillian Gish) frames the four tales, and Griffith's finale intercuts the climactic scenes from all of them. Although a flop with audiences, *Intolerance* features images of incredible beauty coupled with moments of heartfelt drama, all pulled together by sophisticated editing, and backed by a fine score composed and conducted by Carl Davis. Re-released on DVD and bowing on Blu-ray in a superior edition mastered from film historian Kevin Brownlow's restoration, extras include the feature-length versions of two segments that Griffith re-edited for separate release years later, an interview with Brownlow, and a booklet. A landmark silent film, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

James Dean: Ultimate Collector's Edition

★★★★

Warner, 7 discs, 429 min., G/PG/PG-13, Blu-ray: \$99.98



Hollywood legend James Dean (1931-1955) only made three films during his tragically short career, all for Warner Bros., and debuting on Blu-ray in this handsome boxed set. Dean burst onto the silver screen with Elia Kazan's superb 1955 adaptation of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, an update of the Cain and Abel story. The Oscar-nominated Dean plays Cal Trask, a moody, neurotic, let-tuce farmer's son, who vies with his virtuous brother, Aron (Dick Davalos), for the favor of their father, Adam (Raymond Massey). But Dean's most iconic role would come later the same year with his iconic Oscar-nominated performance as a troubled misunderstood teen named Jim who winds up in a standoff with the law in Nicholas Ray's 1955 *Rebel Without a Cause*, which costarred Sal Mineo and Natalie Wood (all three leads would meet untimely deaths: Dean in a car crash, Mineo murdered, and Wood drowning in a mystery-shrouded boating accident). Dean's last film—and final Academy Award nomination—was George Stevens' 1956 *Giant*, based on Edna Ferber's tri-generational epic novel chronicling the volatile relationship between Bick Benedict (Rock Hudson), representing the old Texas of immense cattle ranches; Jett Rink (Dean)—the original JR—personifying

the new Texas shaped by oil money; and the woman loved by both men, Benedict's wife from the East, Leslie (Elizabeth Taylor). Sporting fine transfers, extras across the discs include audio commentaries, documentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, interviews, deleted scenes, screen and wardrobe tests, and more. Although all three titles are available separately on Blu-ray, this set features two exclusive bonus documentaries—*James Dean: Forever Young* (narrated by Martin Sheen) and the *American Masters* entry *James Dean: Sense Memories*—as well as a commemorative photo book. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (R. Pitman)

La Cage aux Folles

★★★1/2

Criterion, 96 min., in French w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95



The surprise global art house hit of 1978, this zesty French-Italian coproduction was one of the first films to portray gay characters in a positive, upbeat light. A breezy farce in the classical tradition, *La Cage aux Folles* was based on a popular and critically acclaimed stage play, and went on to inspire two film sequels, a Broadway musical, and Mike Nichols' 1996 American remake *The Birdcage*, starring Robin Williams and Nathan Lane. Directed by the late Edouard Molinaro, the original film is a decidedly more natural, low-key affair, but it still delivers abundant laughs. The fun begins when nightclub owner Renato (Ugo Tognazzi) and his drag-queen partner Albin (Michel Serrault) agree to pretend to be a straight couple for Renato's son (from a previous relationship) when the latter introduces them to the prim parents of his fiancée. As played by Serrault (who originated the role on stage), Albin is the quintessential drama queen, but his sensitive nature (along with Renato's love for his son) gives *La Cage aux Folles* the heart and soul that have kept the story so popular. The bright pastel-and-neon color palette shines on the restored digital transfer for Criterion's new Blu-ray and DVD editions, which also feature excellent sound for the light and bubbly score by Ennio Morricone. Extras include new interviews with Molinaro and Laurence Senelick (author of *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*), archival clips from the original stage play, and a booklet featuring an essay by film critic David Ehrenstein. Highly recommended. (J. Shannon)

A Letter to Three Wives

★★★1/2

Fox, 103 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$24.99



In Joseph L. Mankiewicz's Oscar-winning 1949 classic, three women are the joint recipients of a letter from neighborhood

social goddess Addie Ross, who informs her "dearest friends" that she is leaving town in the company of one of their husbands. Each reflects on their own marriage, trying to determine if their mate might be the one. Deborah (Jeanne Crain) is a young Navy wife who feels out of place with her upwardly mobile husband's social set. Rita (Ann Sothern) is a successful writer for radio who earns more than her schoolteacher spouse (Kirk Douglas). Lora May (Linda Darnell) is a girl literally from the wrong side of the tracks who lands a store tycoon (Paul Douglas at his gruffest), but he's convinced she's a gold-digger. The flashbacks are by turns melodramatic, clever, acerbically witty (anticipating Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* the following year), and even blatantly comic. Bowing on Blu-ray with a sparkling black-and-white transfer, extras include audio commentary (by Mankiewicz biographers Kenneth Geist and Cheryl Lower, along with the director's son, Christopher Mankiewicz), a *Biography* episode devoted to Darnell, and Fox Movietone newsreel footage of Oscar night, when the film won for Best Director and Best Screenplay. Highly recommended. (D. Liebenson)

Lion of the Desert ★★

Anchor Bay, 174 min., PG, Blu-ray: \$19.99



Destined to remain a dubious footnote in movie trivia books, this occasionally impressive 1980 epic was financed with a budget of \$35 million by Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, who previously attempted the role of movie producer with the critically roasted 1977 film *Mohammad, Messenger of God* (also newly available on Blu-ray). *Lion of the Desert* didn't fare much better (grossing approximately \$1 million worldwide), and while some of its wartime action sequences are intelligently filmed, the movie is more notable for its bad acting. Under a shaggy Muslim beard, Anthony Quinn stars as Omar Mukhtar, the Arab hero and guerilla fighter who defended Libya against Benito Mussolini and Italy's attempted conquests during World War II. As straightforward biography, the movie boasts an admirable epic sweep, but a cliché-ridden script and uniformly terrible performances (from a cast that includes John Gielgud, Oliver Reed, and Rod Steiger) make this little more than a curiosity. Presented with a lackluster Blu-ray transfer that is not even in the original 2:39:1 aspect ratio, the running time on this extras-less release is 173 minutes, not the 156 minutes listed on the jacket (and this is still well short of the full-length 206-minute version). Optional, at best. (J. Shannon)

On the Riviera ★★

Fox, 90 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Inspired by Roy Del Ruth's *Folies Bergère de Paris* and Irving Cummings' *That Night in Rio*,

Walter Lang's 1951 Technicolor production features Danny Kaye in the dual role previously assumed by Maurice Chevalier (in *Folies*) and Don Ameche (in *Rio*). Kaye's Jack Martin is an American song-and-dance man based in Monte Carlo. When playboy aviator Henri Duran (Kaye with a French accent) returns from his latest adventure, Martin notices his own uncanny resemblance to Duran—and takes note of Duran's neglected wife, Lili (Gene Tierney). After Duran is called away on business, Martin accepts an invitation to impersonate him for an important function, which gives him the chance to cozy up to Lili—and infuriate his dance partner, Colette (Corinne Calvet). Duran pays him back with an impersonation of his own. While it's not *Twelfth Night*, *On the Riviera* is an enjoyable diversion, as well as a family affair, since designer Oleg Cassini outfitted wife Tierney, and Sylvia Fine penned tunes for husband Kaye (except for the standard "Ballin' the Jack"). Look sharp for future Bob Fosse hooper (and wife) Gwen Verdon as a dancer and Tierney's famous portrait from *Laura* above Duran's fireplace. Although considered a minor effort in the Kaye canon—the musical was more of an audience favorite than a critical darling—this engaging film (released as part of a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Kaye's birth) makes a welcome debut on Blu-ray, with a retrospective featurette and profiles of Kaye and choreographer Jack Cole. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)



Othello ★★1/2

Kultur, 159 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99



It isn't quite complete—the second scene of Act II is omitted—and Stuart Burge's direction makes no effort to disguise its origin on the stage of Britain's National Theatre, but this 1965 film of Shakespeare's tragedy about the titular jealous Moor, who the malevolent Iago manipulates into murdering his faithful wife, Desdemona, is nonetheless a classic (rarely has the text been acted with greater clarity and power). Nabbing numerous Oscar and Golden Globe nominations, this *Othello* is also a controversial production: some viewers consider Laurence Olivier's blackface makeup in the title role to be offensive (Bosley Crowther, then film critic of the *New York Times*, called it a minstrel show version of the play). Regardless, Olivier delivers a brilliant performance, a *tour de force* of irresistible magnetism and passion, while also bringing out the best in his colleagues, especially Frank Finlay, whose Iago is a masterpiece of quiet menace and cunning. The young Maggie Smith makes a resplendent Desdemona and Derek Jacobi a virile Cassio, with the rest of

Breaking Glass Pictures Presents

A World of Independent Films



2 Jacks

Legendary director Jack Huston (Danny Huston) returns to LA after a long hiatus to raise money for his next film. During his first night in town, he seduces the stunning Diana (Sienna Miller) and attends some wild industry parties, all before playing a high-stakes poker game at dawn. Years later, Jack Huston Jr. (Jack Huston) arrives in Hollywood to pursue his directorial debut, with the hope of finally stepping out from his father's shadow.

\$24.99 SRP

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Lesson Before Love

Eric, Alexis, Cullen and Janae are all single and unsatisfied living their monochromatic lives. The contentious, first time meeting between on-line chat buddies, Eric and Alexis, brings about a torrent of emotion as they all meet up for a night on the town. Afterwards, they begin to experience love lessons that force them to search their own hearts and passion for the love that has long eluded them.

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Capital Games

Take two ambitious men, one top LA advertising firm, add a competition for the same high ranking job. Tough ex-LAPD cop Steve Miller quit the force to work in the calm environment of a business office. Mark Richfield, the glamorous new kid in the office, soon wins favor with the big boss and co-workers causing Steve to cringe in jealousy. After a crazy night in the Santa Fe desert, Steve becomes torn between passionate love and passionate hatred. Steve and Mark endure agonizing decisions that will affect their lives forever.

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Antisocial

Five university friends gather at a house party to ring in the New Year. Unbeknownst to them, an epidemic has erupted outside, causing outbreaks around the world. With nowhere else to turn, they barricade themselves indoors with only their phones, laptops, and other tech devices. They use their devices to research the possible cause of this outbreak. As the virus spreads, the mood in the house changes from fear to paranoia. Who is safe? Who can they trust? Reality becomes blurred as they slowly discover the source of the virus is more terrifying than they ever imagined...

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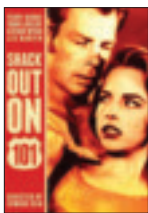


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the cast providing strong support. DVD extras include brief excerpts from an interview with Anthony Hopkins, who recounts his memories of Olivier and the National Theatre. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Shack Out on 101 ★★1/2
Olive, 73 min., not rated, DVD:
\$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95



Director Edward Dein's low-budget film noir, set almost entirely in a dumpy diner on a lonely stretch of the California coast, represents one of the oddest collisions of B-movie crime and Cold War anti-communist paranoia of the 1950s. Terry Moore receives top billing as a waitress named Kotty, and stolid second-rate leading man Frank Lovejoy is Professor Sam Bastion, a nuclear physicist at a local college who hangs out at the seaside café—splitting his time between dating Kotty, gabbing with owner George (Keenan Wynn), and swapping seashells with a short-order cook nicknamed Slob (Lee Marvin), whose easygoing manner can slip into nasty threats (a scene with George and Slob clearing the tables to pump iron and compare pecs is one of the weirdest interludes in American film). The narrative plays out like a bizarre stage play, with characters gathering in the greasy spoon to banter and lob insults and cracks before getting down to the business of stealing secrets for a spy network. And when a harpoon gun is introduced, you know it's going to be used on someone before the credits roll. The offbeat humor, unusual character twists, and strange romantic dynamics (all three men make a play for Kotty, who fends for herself pretty well) elevate this above the level of ordinary Red Scare polemic. A minor cult oddity featuring fine cinematography by Oscar-winner Floyd Crosby, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Shane ★★1/2
Paramount, 118 min., not
rated, Blu-ray: \$19.98

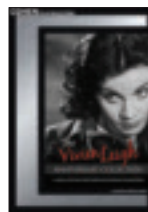


Director George Stevens' 1953 *Shane*, one of cinema's all-time classic Westerns, stars Alan Ladd as the titular gunfighter, a drifter who assists a group of homesteaders in fending off a land-hungry rancher. Shane enters the lives of the Starrett family—husband Joe (Van Heflin), wife Marian (Jean Arthur), and son Joey (Brandon De Wilde), who idolizes him—initially helping out with chores and later becoming more involved in the local fight, especially after the rancher brings in a hired gun (Jack Palance). Once lauded for its realism (a scene with agitated animals during a dust-up between Joe and Shane is still quite powerful), *Shane*—based on a novel by Jack

Schaefer—today plays more like myth, the story of an outsider who envies the lifestyle of the good people he defends, but also knows that his reputation with a gun will never truly allow him to become a part of their community. Nabbing six Academy Award nominations (including Best Picture and Director, and winning for Best Cinematography), *Shane* bows on Blu-ray in a sparkling transfer, with extras including audio commentary by George Stevens, Jr. and associate producer Ivan Moffat. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

The Vivien Leigh Anniversary Collection

★★★
Cohen, 2 discs, 339 min., not
rated, DVD: \$49.98, Blu-ray:
\$59.98



Before becoming internationally famous for playing Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, Vivien Leigh was a rising star in Britain, and this set collects the four British films she made before going to Hollywood. *Fire Over England* (1937), an Elizabethan spy drama set during the time when Spain was preparing to attack Britain with the Spanish Armada, cast Leigh in her first major role, as Cynthia, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth I (Flora Robson) and lover of loyal naval officer Michael Ingolby (Laurence Olivier, whom Leigh later married). James Wong Howe photographs director William K. Howard's visually impressive production, which costars Raymond Massey and James Mason. Leigh transforms from wide-eyed innocent to cagey professional as double agent Madeleine Goddard in *Dark Journey* (1937), a World War I espionage thriller directed by Victor Saville and costarring Conrad Veidt as Baron Karl Von Marwitz, a German operative who falls in love with her. Leigh appears with Rex Harrison in the 1937 comedy *Storm in a Teacup*, helmed by Ian Dalrymple and Saville, about a minor scandal that becomes a press sensation, with Harrison playing reporter Frank Burdon and Leigh as Vickie, the daughter of the politician (Cecil Parker) at the center of the turmoil. Finally, filmmaker Tim Whelan's 1938 *St. Martin's Lane* (aka *Sidewalks of London*) is a rags-to-riches tale starring Charles Laughton as busker Charles Staggers, who takes street urchin Libby (Leigh) under his wing, after which Harrison's theater impresario Harley Prentiss plucks her off the streets and onto the stage. Leigh's cockney accent here is unconvincing at best, but her sassy performance is dynamic, and she's entrancing as the dancing dreamer, theatrical ingénue, and—finally—confident star managing the press and her fans with utter professionalism. All four films are remastered from archival 35mm materials from the British Film Institute for these

DVD and Blu-ray editions, with extras including a featurette with Leigh biographer Anne Edwards, and a booklet. While none of these films are outright classics, this is a nice set that shows a different side of Leigh. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Wild Style: 30th Anniversary Edition

★★★
Music Box, 2 discs, 82 min., R,
DVD: \$29.95



This 1983 indie, shot on the streets of New York by Charlie Ahearn with real-life personalities from the world of art and music in the leading roles, serves up a time capsule look at the urban subculture of the South Bronx. A scruffy narrative about a graffiti artist named Raymond "Zoro" ("Lee" George Quinones), who is on the verge of a mainstream breakthrough, is interwoven amidst scenes of club performances, playground rap battles (while the competitors are playing basketball, no less!), outbursts of breakdancing, and a finale featuring an outdoor concert. Among the pre-fame hip-hop icons featured here are Fab 5 Freddy, Grandmaster Flash, the Cold Crush Brothers, Chief Rocker Busy Bee, and the Rock Steady Crew, as well as graffiti artist Sandra "Pink" Fabara and 1980s underground personality Patti Aspor as a *Village Voice* reporter. While not particularly well acted, the film nonetheless boasts an authenticity that keeps it buoyant and engaging. Viewers will see early performances by some of the most influential artists of what was then a culture in its infancy, and while it's technically not a documentary, the historical record it preserves makes it an important visual document—and invaluable addition to any collection of urban American and hip-hop history. This new 30th-anniversary edition DVD features audio commentary by Ahearn, an anniversary reunion, various artist interviews, an expanded photo gallery, and a booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) during January and February for DVD/Blu-ray-specific comments added to the current video movies reviewed here, as well as new reviews, including *Afternoon Delight*, *All Is Lost*, *Austenland*, *Baggage Claim*, *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs 2*, *Don Jon*, *Fruitvale Station*, *Inequality for All*, *Last Love*, *Machete Kills*, *Riddick*, *Rush*, *Samson & Delilah*, *The Spectacular Now*, *Sunlight Jr.*, *Thanks for Sharing*, and much more!

2 Broke Girls: The Complete Second Season ★★1/2

Warner, 3 discs, 513 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.98

The second season of CBS's popular sitcom finds struggling roommates and BFFs Max (Kat Dennings) and Caroline (Beth Behrs) continuing on course as sexpot waitresses who sling dialogue that is rife with innuendo and blatant double entendres. White co-workers at a Brooklyn diner owned by Korean man-child Han (Matthew Moy)—with elderly black cashier Earl (Garrett Morris), and perverted Ukrainian cook Oleg (Jonathan Kite) thrown into the mix—the girls have a dream of opening a cupcake boutique that finally becomes a reality (sort of). Doubling down on the ribald humor and ethnic stereotyping, the show also features Jennifer Coolidge as Sophie, a dopey Polish nymphomaniac who hooks up with Oleg. Co-creator Michael Patrick King (*Sex and the City*) has thumbed his nose at critics by bringing what he calls “high lowbrow humor” to the sitcom stage, and the results are pretty much love-it-or-hate-it. Episodes follow Max and Caroline as they do whatever it takes to become entrepreneurs, including romancing new and old boyfriends, working extra jobs, and tolerating or baiting those around them. Fans will have a lot to enjoy, starting with Dennings' fine turn as an insecure, voluptuous smart-ass, and the always reliable Coolidge, who nails ditz. Compiling all 24 episodes from 2012–13, DVD extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, a character profile, deleted scenes, a panel discussion with King and the cast, and a gag reel. A strong optional purchase. (T. Fry)



American Horror Story—Asylum: The Complete Second Season ★★1/2

Fox, 553 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.98

Rather than keep the same characters and settings from season to season, series creators Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy have retained several members of the first-season cast (especially Emmy-winner Jessica Lange) but dropped them into an all-new, all-American horror story with new roles. Whereas the first season focused on a present-day family struggling in a notoriously haunted “murder house,” the second season opts for a classically gothic setting: the Briarcliff home for the criminally insane, a former tuberculosis ward where 46,000 people died before it was sold to the Catholic Church in 1962. It is here, two years later, that Sister Jude (Lange) rules with an iron fist, especially when an ambitious reporter

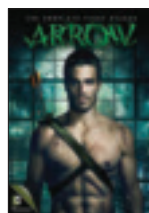


(Sarah Paulson) goes undercover to report on Briarcliff's horrific conditions. The journalist winds up discovering more than she bargained for, including a former Nazi doctor (James Cromwell) performing heinous surgeries in Briarcliff's dank, secret cellar with the help of a demonically possessed nun (Lily Rabe); a black-winged angel of death (Frances Conroy); and a new patient (Evan Peters) who may or may not be the hideous psychopath known only as “Bloody Face.” Also featuring returning first-season costars Joseph Fiennes and Zachary Quinto, *American Horror Story—Asylum* serves up plenty of sick, twisted surprises paired with deep, dark humor. Presenting all 13 episodes from the 2012–13 second season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and deleted scenes. Recommended. (J. Shannon)

Arrow: The Complete First Season ★★★

Warner, 972 min., not rated, DVD: 5 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray/DVD Combo: 9 discs, \$69.98.

The CW fills in the space vacated by *Smallville* with this new take on another DC comic book superhero: Green Arrow. While maintaining the basics—a rich guy becomes a vigilante, fighting urban crime with bow and arrow—this series sets up an origin story (part *Robinson Crusoe* and part *Hunger Games* that plays out in flashbacks over the course of the season) that finds once-spoiled rich kid Oliver Queen (Stephen Amell) becoming seasoned by ordeal into a warrior. Arrow is kind of a junior Batman, working in a city that is just as corrupt as Gotham City, playing the playboy for his family, friends, and the media in order to hide his true mission to right his father's wrongs, which include a conspiracy of millionaires aiming to clean up their city on their own unforgiving terms. Queen even opens a nightclub as a cover for his identity and his secret lair (hidden beneath, Batcave-style). In keeping with the network's young adult demographic, *Arrow* is dominated by attractive twentysomethings in cool costumes and sleek fashions engaged in plenty of romantic tangles, but it's also a lot darker than *Smallville*; Arrow kills his enemies in the early episodes and dishes out much collateral damage during his crime-fighting escapades. Presenting all 23 episodes from the 2012–13 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, a cast and crew Q&A, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Awkward: Seasons 1 & 2 ★★★

Paramount, 4 discs, 528 min., not rated, DVD: \$26.98

MTV's compulsively watchable *Awkward* recounts the misadventures of a 15-year-old California girl longing to be noticed, who narrates each episode as a blog post. Jenna

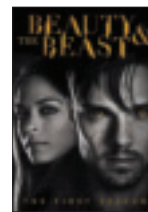
Hamilton (Ashley Rickards) isn't exactly a nerd, but she isn't shallow enough to fit in with the popular crowd either. Jenna's desire for visibility gains traction when she hooks up with Matty (Beau Mirchoff), her crush object, only to discover that he isn't interested in dating—although they continue to see each other in private. Then Jenna trips and breaks her arm, resulting in an oddly positioned cast and rumors that she was trying to kill herself, but best friends Tamara (Jillian Rose Reed) and Ming (Jessica Lu) know otherwise. The humiliations continue by way of a jealous cheerleader, Sadie (Molly Tarlov), who covets Matty but whose plans tend to backfire, especially since Jenna gains more confidence each time she has to stand up for herself. Jenna also catches the eye of Matty's friend, Jake (Brett Davern), who finds her easier to talk to than his bubble-headed girlfriend, Lissa (Greer Grammer). If Jenna's mother (Nikki Deloach) and guidance counselor (Desi Lydic) aren't much help in navigating these issues, her father (Mike Faiola) offers some good advice. Compiling all 24 episodes from the 2011–12 first and second seasons, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)



Beauty & the Beast: The First Season ★★1/2

Paramount, 6 discs, 923 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.99

CBS's youth-oriented remake/update of the George R.R. Martin-scripted 1987–1990 cult TV fantasy series with Ron Perlman and Linda Hamilton could also have been titled *Supermodel and the Beast* (or, to be precise, *Supermodel and the Male Supermodel*). Set in a New York City where scarcely anyone seems to be over the age of 25, the show stars Krisin Kreuk as Catherine Chandler, a gorgeous police detective who hooks up with handsome Vincent (Jay Ryan), the last known survivor of an Afghan War experiment gone amok—to create a genetic super-soldier with spliced-in animal DNA. Vincent now hides out in the NYC shadows, freelancing as a superhero, becoming—in moments of stress—an uncontrollable Incredible Hulk. Together the pair solve some big-city mysteries and negotiate the pitfalls of a paranormal relationship, whilst the malevolent shadow-government military-industrial conspiracy that created Vincent lurks in the background—along with lots of mopey alt-rock music. Replacing the urban fairy-tale vibe of the original with more of a *Twilight*-meets-*CSI* ambience, this chimerical saga is more or less passable pop-escapism. Presenting all 22 episodes from the 2012–13 debut run, extras include pilot-episode audio commentary, behind-



the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Bones: The Complete Eighth Season ★★½

Fox, 1,039 min., not rated, DVD: 6 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 5 discs, \$69.99



The eighth season of this long-running crime procedural starring Emily Deschanel as socially awkward but brilliant forensic anthropologist Dr. Temperance "Bones" Brennan and David Boreanaz as FBI agent Seeley Booth opens with Brennan in hiding, framed by genius serial killer Christopher Pelant (Andrew Leeds), and ends with Pelant still at large on a personal mission to make the lives of Brennan and Booth miserable. The crime-solving partners are now living together (but unmarried) and are the parents of a baby girl, and between bouts with Pelant, they fall back into their familiar crime-scene camaraderie. The rest of the "squint" team returns as well—Tamara Taylor as veteran coroner Cam, Michaela Conlin as resident artist Angela, and T.J. Thyne as bugs-and-slime specialist Hodgins. And psychologist and profiler Dr. Sweets (John Francis Daley) even moves in with the couple after he breaks up with his girlfriend. The series has earned its popularity with its solid mix of science-speak, eccentric personalities, and humor, and this set continues to play with the formula, with undercover assignments at a dance competition and a roller derby league. Plus, fans will finally hear the long-awaited marriage proposal. Compiling all 24 episodes from the 2012–13 season, extras include episode commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Breaking Bad: The Final Season ★★★★★

Sony, 385 min., DVD: 3 discs, \$55.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$65.99



Breaking Bad has been called the best American TV show of its time, and these final eight episodes end the series with the same intelligence, depth of character, and unflinching drama that defined this landmark show throughout. Walt (Bryan Cranston), the one-time high school chemistry teacher who evolved from desperate cancer victim to superstar meth cook to ruthless godfather of his domain, is out of the meth business at this point. Or so he thinks: his DEA agent brother-in-law finally figures out that Walt was the mystery drug kingpin he's been chasing all this time and the investigation stirs the violence back up with a vengeance. Of course, it all comes back to family and friends, and once again no one remains

untouched by Walt's actions (a major theme of the series). Cranston won the Best Actor Emmy three times and while the acclaim is well-deserved, it's not just because he created the most quietly intimidating character on TV. The rationalizations that have accompanied every step of his transformation over the five seasons stem from an underlying arrogance and cruelty that has been there from the start—albeit buried under self-pity and bitterness—and these attributes drive his final quest for revenge and one last stab at redemption. Finally earning the elusive Emmy for Outstanding Drama Series, this 2013 second half of the fifth season boasts extras including audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, an alternate ending, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Defiance: Season One ★★½

Universal, 3 discs, 558 min., not rated, DVD: \$59.98, Blu-ray: \$69.98



Syfy's most ambitious original series in a long time is set in 2046, following an alien attack that destroyed Earth's cities and seeded it with plants and animals of extraterrestrial origin. Survival now depends on coexistence with the invaders, who are all from races that have fled their own dying planet—leading to a collision of cultures that can be combustible. The narrative plays out more as a futuristic Western, complete with rakish cowboy lawman Nolan (Grant Bowler) and his adopted alien daughter, Irisa (Stephanie Leonidas), who give up their wandering ways to stake out a place in the titular frontier mining town that was once St. Louis (the damaged arch still rises over the land, providing a distinctive visual signature). The tribalism of the various populations isn't that much different from real-life urban melting pots—varying individual motivations give *Defiance* its share of heroes and villains, but most folks fall somewhere in between. While there is nothing new here, the show sports an engaging production design that suggests a mix of industrial practicality and scavenged technology, and within this landscape all sorts of schemes, conspiracies, and political machinations are stirred into familiar stories of suspicious strangers, criminal activity, a Romeo and Juliet cross-cultural romance, and outside forces trying to take over *Defiance* and the mines that give it value. Although not complex enough to attract viewers from across the genre divide, it should satisfy otherwise underserved TV sci-fi fans, as well as those playing the tie-in video game—a massive online third-person adventure mirroring events on the show. Compiling all 13 episodes from the 2013 debut season, extras include behind-

the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Degrassi: Season Twelve ★★★

Echo Bridge, 3 discs, 960 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99



Featuring 38 episodes (mostly two-parters), this 2012–13 12th season from the long-running Canadian series starts off with "Come As You Are," in which the students of Degrassi Community School are thrilled after Principal Simpson (Stefan Brogren, a Degrassi alumni since 1987) decides they no longer have to wear uniforms. But that's about the most ordinary thing that happens this season, which features storylines incorporating love triangles, a gay school play version of *Romeo and Juliet*, cheating, health issues, inappropriate bosses, suicide, drugs, screwed up parents...and even schoolwork. This season also includes two hour-long specials: "Las Vegas," where Drew and Bianca (Luke Bilyk and Alicia Josipovic) travel with pals to get married and are involved in a cheesy Elvis musical number; and the graduation finale "The Time of My Life." Although this is sure to be popular with the target audience, as a longtime franchise fan I can't help but notice that the makers seem to be running out of realistic steam. Guest star Chaz Bono helps a transgendered student with girl trouble? Someone's dad with early onset dementia runs over the family dog? A top scholar who developed a breast cancer breathalyzer and earned a scholarship to MIT but can't remember to take birth control? Seven brunette males with the same haircut? Maybe it's me, or maybe it's time for class to be dismissed. DVD extras include an episode commentary, a 300th episode celebration, "making-of" featurettes, bloopers, and more. Recommended, overall. (J. Williams-Wood)

Dexter: The Final Season ★★★

Paramount, 633 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$55.98, Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$63.98



This black-humored Showtime original series—starring Michael C. Hall as Dexter, a blood-spatter expert for Miami PD and TV's favorite serial-killer hero—developed a strong fan following that kept Dexter's reign of crime going for eight seasons, the last of which finds him in great shape, but adoptive sister Debra (Jennifer Carpenter) spiraling into a self-destructive binge after learning his dark secret and even killing to protect it. The story arc here is all about reconciling present and past, which comes back in the form of psychopathologist Dr. Evelyn Vogel (Charlotte Rampling), who helped Dexter's adoptive father Harry (James

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Remar) create Dexter's code (i.e., he only slays other killers) and now consults for Miami PD in the case of a serial murderer nicknamed the Brain Surgeon (for reasons that become obvious after you see the first victim). There's also a potential apprentice for Dexter to mentor, and maybe even a chance at a real family life of his own, although it's hard to envision a happy ending for a man with so much collateral damage on his conscience. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2013, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Likely to satisfy faithful fans, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Family Tree: The Complete First Season

★★★

HBO, 2 discs, 216 min., TV-14, DVD: \$29.98

Christopher Guest brings his mockumentary/improv comedy approach to HBO with *Family Tree*, which stars Chris O'Dowd as Tom Chadwick, a recently unemployed and divorced thirtysomething who is distracted from his self-pity when he inherits a box of memorabilia from a distant great-aunt and sets out to track down the backstories of his ancestors. What he finds, inevitably, is a roll call of eccentrics, underachievers, and pursuers of stunted dreams, but it all unfolds in the droll, underplayed manner that makes Guest's feature films (including *Waiting for Guffman* and *A Mighty Wind*) such a delight. The first half of the season plays out in Great Britain, but then Tom's sister, Bea (Nina Conti)—who travels everywhere with an opinionated hand puppet that channels her repressed opinions—and best mate Pete (Tom Bennett) join him to follow the trail to America. Some familiar faces from Guest's movies show up along the way, including Michael McKean (as the dad who spends his days watching painfully unfunny—and completely made-up—old British sitcoms), Ed Begley Jr., Fred Willard, Bob Balaban, and Guest himself. Compiling all eight episodes from the 2013 debut season, extras include deleted scenes, four faux Britcom scenes, and music clips from the show. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Glee: The Complete Fourth Season ★★★½

Fox, 963 min., not rated, DVD: 6 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$69.99

As in seasons past, lessons are learned and issues are faced—with song, dance, humor, and drama—by the attractive talented kids in William McKinley High School's New Directions glee club. A handful of characters have graduated—Rachel (Lea Michele) and Kurt (Chris Colfer) are in New York, and Finn



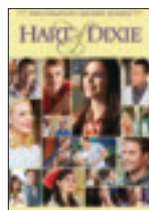
(Cory Monteith, who died in July 2013) has a new career—while gifted newcomers are filling in the ranks as underclassmen. *Glee* is still teenage melodrama in the extreme—with fantasy elements in which students break out in lavishly staged pop music productions that mirror their emotions with equal parts style and literalism. Amidst all the hugging and tears, diversity has never been so adorable, with breakups of every sort—boy/boy, boy/girl, girl/girl—as well as new couplings. Mr. Schuester (Matthew Morrison) finally marries Ms. Pillsbury (Jayma Mays), while Cheerios cheerleaders coach Sue Sylvester (Jane Lynch) continues to bring the laughs. The characters deal with everything from bullying to a shooting, although the rousing, creative production numbers remain the show's *raison d'être* (and for those who want to skip the soap opera, there's a "Glee Jukebox" option here). Compiling all 22 episodes from 2012–13, additional extras include "making-of" featurettes, interviews, and deleted scenes. A strong optional purchase. (T. Fry)

Hart of Dixie: The Complete Second Season

★★

Warner, 5 discs, 929 min., not rated, DVD: \$59.98

The first season finale of this CW-aired romantic comedy ended with Lemon Breeland (Jaime King) being jilted at the altar by hunky George Tucker (Scott Porter) after the latter decided he was in love with Dr. Zoe Hart (Rachel Bilson), whom he found in bed with local lothario Wade Kinsella (Wilson Bethel) when he burst in to break the news. If that sounds a little on the breathless-and-wacky side, such are the soap opera antics of small-town Southern life in BlueBell, AL. Despite an all-too-familiar premise—Zoe wound up in the little burg as a general practitioner after her dream of being a big-time surgeon in New York City fizzled—*Hart of Dixie* is often heartwarming. The story arc for the second season is anchored by Zoe's uncertainty about choosing between George and Wade, as well as continued interactions among other prominent citizens, including Lemon's father, the cranky Dr. Brick Breeland (Tim Matheeson); mayor and former NFL star Lavon Hayes (Cress Williams); and Zoe's on-and-off friend, the gossipy Annabeth Nass (Kaitlyn Black). Compiling all 22 episodes from 2012–13, this is an optional purchase. (T. Fry)



Here's Edie: The Edie Adams Television Collection ★★★

MVD, 4 discs, 720 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.95

This four-disc set rekindles a powerful childhood crush on Edie Adams, wife



of Ernie Kovacs and an accomplished actress, singer, comedienne, and entertainer in her own right. I remembered little of the variety show, which alternated weekly with *The Sid Caesar Show*, but Adams' commercials for Muriel Cigars ("Why don't you pick one up and smoke it sometime?") left an imprint on my adolescent libido. *Here's Edie* (later *The Edie Adams Show*) was an unconventional variety series that while not nearly as groundbreaking or subversive as her husband's TV forays was still engagingly off-center. One indelible bit: Adams does a striptease to David Rose's well-known tune "The Stripper"—intercut with Weegee photographs that make it appear as if his subjects are reacting to her sultry dance. The home video release of vintage variety shows is always welcome, especially in the case of a long-buried treasure such as *Here's Edie*. Compiling the complete 1962–64 run of all 21 episodes, the series features time capsule glimpses of legendary musicians and entertainers (Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Sammy Davis, Jr., Bob Hope, Bobby Darin), as well as stars of their time (Allan Sherman, Eddie Fisher), and even baseball great Maury Wills. Among the more uniquely compelling moments here are a clip of Sir Michael Redgrave performing the "St. Crispin's Day" speech from *Henry V*, and another featuring Peter Falk as a New York cab driver who reflects on how much the president is worth. Extras include musical numbers from several of Kovacs' TV shows (including Adams' signature Marilyn Monroe impression, in which the blonde bombshell performs "The Ballad of Davy Crockett"), a 1965 Muriel promotional film, and a booklet. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)

The Hollow Crown: The Complete Series

★★★½

Universal, 4 discs, 528 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.98

Shakespeare's "Henriad"—the tetralogy of plays covering the period 1398–1422 in English royal history—is sumptuously mounted in this four-film PBS-aired series produced by the BBC. Each was filmed in locations connected with the actual events by three directors—Rupert Goold for *Richard II*, Richard Eyre for *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Part 2*, and Thea Sharrock for *Henry V*—and they feature many of Britain's most esteemed actors in supporting roles, including Patrick Stewart, David Suchet, James Purefoy, John Hurt, Julie Walters, Alun Armstrong, Geraldine Chaplin, Iain Glen, and the late Richard Griffiths. The leads are taken by Ben Whishaw as Richard II, Rory Kinnear and Jeremy Irons as a young and older Henry IV, Tom Hiddleston as Prince Hal (later Henry V), and Simon Russell Beale as Sir John Falstaff. Easily the most successful of the quartet is *Richard II*, in which Whishaw

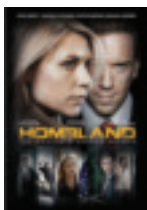


offers an extraordinary performance in an adaptation that depicts King Richard as a fey figure whose overthrow mimics Christian martyrdom. The quality of the three Henry films, unfortunately, is somewhat compromised by the presence of Hiddleston, who tries hard but frankly seems out of his league, and by the decision of both Eyre and Sharrock to mute some of the plays' most rousing passages—including the St. Crispin's Day speech in *Henry V*, presented here in a conversational style that lacks the grandeur in versions starring Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh. Kinnear and Irons are solid as young and old Henry IV, but Beale's Falstaff is curiously sedate, never emerging as the comically oversized personality of tradition. That's only one aspect of the decision by both Eyre and Sharrock to present the last three plays in realistic fashion—a characteristic also evident in the battle sequences, which are extremely grim and gritty. By contrast, Goold translates the theatrical nature of *Richard II* into genuinely cinematic terms rather than simply toning it down. Despite being uneven, *The Hollow Crown* is an ambitious project that boasts true flashes of brilliance. DVD extras include "making-of" featurettes. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Homeland: The Complete Second Season

★★★★1/2

Fox, 628 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.98



Showtime's acclaimed drama about vigilance against domestic terrorism—centered on a troubled CIA agent and a soldier who may be hiding terrible secrets—is novelistic TV at its best. *Homeland* and its lead actors—Claire Danes as operative Carrie Mathison and Damian Lewis as Sgt. Nicholas Brody—won Emmys for the gripping debut season. This second run is equally compelling, with more unpredictable plotlines, and seismic shifts. Carrie's bipolar disorder is under control now that she's not only out of the Company but has also overcome her romantic feelings for Brody. Newly elected to Congress, Brody is also trying to move forward, but his secret life won't let go, and pressures come both from the highest levels of the U.S. government and the top tier of Islamic extremists who are its mortal enemies. Tension builds as Carrie is pulled back into the intelligence fold and Brody all but loses his mind (and his family) when asked to do unthinkable things. Returning characters include Mandy Patinkin as Saul, Carrie's boss and mentor; David Harewood as CIA deputy director David Estes; Jamey Sheridan as Vice President William Walden; Morena Baccarin as Brody's wife, Jessica; Morgan Saylor as Brody's daughter, Dana; and Navid Negahban as master terrorist Abu Nazir. Rupert Friend is introduced as

shadowy CIA analyst Peter Quinn, who's far from being above suspicion himself. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2012, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and deleted scenes. Highly recommended. (T. Fry)

In the Flesh ★★★

BBC, 180 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.98



Amidst the proliferation of movies in which the voracious undead serve as various metaphors, the BBC presents this three-part series, directed by Jonny Campbell, which is set in the aftermath of a zombie uprising. With drugs and therapy being used to calm the rampagers (now classified under the tag "partially deceased syndrome")—allowing their underlying human personalities to take control—horror takes a backseat to social drama as one young man, suicide victim Kieren (Luke Newberry), returns home to a small village where fear and hatred prevail. While his parents (Marie Critchley, Steve Cooper) try to protect him from patrolling militias, and younger sister Jem (Harriet Cains) cannot acknowledge that the brother she knew still resides within this strange and damaged body, Kieren faces his own issues. The narrative tackles themes of intolerance, forgiveness, acceptance, guilt, trauma, and hypocrisy, ultimately finding that emotion is far more powerful than reason or knowledge. As a vehicle for portraying prejudice, *In the Flesh* is not exactly subtle, but creator Dominic Mitchell invests deeply in his characters, exploring how people justify their impulses and ignore contradictions to suit their needs. Rather than good guys versus bad guys, this is more about self-awareness and the all-too-human contradictions that bubble up within us. Compiling all three episodes that originally aired in 2013, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Jack Irish, Set 1 ★★★

Acorn, 202 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: 2 discs, \$39.99



Guy Pearce is Jack Irish, a former lawyer struggling to pick up the pieces after his wife is brutally murdered—by Irish's own client—in this Australian telefilm series based on novels by Peter Temple. All of this is established within the first few minutes of *Bad Debts*, the first of two Jack Irish films that debuted on Australian TV in 2012. Pearce is suitably shabby and seedy as Jack, who turns his back on his profession, but seems content getting by as a low-rent debt collector, itinerant racetrack gambler, drinker, and apprentice to a cabinet maker—playing it all in the low-key style of a man slipping back into old haunts and easy rhythms. But when a former client turns up

dead and Jack is not satisfied with the official explanation, he turns detective and ends up digging through an old political scandal and cover-up along with investigative reporter Linda Hillier (Marta Dusseldorp). The second film, *Black Tide*, sends Jack on a missing-persons case that turns out to be connected to a number of disappearances. Anchored by an interesting character and a strong performance by Pearce, these traditional but well-written offerings are of the same caliber as most British TV mysteries but with an Australian setting and sensibility. Compiling both feature-length episodes on DVD and a Blu-ray/DVD Combo set (opt for the latter, since the prices are identical), extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Last Tango in Halifax

★★★★1/2

BBC, 2 discs, 336 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.98



The premise of this BBC series finds widowers Alan and Celia—childhood sweethearts who haven't seen each other for 50 years—reunited in their seventies via Facebook and quickly deciding to marry. Thanks to perceptive writing by Sally Wainwright and outstanding performances from a strong ensemble cast, *Last Tango in Halifax* proves to be a surprisingly affecting comedy-drama. Much of the credit goes to Derek Jacobi and Anne Reid as the septuagenarian lovers learning anew about one another and surrounded by families whose problems ring true. Alan's daughter, Gillian (Nicola Walker), is a widow struggling to keep the family farm afloat while caring for a teenage son troubled by rumors about his father's death, and Celia's daughter, Caroline (Sarah Lancashire), finds her philandering husband trying to worm his way back into her life after going off with a younger woman—a situation that unnerves their two boys. The initial disastrous meeting between Gillian and Caroline has a calculated feel, and the episode in which Alan and Celia are locked in a local museum for the night comes off as contrived, but for the most part the material that Wainwright has invented for the characters (such as Celia's reaction to news of Caroline's liaison with a fellow teacher) is genuinely moving, with twists that make emotional sense. Compiling all six episodes from the 2012 first season of this BAFTA-winning series, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Leverage: The Final Season ★★1/2

Fox, 4 discs, 635 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.98

This cable series about a modern Robin Hood team of colorful thieves who combine old-fashioned confidence schemes and high-tech tools to take on rich crooks in acts of poetic justice comes to a close with this

fifth and final season. The original team is still intact and more comfortable than ever in their roles—Timothy Hutton as former insurance investigator and team ringmaster Nathan Ford; Gina Bellman as con artist Sophie Devereaux; Christian Kane as the muscle, Eliot Spencer; Aldis Hodge as computer expert Alec Hardison; and Beth Riesgraf as cat burglar Parker. A move to Portland, OR (where the show is actually shot) brings new authenticity to the series. One episode features the famed “Spruce Goose” aircraft at the Evergreen Aviation Museum, while a later chapter revives the D.B. Cooper legend, with the regular cast members taking on additional parts in a substantial flashback. Guest stars include Cary Elwes, Treat Williams, Fred Ward, Matthew Lillard, and Adam Baldwin, along with Mark Sheppard as returning nemesis Jim Sterling. Offering escapism over drama while also delivering action-movie flair, snappy writing, likable (if eccentric) characters, and plenty of cheeky humor, this is hardly essential TV but it is often fun. Compiling all 15 episodes from 2012, extras include audio commentaries, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



Mad Men: Season 6

★★★

Lionsgate, 618 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.98

The sixth season of the acclaimed cable drama about mid-20th-century advertising execs and creative types drags the characters into the New York of 1968, where they're still frantically trying to get a handle on the fast-developing counterculture. Don Draper (Jon Hamm) responds in the usual ways—chafing at the independence of young wife Megan (Jessica Paré), having an affair with upstairs neighbor Sylvia (Linda Cardellini), and blithely sabotaging a relationship with a problem client—while also ending up merging the firm with a rival, which brings Peggy (Elisabeth Moss) back into the fold. Meanwhile, marriages end, relationships sour, and a speedball-fueled weekend work session sends the old guard on a bender. Woven throughout are an increasing number of flashbacks to Don's childhood growing up at a brothel, but real-life events also leave their mark, from the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy to Vietnam and the protests at the Democratic National Convention. As in previous years, the characters stand largely outside the swiftly moving social currents and major news stories, and the series continues to provide an interesting perspective on American history, culture, and social norms. Still one of the best



shows on TV, *Mad Men* features sophisticated writing, superb acting, unusual plot turns, and a finale that means big changes for the future of the company and individual lives in what will be the final season. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2013, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and an interactive gallery on the “Summer of Love.” Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Mama's Family: The Complete Collection

★★★

StarVista, 24 discs, 3,315 min., not rated, DVD: \$199.95

Before Tyler Perry's *Madea*, there was plain-speaking Mama. A breakout character from *The Carol Burnett Show*, Mama's dysfunctional family sketches were admirably acted but also tonally at odds with the broader comedy and show-stopping musical numbers of the parent show. But a funny thing happened on the way to a weekly series: Mama's rougher edges were somewhat smoothed over and *Mama's Family* went from being Southern gothic to just another sitcom on the block from 1983-1990. The ensemble cast is hit and miss. Vicki Lawrence, former *Burnett* sidekick, is in her element in her signature role. Blandly likeable Ken Berry is her dim son, Vinton, who moves back home, and is later joined by “floozy” Naomi (Dorothy Lyman), whom he marries, much to Mama's displeasure. I'd mention Vinton's two children Sonja and Buzz, but they were gone by the time the series went into first-run syndication after two seasons. Pre-*Golden Girls* Rue McClanahan and Betty White star as Mama's sister and daughter, respectively. Burnett herself pops in on occasion as high-strung, resentful daughter Eunice with husband Harvey Korman in tow (Korman did double duty during the show's initial NBC run as an Alistair Cooke-type host who introduced the episodes). Compiling all 130 episodes from the series' six-season run, the copious extras here include the 1982 TV-movie *Eunice*, a cast reunion, interviews, original sketches, bloopers, and a “family album” booklet. Although popular in its day, *Mama's Family* is an '80s relic that has not aged well (shot on video, it looks even more ancient than most of the jokes). Not a necessary purchase. (D. Liebenson)



Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman: The Complete Series

★★★

Shout! Factory, 38 discs, 8,100 min., not rated, DVD: \$249.95

Norman Lear's soap opera parody lasted only a year and a half in the mid-1970s and never received high ratings, but it developed a strong following and had a big impact on popular culture. Set in the



fictional town of Fernwood, OH, the show stars Louise Lasser as the titular unfulfilled housewife, who is struggling with a sexually confused husband (Greg Mullavey), a father known as the “Fernwood Flasher,” a serial killer who targets domestic animals as well as people, and the waxy yellow build-up on her kitchen linoleum. Among the notable costars, Debralee Scott is Mary's sexually reckless single sister, Mary Kay Place is a neighbor and aspiring country singer, Dabney Coleman is the town's scheming mayor, and Martin Mull plays identical twins. The half-hour program was shot like a traditional soap opera and ran five days a week in syndication, mixing wild parodies of soap opera complications with sly cultural satire about changing sexual mores, consumerism, family dynamics, and media hysteria. The series is over 35 years old yet it holds up surprisingly well, thanks to smart writing, a superb cast, and its perfect evocation of the soap opera style. The video quality here betrays the show's age, with discoloration and some distortion at the edges of the image, but that's to be expected from '70s video technology. Compiling all 325 episodes from the 1976-77 first and second seasons, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, 10 episodes of the spin-off series *Fernwood 2 Night*, and a booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Middle: Season 3

★★★

Warner, 3 discs, 516 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.98

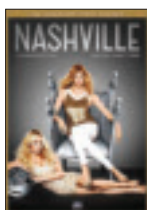
A cross between *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Roseanne*, this sitcom receives little network support, respect from critics, or recognition from the Academy of TV Arts & Sciences. But operating under the radar, it remains one of TV's buried treasures. The third season is hardly the charm for the Heck family from Orson, IN, who live chaotic lives of financial and social desperation. The Hecks are the family who takes in the mail and tends to the pets of vacationing neighbors (and are invariably rewarded with souvenir refrigerator magnets as thanks). As with *The Honeymooners*, what keeps *The Middle* from crossing over into the utterly depressing is its clever writing, fully-committed performances, and indefatigable spirit: the Hecks have been lapped a thousand times over, but they refuse to quit the race. At the heart of the series are those “once in awhile” moments in which, against all odds, the family manages to come together (albeit fleetingly). In one episode, mother Frankie (Patricia Heaton) moves heaven and earth to get two Justin Bieber concert tickets for herself and daughter Sue (Eden Sher) as a bonding outing, only to be crushed when Sue invites a friend to use the second ticket. Watching TV by herself, Frankie winds up



being unexpectedly joined by her usually thoughtless, selfish slacker son (Charlie McDermott). Guest stars include Ed Asner, Molly Shannon, and Heaton's *Everybody Loves Raymond* costar Ray Romano, who appears in a two-part honeymoon flashback episode. Compiling all 24 episodes from the 2011-12 third season, extras include deleted scenes and bloopers. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)

Nashville: The Complete First Season ★★½

Lionsgate, 5 discs, 903 min., TV-PG, DVD: \$45.99



Set in the big-business capital of country music, this drama is a full-blown nighttime soap opera with a superb soundtrack. Created by Callie Khouri (writer of *Thelma & Louise*), *Nashville* is a series dominated by women, most notably Connie Britton's Rayna James, a savvy star whose marriage to mayoral candidate Teddy Conrad (Eric Close) is on the rocks, and Hayden Panettiere's country pop tart Juliette Barnes, a fiercely competitive, career-minded shark with more talent than she's given credit for. Sandwiched amongst the sometimes tiresome parade of affairs, betrayals, blackmail, and back-stabbing career gambits are some terrific original songs, thanks to the involvement of musical producer T-Bone Burnett. Clare Bowen, Jonathan Jackson, and Sam Palladio play attractive young up-and-comers; Powers Boothe and Robert Wisdom are political heavyweights locked in campaigns of smears and dirty tricks; and Charles Esten is an amiable veteran guitarist and recovering alcoholic whose reckless past complicates much of the narrative. *Nashville* is a minor success, but that is largely thanks to the music and the strong leads. Compiling all 21 episodes from the 2012-13 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and bloopers. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

New Girl: The Complete Second Season ★★

Fox, 3 discs, 546 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.98



Although I am mostly resistant to *New Girl*'s relentlessly quirky charms, the encyclopedic recaps in such pop culture barometers as *Entertainment Weekly* are solid evidence that the series has a devoted following. Jess (Zooey Deschanel) and loft-mate Nick (Jake Johnson) are the show's will they/won't they relationship, and during this sophomore season—following much high school-ish behavior—they will. The series continues to insist on making womanizer Schmidt a thing (or as he calls it in

the opener, rebuilding the Schmidt "brand"). But for those who love the show, season two does feature some benchmark episodes, including "Cooler," with Jess and Nick's kiss, and "Virgins," in which the characters recall how they lost their virginity. Notable guest stars include Jamie Lee Curtis and Rob Reiner as Jess's parents, the late Dennis Farina as Nick's con man father, and Olivia Munn as a stripper/love interest for Nick. Fans will appreciate the inspired banter and wordplay that boasts an original, uniquely *New Girl* loopiness. Extras include an episode audio commentary, deleted scenes, a gag reel, and an extended episode. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)

The Secret of Crickley Hall ★★½

BBC, 175 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.98



Prolific British horror writer James Herbert's 2006 novel—his penultimate work—served as the basis for this three-part 2012 BBC miniseries, which tells a rather old-fashioned haunted-house tale spanning 70 years, moving between the present and events from 1943. Suranne Jones stars as Eve, who blames herself for the disappearance of her young son Cam during a visit to a park. To help her cope, husband Gabe (Tom Ellis) arranges a family stay at Crickley Hall, an old mansion near a coastal village. But Eve soon senses a spectral presence, which she believes to be Cam calling for help. As the ghostly apparitions increase, Eve investigates the history of the place, discovering that it was the site of a tragedy during the war, when it served as a refuge for children fleeing the Blitz. Writer-director Joe Ahearne juggles Eve's inquiries (which involve a medium and a parapsychologist as well as various locals) with flashbacks to 1943, a time when the imperious head of the orphanage clashed with a young teacher who questioned his stern methods, particularly toward a sad-faced Jewish boy from Germany. Eventually, the plot strands come together, but a series of unlikely coincidences in the last act ultimately strain credulity. While handsomely mounted and decently acted, *The Secret of Crickley Hall* feels like a contrived attempt to resuscitate a creaky genre. Optional. (F. Swietek)

Sinbad: The Complete First Season ★★½

BBC, 540 min., not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.98

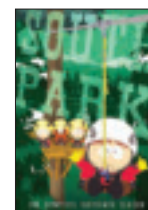


Sinbad of Arabian Nights fame receives a grandiose *Pirates of the Caribbean*-type treatment in this Anglo-Irish BBC co-production filmed in picturesque Malta and replete with digital f/x and magical creatures. More

resembling a thief of Baghdad than the sailor of traditional folk tales, Sinbad (Elliot Knight) begins as a reckless youth in 8th-century Basra, accidentally causing the death of the emir's nephew and losing his own brother to execution. As part of his atonement, Sinbad is cursed and sent to sail the oceans in a captain-less, hazard-prone vessel called the *Providence*, whose multicultural crew (an Arab physician, a Viking war criminal, an African princess) become Sinbad's allies in perilous, fantastic adventures that cut across world folklore. Among the diversions here are were-wolves, mermaids, ninjas, Death himself, and what would pass for the fabled "roc" bird. The production values and costumes are superb, and while only a few guest stars in the exotic cast (Naveen Andrews, Timothy Spall, Janet Suzman, Dougray Scott) might be familiar to U.S. viewers, this series is a real treasure. Compiling all 12 episodes from the 2012 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

South Park: The Complete Sixteenth Season ★★½

Paramount, 308 min., not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$42.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$59.99



As a former *South Park* diehard fan—who blinked back bitter tears after being turned away as too young (by a month!) to watch the 1999 Oscar-nominated feature film in theaters—I have to admit that I'm somewhat indifferent when it comes to newer seasons, including this 14-episode 16th season from 2012 of the Comedy Central-aired animated series. Once again, the youngsters of Trey Parker and Matt Stone's infamous Colorado city tackle their weight in absurdity and pop culture skewering in episodes including "Reverse Cowgirl" (Clyde's mom dies when he leaves the toilet seat up); the meme-puncturing "Faith Hilling"; the survival docudrama spoof "I Should Have Never Gone Ziplining"; and the trickle-down bullying-themed "Butterballs" (in which the timid Butters is tormented by his seemingly sweet grandmother, who taunts him: "think you're fuckin' tough, huh?"). Also including the matchmaking misstep "Cartman Finds Love" and "Raising the Bar" (which pokes fun at reality star Honey Boo Boo and composer Randy Newman), the season culminates with the lackluster finale "Obama Wins!"—an episode that sadly pales in comparison to the stellar, pitch-perfect 2008 election-themed entry "About Last Night..." (one of my favorites of the entire series). Either Parker and Stone are getting way more lame, or maybe I'm—finally—growing up. Extras include mini-commentaries by Parker and Stone and deleted scenes. A strong optional purchase. (J. Williams-Wood)

Spartacus: War of the Damned, The Complete Third Season ★★

Anchor Bay, 3 discs, 553 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.98, Blu-ray: \$59.99



This third and final season of the Starz cable series about the titular slave who led an uprising that almost toppled the Roman Republic combines blood, beefcake, and soft-core porn, to which is added arch speechifying, liberally salted here with f-bombs. The overall result is similar to one of those ridiculous sword-and-sandal movies that Italian studios churned out in the 1950s and '60s, goosed up with gratuitous sex and nudity, and a nonstop deluge of violence (including regular doses of decapitation and dismemberment, as well as an occasional crucifixion). The storyline offers a fanciful depiction of the military cat-and-mouse game played between noble Spartacus (Liam McIntyre) and crafty Crassus (Simon Merrells) on their way to a final showdown, which in this case involves a hand-to-hand duel. Both sides are also ripe with dissension, as Spartacus argues with his more bellicose second-in-command, Crixus (Manu Bennett), and Crassus is unable to mediate between his ambitious son, Tiberius (Christian Antidormi), and the arrogant young Julius Caesar (Todd Lasance). Those hankering for another helping of comic-book-level heroics will eat *War of the Damned* up, but most viewers would be better off watching Stanley Kubrick's brilliant 1960 epic *Spartacus*. Compiling all 10 episodes aired in 2013, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. An optional purchase, at best. (F. Swietek)

Under the Dome ★★★

Paramount, 4 discs, 541 min., not rated, DVD: \$54.99, Blu-ray: \$64.99



Adapted from Stephen King's bestselling 2009 novel, the CBS summer miniseries *Under the Dome*—essentially a small-town melodrama with a sci-fi twist—was a ratings hit. On a bright autumn day, the 1,976 citizens of Chester's Mill, ME, suddenly find themselves trapped under a gigantic clear dome: no one can enter or leave. Although it differs from the novel, the small screen version of *Under the Dome* still pits individual citizens and groups against each other as loyalties and rivalries form over precious resources like water, food, and firearms. Over time, a military presence forms outside the dome, but the dome's origin and purpose (alien, or supernatural, or military?) remain shrouded in mystery as tensions escalate beneath it. Appealing to all demographics, the series features both teenagers and a suitably soapy variety of adults vying for control, with the ensemble cast capably led by Mike Vogel

as a mysterious outsider hiding a scandalous secret, and Dean Norris as the town's corrupt and power-hungry mayor. Compiling all 13 episodes from the 2013 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Recommended. (J. Shannon)

The Vampire Diaries: The Complete Fourth Season

★★★

Warner, 969 min., not rated, DVD: 5 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray/DVD Combo: 9 discs, \$69.98



L.J. Smith's multi-volume YA saga about ancient bloodsuckers and teenage love predates the *Twilight* book series. But it wasn't until after *Twilight* became a pop phenomenon that showbiz cashed in on the craze with a TV version of *The Vampire Diaries*, which remains a hit for the CW network. The biggest news from season four arrives in the 20th episode, which is essentially the pilot for the new spin-off show *The Originals*. *The Vampire Diaries* is set in Mystic Falls, where supernatural spirits have long been present, and where the blood of Elena, Stefan, and Damon boils with passion in a complicated triangle of vampire obsession. Newly turned Elena is struggling with the switch to immortality and the reality of what feeding really means, although it will later turn out that Elena has a cure for vampirism—a plot point that reaches a head during the cliffhanger finale. Actress Nina Dobrev plays both Elena and her ancient doppelgänger Katherine, which leads to the unusual prospect of fighting herself to the "death." Paul Wesley, who plays Stefan, also has a double named Silas. Compiling all 23 episodes from the 2012-13 fourth season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, a gag reel, and a gallery of fan-created artwork. Recommended. (T. Fry)

Vegas: The DVD Edition

★★

Paramount, 5 discs, 902 min., not rated, DVD: \$55.98



This cops-and-gangsters drama, co-created by Nicholas Pileggi (writer of *Goodfellas*), takes a network TV stab at the popular strain of period shows that are finding success on paid cable networks. The hook here is the collision of a cowboy lawman and urban mobsters in the wild days of early 1960s Las Vegas. Dennis Quaid is Ralph Lamb, a maverick rancher turned frontier-style sheriff of Las Vegas County (the character is loosely based on an actual person of the same name), who is brought in to run herd over the growing mob presence. Michael Chiklis (*The Shield*) costars as Vincent Savino, a Chicago gangster who takes over a hotel/casino and has aspirations to control the entire town. Both are larger-than-life personalities—in a

series full of flashing lights, lavish sets, and dazzling costumes—whose days are taken up with murders, mob hits, shady deals, compromised politicians, and a city government torn between keeping crime off the streets and making sure the gambling establishments thrive. But while the re-creation is impressive, the tug-of-war between these rivals never matches either the grit or the novelistic sweep of its cable inspirations (the sex and violence here are also definitely toned down), and *Vegas* was cancelled after a single season. Costars include Carrie-Anne Moss as assistant DA Katherine O'Connell; Jason O'Mara as Ralph's brother and deputy; Taylor Handley as Ralph's son; and Sarah Jones as a hotel exec. Compiling all 21 episodes aired in 2012-13, DVD extras include episode audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Optional, at best. (S. Axmaker)

More Boxed Sets

Doctor Who: Complete Series 1-7 Limited Edition Blu-ray Gift Set (BBC, Blu-ray: 29 discs, \$349.98).



Compiling the complete adventures of the Ninth Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) and Tenth Doctor (David Tennant), as well as episodes featuring the Eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith), this high-definition collection showcasing the escapades of an eccentric time-traveling sci-fi hero includes all seven series sets from 2005-13—reviewed in VL-7/06 (★★★★), VL-5/07 (★★★★), VL-11/11 (★★★), VL-1/13 (HHH), and VL Online-10/13 (★★★)—and *The Complete Specials*, starring Tennant, plus bonus features.

The Nunsense Collection (SRO, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.99). Starring Rue McClanahan and Vicki Lawrence, this compilation includes the musical comedies *Nunsense* (VL-11/97 ★★★1/2), *Nunsense 2: The Sequel* (VL-1/01 ★★★1/2), *Nunsense 3: The Jamboree* (VL-7/03 ★★★), and *Nuncrackers* (guest starring John Ritter).



Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during January and February, including: *The Fall: Series 1*, *Johan Falk Trilogy*, *Kindred: The Embraced*, *Line of Duty: Series 1*, *Mystery Science Theater 3000: 25th Anniversary Edition*, *Primeval New World: The Complete Series*, *Silk: Series One*, and much more!



The following list, selected and compiled by Video Librarian staff, honors the best new documentaries reviewed in the magazine and online during 2013. Unless otherwise noted, titles are available from most distributors.

56 Up (First Run, 138 min., DVD: \$29.95). The eighth film in Michael Apted's groundbreaking landmark documentary series—in which the director has interviewed a group of subjects every seven years since 1964 when they were seven—finds the now-56-year-olds coping with the global financial crisis. (VL-7/13)



Beware of Mr. Baker (Vivendi, 74 min., DVD: \$14.95). Filmed at his South African homestead, irate London-born septuagenarian drummer Ginger Baker of Cream and Blind Faith is profiled in this rock-and-roll saga from *Rolling Stone* writer and filmmaker Jay Bulger. (VL Online-6/13)



Blackfish (Magnolia, 83 min., DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98). Nominated for a Sundance Grand Jury Prize, director Gabriela Cowperthwaite's investigative report on SeaWorld is a thought-provoking and compelling piece of activist filmmaking, questioning the wisdom of keeping orcas—or so-called killer whales—in captivity as entertainment providers in staged shows. (VL-11/13)

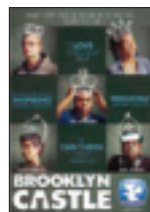


Branca's Pitch (Strand, 87 min., DVD: \$19.99). Filmmaker Andrew J. Muscato's "jockumentary" looks at the aftermath surrounding the scapegoating of 1950s Brooklyn Dodger pitcher Ralph Branca after he threw a ball that was hit for a game-winning home run—the legendary "shot heard round the world"—and also explores Branca's collaboration on a book with



colorful ghostwriter David Ritz. (VL-11/13)

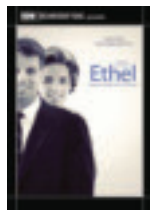
Brooklyn Castle (Millennium, 90 min., DVD: \$19.99 [\$60 w/PPR from First Run Features, www.firstrunfeatures.com]). Directed by Katie Dellamaggiore, this engaging documentary shines a spotlight on the highly-ranked junior high chess team at inner-city Brooklyn Intermediate School 318, celebrating the commitment of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. (VL-9/13)



The Central Park Five (PBS, 120 min., DVD: \$24.99 [\$54.95 w/PPR from www.teacher.shop.pbs.org], Blu-ray: \$29.99). Famed filmmaker Ken Burns's latest documentary—adapted from a book by his daughter, Sarah Burns—presents a gripping true crime story from the perspective of five black and Latino teenagers from Harlem who were wrongly convicted of raping a white woman in New York City's Central Park in 1989. (VL-5/13)



Ethel (HBO, 97 min., DVD: \$19.98). Directed by 11th and last child Rory Kennedy, this HBO-aided biographical documentary focuses on Ethel Kennedy, who describes an idyllic, active upbringing in the Skakel family followed by wonderful and terrible years as a Kennedy clan matriarch. (VL-9/13)



First Position (MPI, 94 min., DVD: \$24.99). Filmmaker Bess Kargman's beautiful dance documentary follows a group of multi-ethnic kids striving in a mighty performance competition: the Youth America Grand Prix world-traveling exhibition of both classical and modern dance, which serves as a route to school scholarships and job slots in professional troupes. (VL-3/13)



A Girl & a Gun (First Run, 76 min., DVD: \$24.95 [\$200 w/PPR: public libraries, \$350 w/PPR: colleges & universities from Collective Eye Films, www.collective-eye.org]). Filmmaker Cathryn Czubek's provocative documentary examines the relationship between American women and firearms through interviews with both enthusiasts and



those who have experienced tragedy due to guns. (VL-9/13)

Guilty Pleasures (PBS, 86 min., DVD: \$19.99 [\$39.95 w/PPR from www.teacher.shop.pbs.org]). Aired on PBS's POV series, director Julie Moggan's documentary offers a perceptive look at the romance novel genre, profiling individuals from India, Japan, England, and New York, including three women who read Harlequin (in Britain, Mills & Boon) romance novels, an elderly bachelor who has written nearly 50 bodice rippers, and a male model who appears on more than 200 Mills & Boon covers. (VL-1/13)



Head Games (The AV Cafe [www.theavcafe.com], 96 min., DVD or Blu-ray: \$14.99). Inspired by the titular book from former football player and wrestler Christopher Nowinski, filmmaker Steve James's documentary exposes the dangers of sports concussions—aka "mild traumatic brain injury"—which are often anything but mild, especially when suffered by school-age athletes. (VL-11/13)



The House I Live In (MPI, 108 min., DVD: \$14.99). Eugene Jarecki's Sundance Grand Jury Prize award-winning documentary presents a searing indictment of both the ineffectiveness and the flawed social justice of the so-called "War on Drugs," detailing the chronic failure of government policy over the past four decades. (VL Online-7/13)



The Imposter (Indomina, 99 min., DVD: \$19.98). Playing like a psychological thriller, Bart Layton's suspenseful documentary—based on a 2008 *New Yorker* article by David Grann—interweaves interviews and dramatizations to tell the almost unbelievable-but-true story of a 23-year-old French Algerian man who assumed the identity of a missing Texas teenager. (VL-1/13)

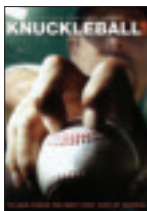


Into the Cold (Shelter Island/TDC, 87 min., DVD: \$24.98 [\$199 w/PPR: public libraries, \$249 w/PPR: colleges & universities from www.shelterisland.net]). Filmed using a handheld video camera, director Se-



bastian Copeland's extraordinary documentary follows photographer Copeland and teammate explorer Keith Heger on a 400-plus-mile expedition through the Arctic Circle to the North Pole. (VL-3/13)

Knuckleball! (MPI, 85 min., DVD: \$24.98). Filmmakers Ricki Stern and Annie Sundberg's entertaining and informative documentary looks at a controversial and often marginalized group of baseball pitchers who specialize in throwing unpredictable knuckleballs, focusing on 18-year veteran Tim Wakefield of the Boston Red Sox and 37-year-old R.A. Dickey of the New York Mets. (VL-5/13)



Last Call at the Oasis (Docurama, 105 min., DVD: \$29.95). Filmmaker Jessica Yu's globe-spanning eco-alarm documentary on dwindling water resources—a situation stemming from a combination of wasteful industries, shortsighted planning, and a human population of seven billion—features commentary from activists

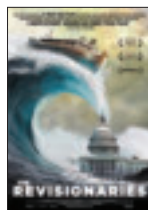


and experts, including Erin Brockovich. (VL-Online-1/13)

The Other Dream Team (Lionsgate, 90 min., DVD: \$24.98). Filmmaker Marius A. Markevicius's inspiring documentary celebrates Lithuania's love for basketball—from being forced to play on Soviet teams after the country was absorbed by the U.S.S.R. following WWII, to their amazing 1992 Summer Olympics performance in Barcelona as an independent Lithuanian team that was financially backed by the Grateful Dead. (VL-1/13)



The Revisionaries (Kino Lorber, 83 min., DVD: \$29.95 [\$349 w/PPR from www.kinolorberedu.com]). Detailing one aspect of the continual evolution-vs.-creationism argument, director Scott Thurman's documentary offers a snapshot of theocratic strategies for insinuating a right-wing Christian agenda into U.S. schools, focusing on Texas School Board of Education Chairman Don McLeroy, who believes that the universe is only 6,000 years old. (VL-5/13)



Searching for Sugar Man (Sony, 87 min., DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99). An obsession to uncover the truth about an obscure singer-songwriter brings surprising and affecting revelations in Malik Bendjelloul's hugely entertaining, Oscar-winning documentary on Sixto Rodriguez, who commercially bombed at Motown but became hugely popular years later (unbeknownst to him) when several of his songs were adopted as anthems in apartheid-era South Africa. (VL-1/13)



Somm (First Run, 93 min., DVD: \$24.95). Jason Wise's entertaining documentary explores the exclusive world of the prestigious Court of Master Sommeliers, focusing on four wine buddies who study history, geography, and German-language idioms using flashcards in an effort to pass the famously intimidating Master Sommelier Exam, which challenges their ability to ID wine right down to a specific vineyard and year, by taste alone. (VL-11/13)



Soul Food Junkies (PBS, 60 min., DVD: \$24.99 [\$275 w/PPR: colleges & universi-

ties from Media Education Foundation, www.mediaed.org]). Writer-director Byron Hurt's PBS-aided *Independent Lens* documentary examines the complex relationship between black people and soul food, which health experts warn carries risks for diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, and other ailments. (VL-7/13)



The Story of Film: An Odyssey (Music Box, 915 min., DVD: 5 discs, \$69.95). Beginning with the birth of motion pictures in the silent era and moving up through the digital age, Irish critic and filmmaker Mark Cousins's 15-part personal tribute serves up a comprehensive history of cinema that features interviews with filmmakers and actors such as Gus Van Sant, Lars von Trier, Wim Wenders, Claire Denis, Jane Campion, John Sayles, and Abbas Kiarostami. (VL-1/13)



Undeclared (Anchor Bay, 114 min., DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.99). Filmmakers Dan Lindsay and T.J. Martin's Oscar-winning documentary follows the Manassas Tigers, a severely underfunded West Memphis high school football team striving to overcome their losing reputation with the help of volunteer coach Bill Courtney. (VL-1/13)



The Waiting Room (Docurama, 82 min., DVD: \$29.95 [\$295 w/PPR from Bullfrog Films, www.bullfrogfilms.com]). Peter Nicks's Academy Award short-listed documentary offers a powerful cinema vérité portrait of the stunningly overcrowded emergency waiting room at Oakland's Highland Hospital. (VL-9/13)



We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks (Universal, 130 min., DVD: \$19.98). Directed by Alex Gibney, this documentary thriller blends the stories of Julian Assange and the creation of WikiLeaks with that of document-leaker Pfc. Bradley Manning in the dissemination of top-secret material about the Iraq War, as well as a huge cache of State Department documents that were embarrassing to Washington. (VL-11/13)



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Ordering information for the titles reviewed in this section can be found in the "Distributor Addresses" listings at the back of the magazine.

★★★★ = Excellent

★★★ = Good

★★ = Fair

★ = Poor

PPR = Public Performance Rights

DD = Digital Download

Aud = Audience

K = Preschool-Kindergarten

E = Elementary (grades 1-3)

I = Intermediate (grades 4-6)

J = Jr. High (grades 7-8)

H = High School (grades 9-12)

C = Colleges & Universities

P = Public Libraries

CHILDREN'S

Aaahh!!! Real Monsters: The Complete Series ★★½

(2013) 8 discs. 1,200 min. DVD: \$29.95. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors).

Well before *Monsters University*, Nickelodeon aired this 1994-1997 cartoon series about a secret creature academy in a city dump that educates young monsters in the art of scaring humans (with one amusing episode featuring black-and-white classroom-style films illustrating how boogeymen-monsters shaped civilization through the ages). The plotlines in the 52 episodes compiled here focus chiefly on three monster classmates: Krumm, whose standout trait is a foul smell; shape-changing Oblina, an overachiever with consistently high grades; and Ickis, who may be the son of an eminent monster, but basically resembles a bunny. Stories include Krumm becoming conceited after he fashions a discarded purse into a new head, Oblina attracting a shallow suitor, and an encounter with one of the academy's most prominent dropouts—Bigfoot. Despite the school setting and the fact that the monster heroes faithfully turn in their homework (i.e., scaring people), the show is far less about guidance than pure goofiness. That said, *Aaahh!!! Real Monsters* is also pretty noisy and frantic, and one has to wonder whether 21st-century kids will get the gags about pay telephones and film-loaded cameras. Celebrity voices include

Tim Curry, John Rhys-Davies, George Kennedy, Margot Kidder, Ben Stein, and in a recurring role as an ever-foiled monster-hunter, Jim Belushi. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

The Ant and the Grasshopper ★★½

(2013) 6 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-545-57136-7.

Animated by Soup2Nuts, this latest adaptation from daughter/father team Rebecca and Ed Emberley is based on their 2012 picture book. Featuring narration and an über-jazzy soundtrack by Louisiana-based blues musician Chris Thomas King, the classic fable is here updated with vivid greens, bright blues, and day-glo pinks and orange as a girl-ant struggling with picnic remains on a humid day meets a hip grasshopper and his buggy boogie band. "Come groove with us!" says the grasshopper—who calls the ant "baby"—but since she's in a hurry to get back to the colony, the gang (including beetle, dragonfly, and bee musicians) follow along, and provide music for a cool underground party. Offering a funky twist on a well-known tale, extras include a read-along option. Highly recommended. Aud: K, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Barbie & Her Sisters in A Pony Tale ★★

(2013) 75 min. DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$26.98. Universal Studios Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

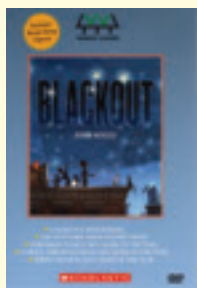
Set in the shadow of the Matterhorn (in the Alps, not Disneyland), this latest addition to the animated franchise features Barbie and her siblings traipsing around a pretty-cool-looking CGI riding school owned by their Aunt Marlene and her young twins Max and Marie. In this outing, Barbie is searching for a special horse to bring home for riding competitions,

Skipper would rather update her blog than enjoy the Swiss scenery, Stacie is worried her "natural jock" status will be marred by her lack of horse-riding skills, and little Chelsea is unhappy when tiny pony Dash appears to be her biggest prospect. Centered around the upcoming annual equestrian tournament—with the threat that the riding academy may close (if they don't win!)—*A Pony Tale* finds Barbie bonding with a majestic steed from a special ancient herd, and serves up comic relief in the form of fluffy puppies, boys from a rival school, and a stereotypical French worker and his scheming brother. Extras include an episode from the "Life in the Dreamhouse" web series, music videos, and outtakes. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Betsy's Kindergarten Adventures: Volume 1 ★★★

(2011) 120 min. DVD: \$19.95. Polka Dot Productions (dist. by Janson Media). ISBN: 978-1-56839-457-2.

Five-year-old Betsy navigates her first year of school in this charming animated PBS-aired series created by teacher and author Betsy M. Quinn and directed by Academy Award-winning animator Fred Crippen. During the eight segments compiled here, the precocious student attends her first day of class, makes friends, and shares her anxieties, confusion, and excitement about this big new change. Each segment combines lessons in educational basics, such as counting, with an overarching moral theme. Betsy learns about teamwork, responsibility, and how to solve conflicts as she navigates new experiences that include going on field trips, searching for the lost class salamander, and preparing for her first visit from the tooth fairy. The simple, colorful animation boasts the pleasing look of a child's drawing, while the corresponding tone is light and friendly. Recommended. Aud: K, P. (K. Cruver)



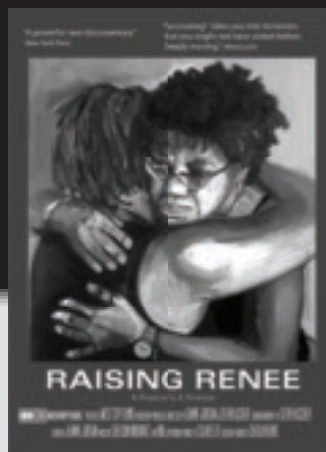
Blackout ★★★★★

(2013) 7 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-545-57146-4.

This adaptation of author and illustrator John Rocco's 2011 picture book—which won acclaim as a Caldecott Honor Book and Best Book of the Year for *Publishers Weekly*, *School Library Journal*, and *Kirkus Reviews*—features a rousing salsa-ish soundtrack by David Mansfield. Narrated by Oscar-nominee Stanley Tucci, the almost-luminously animated *Blackout* focuses on a young boy and his family in a city apartment on a hot summer night. Everyone is too busy talking on the phone, cooking, etc., to play a board game, so the protagonist turns to video games...until "the lights...went...out...all of them." Watching the household bond not only with each other (as they gather flashlights and candles for shadow puppets) but also with their neighbors (everyone congregates to appreciate a music and ice-cream filled block party lit by the stars) is a heartwarming treat. Extras include read-along subtitles, and an interview with Rocco (also known for his work on the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* covers). Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

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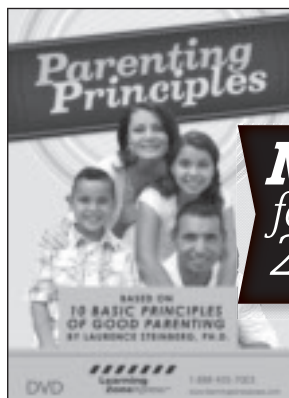
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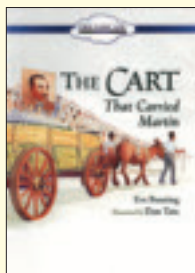
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The Cart That Carried Martin ★★★

(2013) 7 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-933938-97-4.

Based on author Eve Bunting and illustrator Don Tate's 2013 book, this iconographic-animated adaptation—narrated by Sean Crisden—follows the funeral procession of Martin Luther King Jr., as his staff borrows a wagon, paints it the color "of grass when it rains," and hitches it to a pair of mules for the trip from Ebenezer Baptist Church through Atlanta to King's alma mater, Morehouse College. *The Cart That Carried Martin* is full of realistic details, ranging from the sad crowds (who climb trees and lampposts for a better view) to an image of Coretta Scott King—under a dark veil—holding her young daughter. Viewers will also see the National Historic Site display of the titular cart that held an activist icon on his last day, a man whose "great spirit had been the heaviest part of him." Also including an audio segment about King's life, this is recommended. Aud: E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Gravity Falls: Six Strange Tales ★★★

(2013) 129 min. DVD: \$19.99. Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

Twelve-year-old siblings Dipper and Mabel are sent to visit their great-uncle in Gravity Falls for the summer. Their "Grunkle" runs the Mystery Shack, a tourist trap billed as "the world's most bizarre museum." But his faux wonders pale in comparison to what Dipper and Mabel discover in the pages of a journal they find in the woods. This imaginative animated Disney Channel series recalls *Eerie, Indiana*, a one-season wonder about two friends who investigate the weirdness of their idyllic small town. Fortunately, *Gravity Falls* seems destined to have a longer life, not least because animation is a better medium for creating such age-appropriate oddities as, say, a marauding monster comprised of garden gnomes seeking a garden queen. The series greatly benefits from the ebullient voice of Kristen Schaal (*Flight of the Conchords*), who imbues Mabel with an infectious eccentricity and enthusiasm, and aside from minor annoyances, the twins' relationship is refreshingly supportive. Compiling six episodes from the series, this is recommended. Aud: P. (D. Liebenson)

Guess How Much I Love You: Hidden Treasure ★★★½

(2011) 80 min. DVD: \$12.98. Entertainment One (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 1-4172-3719-8.

Based on the 1994 children's picture book written by Sam McBratney and illustrated by Anita Jeram, the animated *Guess How Much I Love You* includes six short episodes featuring Little Nutbrown Hare, his dad Big Nutbrown Hare, and friends Little Field Mouse, Little Grey Squirrel, and Little Redwood Fox. The elegant woodland world of Jeram's original images comes to life in these stories, which kick off with "Hidden Treasure," in which Mouse looks for a sparkling rock but can't find one. In "Finder's Keepers," Fox happens upon a pile of yummy spotted acorns

set aside by Squirrel for the winter. In "It's Okay," Mouse accidentally disturbs Little Nutbrown Hare's fun and tries hard to compensate; while in "Slip, Slop, Slide," Hare is embarrassed about his clumsiness when skating with pals on an ice pond. "Inside Day" is a cute segment in which Hare and Mouse—who are not natural hibernators like Squirrel—decide to give hibernation a try in order to make spring come faster, and "Snowflake" is a sweet tale about trying to catch a snowflake that one can keep. Serving up valuable life lessons tucked within engaging narratives that are enhanced by lovely visuals, this is highly recommended. Aud: K, P. (T. Keogh)

I Want My Hat Back ★★★

(2013) 9 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-545-57151-0.

Canadian author and illustrator Jon Klassen's 2011 picture book—a cute story about a bear searching high and low for his missing hat—was lauded with both ALA Notable and Theodor Seuss Geisel Beginning Reader honors. Narrated by Daniel Pinkwater, with a banjo/whistling soundtrack by Scotty Huff, this animated adaptation follows Bear after he realizes that, "My hat is gone. I want it back." Moseying along, Bear asks about his hat as he encounters animals such as a fox, a frog, a turtle, a snake, and others...including a rabbit wearing a hat, who grows very defensive about the inquiry. Set against a stark white background with black, gray, and muted colors used for the creatures and forest, this silly story features extras including read-along subtitles and an interview with Klassen. Recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Mama Doni's Jewish Holiday Party

★★★

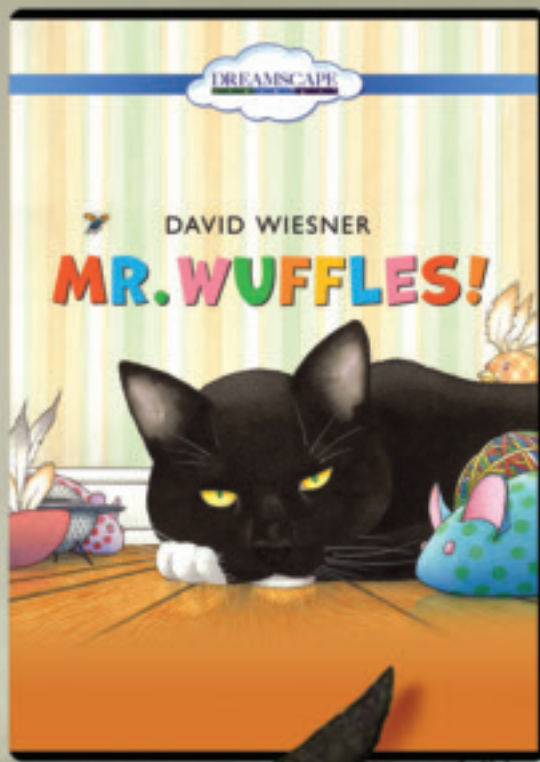
(2013) 66 min. DVD: \$19.98. Mama Doni Productions (avail. from most distributors).

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Mama Doni (Doni Zasloff Thomas), a dynamo of energy and talent—focuses on three Jewish holidays marked by rituals, good food, bonding time, music, and fun, with Doni and musical partner Eric Lindberg contributing bluegrass versions of holiday favorites. For Chanukah, Mama Doni wisely begins with a kids' game: a dreidel circle with gelt (chocolate coins) in the middle for the winner, which is followed by a cute film about trying to use gelt as real money in stores, after which Doni explains the story behind Chanukah. Next up is Passover, which Doni suggests is about freedom—including the freedom to be oneself. Doni notes that Passover includes housecleaning, shopping for kosher foods and leavened products, putting together a Seder plate, and—for youngsters—making matzo pizza. The third segment, which centers on the Shabbat (or weekly Sabbath), features more tunes, dances, and stories, along with a simple recipe for making challah. Bundled with a bonus audio CD featuring 13 songs, this engaging children's title is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (T. Keogh)

Power Rangers Zeo, Volume One ★★

(2013) 3 discs. 480 min. DVD: \$19.95. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

This compilation of 25 episodes from the 1996 fourth season of the never-ending U.S./Japanese *Power Rangers* franchise features the chintzier production values of yesterday—i.e., very little CGI, and the “Zords” (robot animals used by the Power Rangers) are clearly puppet miniatures. Believe it or not, some fans actually find those subpar qualities to be this cheesy enterprise's primary charm (in one episode here, the heroes learn about something called the “Internet”). *Zeo* finds the suspiciously mature-looking “high school” Power Ranger kids facing a new foe: the Machine Empire, led by a royal family of robots described as so evil they were expelled from an association of villains. But they're an exceptionally goofy dynasty of darkness, silly even by series standards, and the metallic King Mondo remains jovial and upbeat even when his minions (most of whom wear what look like C3PO masks) are defeated repeatedly by the Rangers. Guest mecha-monsters are on the level of a top-hatted, punning man-piano called Fortissimodo (which features an *Amadeus* gag). The infectious sense of dumb fun is underlined by cast gags and bloopers over the closing credits. In one, an actor mispronounces “service” as “cervix,” and that's about as “racy” as the show gets. Collections already Powered up will find the time-tested fan base wanting to revisit this classic. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

Sesame Street: Being Brave ★★

(2013) 134 min. DVD: \$14.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

The *Sesame Street* gang is back in this



Lost and Found ★★½

(2008) 24 min. DVD: \$9.98. Entertainment One (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4172-3217-X.

Based on a popular children's book by Oliver Jeffers, *Lost and Found*—narrated by Oscar-winner Jim Broadbent—is a charming, gorgeously animated short about a boy who comes to terms with taking responsibility for an impetuous penguin. When the latter turns up one day in a seaport town, the critter waddles its way into the life of our nameless little hero, who tries to rid himself of the bird via a lost and found department and a departing ship. When nothing works, he takes the penguin with him in a rowboat and heads for Antarctica, but a few mishaps lie in wait, including a giant storm, an encounter with hundreds of rubber ducks, and a malevolent-looking giant octopus. The visuals are wonderful, the spare dialogue enchanting, and the story's unexpected ending both sweet and satisfying. DVD extras include a “making-of” featurette. Highly recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (T. Keogh)

solid theme-based compilation touching on facing common worries. Segments include a silly scene featuring the “Mostly Poultry” T-ball team overreacting to a thunderstorm, during which Hooper's Store worker Chris, Laundromat employee Leela, Elmo, and Abby Cadabby try out techniques to calm the chicken; Zoe overcoming her fear of enormous fuzzy Muppet pup Barkley and learning about proper etiquette for meeting and greeting dogs; and a sleeper where Baby Bear reassures his younger Cousin Bear over scary shadows. Also including animated segments, and a vignette with guest star James Gandolfini (as he chit-chats with Zoe about fears and clutches a teddy bear), extras include the bonus episode “A Celebration of Me, Grover,” and three additional segments. Recommended. Aud: K, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Sesame Street: Fairy Tale Fun! ★★½

(2013) 121 min. DVD: \$14.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

This latest compilation from the long-running children series cobbles together fairy tale and nursery rhyme-themed segments featuring the popular Muppet characters and friends. Here, Elmo and Abby try their hand at helping Mother Goose—who is suffering from writer's block—to create three more works before her deadline. Kermit the Frog pops up in reporter garb to meet with classic characters, including a princess who wants to kiss an amphibian (which backfires) and a snoring Sleeping Beauty. Also including Big Bird's playdate with Hansel and Gretel, Abby attempting to kiss Oscar the Grouch to turn him into royalty, and a nervous Jack Be Nimble (who draws inspiration from a song-singing kangaroo and the famous cow who jumped over the moon), this is ultimately a so-so title. Extras include two bonus segments, and the full-length *CinderElmo* (starring Keri Russell, Kathy Najimy, and Oliver Platt). A strong optional purchase. Aud: K, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Those Darn Squirrels ★★★

(2013) 8 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-933938-40-0.

Based on the 2008 picture book by author Adam Rubin and illustrator Daniel Salmieri, this iconographic-animated adaptation introduces crotchety “Old Man Fookwire,” who—unimpressed with the niceties of life (such as pie and puppies)—only gets excited about painting pictures of the myriad birds that fly near his little home on the edge of town. With the onset of fall, the lonely grump decides to try to lure the avian scavengers into sticking around with robust birdfeeders, but these are swiftly overtaken by a group of crafty, extremely intelligent squirrels. Both the birds and Fookwire are upset at the thieving rodents, so Fookwire sets about fashioning complicated contraptions to put a stop to the pilfering...even though the birds—naturally—still fly South for the season. Although the old man is sad, *Those Darn Squirrels* comes up with some ideas to soften the blow for Fookwire in this fun children's tale narrated by Kirby Heyborne. Recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

PSYCHOLOGY & SELF-HELP

El Huaso: The Last Rodeo ★★★

(2012) 78 min. In English & Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$398. Magic Lantern Films. PPR.

Canadian filmmaker Carlo Guillermo Proto's documentary highlights the emotional trauma experienced by his father, Gustavo, a 58-year-old Chilean immigrant who carved out a successful business career before becoming obsessed with the concept of suicide after medical tests detected the possible beginnings of Alzheimer's disease. The diagnosis only exacerbates Gustavo's propensity toward depression—his mother succumbed to Alzheimer's and his father took his own life. As Gustavo finds his memory slowly fraying—a sequence in which he be-

comes frustrated by failing to take the proper highway exit is particularly painful—he arranges to leave the bleak wintry landscape of Toronto and go back to Chile. While Gustavo claims that his return to his native country will allow him to pursue a childhood dream of being a cowboy, his son is concerned that the trip home will be the final stop on his life's journey. Although often uncomfortable to watch, *El Huaso* tells a sensitive and heartbreaking family story. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Here One Day ★★

(2012) 76 min. DVD: \$95; public libraries; \$295; colleges & universities. Two Suns Media. PPR.

In her artful, affecting documentary, filmmaker Kathy Leichter tries to understand more about her late mother by sifting through photographs, home movies, and audio recordings. In 1958, Nora Williams married Franz Leichter, a Holocaust survivor (his mother died in a concentration camp) who went on to become a New York state senator. Friends and relatives remember Nora, a school administrator, as bright, charming, and witty, but starting in the 1970s, she began to suffer from severe mood swings. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder, Nora took medication and attended a support group. Franz encouraged Nora to become more politically active, but she feared that her marriage would suffer if she spent too much time outside the home (she did, however, print up buttons for associates that read "Kiss Me, I Have a Mental Instability"). Over time, Nora's depression worsened, particularly after the death of her own mother. She tried different prescriptions and even electroshock therapy, but no one realized how hopeless Nora felt until she jumped to her death from the family's 11th-story apartment. By engaging with the very materials she spent 16 years trying to avoid, Leichter has been able to move forward. A powerful personal story, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

You Are in Charge of Your Body

★★★★1/2

(2013) 31 min. DVD: \$185 (teacher's guide included). Human Relations Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62706-021-9.

Designed for grades 3-5, this important program takes a direct but age-appropriate approach to the subject of sexual abuse, featuring adult and kid actors who continue to remind viewers "don't worry, we'll only be acting." Combining dramatic re-enactments with real-life kid commentary, and animated segments, *You Are in Charge of Your Body* is primarily divided into three sections with vignettes that are followed by a summary/review incorporating advice on how to deal with situations. "Recognizing Sexual Abuse" addresses body boundaries (the bathing suit parts), warning signs (even without actual touching), and emphasizes the fact

that abusers don't necessarily look creepy and may even seem normal. "Stopping an Abuser" assures kids that they can be assertive and say "NO!"—even to a grownup—noting that it's okay to lie in order to get away if you feel danger. "Telling Someone" includes suggestions for creating a safety network of family or school workers, with information for the National Abuse Hotline. DVD extras include a PDF teacher's guide. A fine guidance title on a serious subject, this is highly recommended. Aud: E, I, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Devil We Know: An Objective Look at the Prince of Darkness ★★

(2013) 48 min. DVD: \$169.95. Films Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62290-715-1.

Satan and satanism remain staples of popular culture even as the devil himself has steadily faded from serious discussion in theological circles. A fast-paced documentary, *The Devil We Know* looks at various aspects of demonology, beginning with a historical sketch of the devil's evolution over the centuries. Early Scriptural allusions in such Jewish texts as the Book of Job to a figure who served as God's assistant are contrasted

with the more contemporary notion of the tempter found in the Christian Gospels. The film explores the emergence of associated imagery during the Middle Ages, discusses the introduction of the concept of witchcraft and human "deals" with Satan (ranging from the Faust story to a myth associated with blues musician Robert Johnson), and examines how the devil and his adherents have been portrayed in popular entertainment, particularly in movies such as the 1973 blockbuster *The Exorcist*. The final segment turns to the issues of possession and exorcism, looking at the sporadic panics regarding satanic practice (particularly involving ritual abuse of children) that have sprung up since the 1980s, the prevalence of satanic references in rock music, and the attitudes of Christians (especially the Catholic Church) toward such matters. Although the documentary sometimes suffers from a sensationalist bent—jazzing up the subject with flashy graphics, film clips, and artwork, as well as whiplash editing—it also offers smart commentary from a variety of interviewees (including a priest). Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Thank God for Football! ★★

(2013) 157 min. DVD: \$19.99. Christian Television Association (dist. by Vision Video).

An interesting football-and-faith docu-

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Got the facts on Milk? dares to question the conventional wisdom of the publicized health benefits of milk and dairy products. Addressing myth, truth and all in-between, the film is a humorous yet shocking exposition that provokes serious thought about this everyday staple.

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In an epic snow year, a group of artists leave their daily lives behind to hike & record California's historic John Muir Trail, a 219 mile stretch from Yosemite to Mt. Whitney. Their goal - complete the journey in 25 days while capturing the amazing sights and sounds they encounter along the way. Inspired by their bond, humor, artistry and dedication, the group continues to grow to include other artists, musicians & adventure seekers. Before they all reach the summit, hikers and viewers alike affirm the old adage - it's about the journey, not the destination. *Mile... Mile & A Half* is the feature-length documentary of that journey.

Documentary | 88 min
Color | PRDVD2220 | \$24.95

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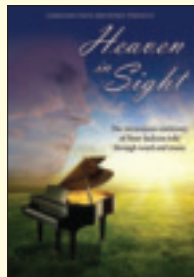


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Heaven in Sight ★★

(2013) 100 min. DVD: \$19.99. Christian Faith Ministries (dist. by Vision Video).

In this video autobiography and concert, blind Christian pianist and composer Peter Jackson of Wales shares his story of faith and determination while also intermittently playing favorite hymns—as well as jazz and classical pieces—before a live audience in Fraserburgh, Scotland. We learn that Jackson lost his vision as a result of contracting measles, and since his parents felt ill-equipped to raise a sightless child, he was removed from home at the age of 2 and cared for by a social service agency. Struggling with sadness and feeling unloved, Jackson found salvation upon hearing his first piano notes—and a song about Jesus—when he was 4. Not only was the sound of the instrument revelatory, but also the message about a God who loved all boys and girls, including him. Talking about his education—which initially included prayers and learning to read and write Braille in equal measure—Jackson says that he felt a personal connection not just to God but also to teachers who were kind and lived their faith. Eventually, music lessons were added to his educational regimen, and during his teenage years he was playing parties and clubs, inspired by such greats as Fats Waller. Jackson also went through the normal rebellion of most teenagers, even moving away from God; but then returned to his religious roots with a fervor that led him to make ministry a full-time pursuit. Offering an inspiring account of an unusual spiritual journey, this is recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)



mentary, *Thank God for Football!* chronicles the birth of soccer in the U.K., while also focusing on the Christian organizations that embraced—and helped develop—the game during its early years. Historian Peter Lupson tells the stories of 12 clubs in exhaustive detail with highlight footage sure to thrill aficionados. For example, viewers will learn about the origins of the Aston Villa club—one of the most winning teams—which started with Bible students at a Wesleyan chapel, who first played together on a cricket team (four of them were intrigued by a new thing called “association football” and decided to give it a go). Presented alongside the sports history but accounting for much less of the running time is a message about the importance of Christian faith, values, and worship to players and officials alike. Host and narrator Lupson appears on location, backed by archival footage, photographs, and drawings, as well as dramatic re-enactments. The chapters here can be played in their entirety, or accessed individually by the clubs, which include: Barnsley, Everton, Fulham, Liverpool, Manchester City, Southampton, Swindon Town, and Tottenham Hotspur. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

Through Lent & Easter Sunday with the Gospels of Matthew and John ★★

(2013) 22 min. DVD: \$24.99. Oblate Media (dist. by Videos With Values). PPR. ISBN: 978-193214288-4.

This step-by-step overview of the importance of New Testament Gospels during the season of Lent (leading to Easter) begins with a reflection on the significance of Easter in Catholicism, noting that every other event in the church’s annual life actually springs from Easter. Suggesting that Catholics will

get more out of the celebrations by understanding relevant Gospel passages, this guide explains the cycle of Gospel readings that take place during Lent, with specific purposes linked to different Sunday services. Along the way, viewers learn about the “scrutinies,” rites tied to passages that encourage self-evaluation and offer reminders about temptation and the meaningfulness of Jesus’s resurrection in the daily lives of Christians. Also touching on the need to renew Baptismal promises, the meaning of transfiguration, and the last days of Christ and his prophecy of “end times,” this will serve as a solid springboard for group discussion or personal reflection. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES

Bittersweet Joke ★★1/2

(2011) 52 min. DVD: \$390. Icarus Films. PPR.

Claiming to be “the first film to show the real lives and faces of unwed mothers and their children in Korea,” this well-intentioned effort from filmmaker Paik Yeonah nevertheless fails to quantify how South Korean society’s treatment of single moms is markedly different from that in other places around the globe (even though the country is known for exporting babies for adoption worldwide). The young women whose stories are highlighted in *Bittersweet Joke* are bright, optimistic, funny, and opinionated, and they include activists in a nascent association established to fight for women’s rights. But the documentary falls short in explaining what, exactly, are the obstacles they face, aside from social pressure expressed in various ways,

such as families who no longer speak to them. One youthful mother’s travails appear to consist of not being able to hail a taxi to accommodate her and a very large and colorful child’s coupe (a tricycle with a cab). Despite taking on a topic worth exploring, the lack of context here makes this an optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

Brown Babies: The Mischlingskinder Story ★★

(2013) 61 min. DVD: \$195: high schools & public libraries; \$295: colleges & universities. Transit Media. PPR.

The Allied conquest of Germany at the end of WWII led to the birth of approximately 100,000 illegitimate babies between German women and Allied occupation soldiers, almost 5,000 of whom were mixed-race “mischlingskinder” children, fathered by black servicemen. Filmmaker-narrator Regina Griffin finds multiple ironies in the lives of these innocent kids. Although the scandal of “brown babies” was culturally discomfiting to Aryan-blond Germans, it became appallingly clear (even to members of the Third Reich) that the U.S. was a mercilessly racist society, a place where such children would find no welcome either. A flawed heroine here is the late Mabel Grammer, a light-skinned Afro-American socialite who undertook a personal mission to place the unwanted children with accepting families. Unfortunately, her DIY adoption system had its own share of problems, and we meet siblings Dan and Sonja Cardwell, who went from Germany to a miserable existence as farm laborers in Maryland (Dan tells a particularly poignant story about his search for his true birth mother). Combining interviews and archival material, *Brown Babies* shines a light on a little-covered chapter from WWII. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Building Babel ★★1/2

(2012) 58 min. DVD: \$79.95: public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Seventh Art Releasing.

Director David Osit’s fly-on-the-wall documentary centers on Sharif El-Gamal, a New York City real estate developer whose intention to build a Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan—two blocks from Ground Zero, where the World Trade Center collapsed following the 9/11 terrorist attack—caused local outrage. While El-Gamal is portrayed as a well-meaning and even affable philanthropist determined to stop the demonizing of Muslims in America, his harshest critics here regard him as tone deaf and insensitive to the pain of New Yorkers who lost loved ones on 9/11 (the fact that those naysayers are stereotyping an entire group of people as an enemy is an irony that is lost on them). Shot over two years, *Building Babel* captures the long process of moving this quixotic project along at its creator’s mounting ex-

pense—despite facing official and unofficial obstacles—and it reflects El-Gamal's mood swings throughout, from hope to despair. We see him pray with his family, hold press conferences, deal with his wife's ambivalence, chide an imam for grandstanding during a meeting, and constantly talk to the media, which has a field day after El-Gamal's troubled youth is revealed. "Our community is closeted; we're not practicing being good Americans," says El-Gamal at one point. *Building Babel* powerfully illustrates why that practice is so hard. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Fall to Grace ★★1/2

(2013) 46 min. DVD: \$19.98. HBO Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Shoehorning a lot of material into a too-brief running time, this documentary short from politics-watcher Alexandra Pelosi (*Journeys with George*) centers on disgraced former New Jersey governor Jim McGreevey—a rising star of the Democratic party (with possible White House aspirations)—who was publicly outed in 2004 in an extramarital homosexual affair that became a scandal. McGreevey's attempt at a stirring mea culpa speech as a "gay American" earned more jeers from late-night comics than respect, and he subsequently left office. McGreevey then went into an Episcopal seminary (finding no acceptance within his own Catholic Church) for three years and emerged with a new image, as an un-closeted gay-activist cleric (and would-be priest) who conducted highly public outreach programs for women prisoners and addicts, and often found himself in the midst of New Jersey's black community—home to his strongest former constituents. The big question: is this new mission sincere, or just a grandstanding

attempt to stay relevant and in the public eye? McGreevey himself notes that a dangerous blend of ego and exhibitionism draws many people into politics and the priesthood. In a longer film, Pelosi might have been able to explore these issues in more detail, but as it is, *Fall to Grace* is recommended only for regional collections, and is optional elsewhere. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Global Food Equity ★★★

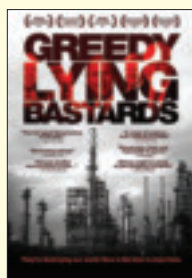
(2012) 20 min. DVD: \$129.95. VEA (dist. by Films Media Group). PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62290-046-6.

Presenter Georgia Daoud mingles in a crowded open market while talking about global imbalances in access to food in this short documentary that also features interviews with experts including Jennifer Evans of the Australian Red Cross, Shen Narayanasamy from the aid group Oxfam International, Dr. Claire Melamed of the global movement ActionAid, and Peter Goossens from the Somalia World Food Program. *Global Food Equity* looks at why some people don't have access to safe and nutritious food, with reasons ranging from insufficient finances to distribution problems. The statistics here indicate that 1 in 7 people go to bed hungry (even though so much food is wasted), with those affected including individuals who are isolated, low-income, disabled, and mired in war conflicts. Global food inequities lead to inflated prices, as well as malnutrition and obesity, and impacted economies. While naturally offering no magic solutions—although it does present some good ideas about sharing technology, and working together to combat dwindling resources—this is sure to spur discussion. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Greedy Lying Bastards ★★★

(2013) 94 min. DVD: \$19.98. The Disinformation Company/TDC (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-939517-15-9.

According to this documentary by filmmaker and activist Craig Rosebraugh, climate change has been anticipated for at least a couple of generations. In fact, segments from a 1950s educational video here predict much of what has come to pass, including melting ice caps, extreme weather phenomena, and out-of-control wildfires. That vintage excerpt also suggests the underlying reasons: namely, the unrelenting exploitation of fossil fuels. *Greedy Lying Bastards* asks a pivotal question: if we knew this was coming, why didn't we try to prevent it? Rosebraugh looks at decades of successful efforts by the oil and gas industries to shape public opinion and lead government policy away from the acceptance of climate change as a growing reality, denying everything while hiring legions of skeptics to testify that nothing is wrong. Entire careers in denial have been crafted, some of them bordering on the cartoonish, such as that of conservative British pundit Christopher Monckton, who denies global warming at every opportunity. Besides explaining how a concerted push by big business (including massive donations to the campaigns of key elected U.S. representatives) has won the day so far, the documentary also provides ample evidence of the ongoing destructive processes at work in the Arctic, in the drought- and fire-plagued U.S. West, and in the shifting everyday weather patterns across the globe. Climate change isn't just "coming," we're reminded, it's already here. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



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Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth ★★★

(2012) 98 min. DVD: \$295. Umbrella Films (dist. by Bullfrog Films). PPR. ISBN: 1-93777-245-4.

Filmmakers Frauke Sandig and Eric Black's documentary offers a caustic critique of the ecological destruction caused by mining and deforestation in Mexico and Guatemala, while also serving up a poetic evocation of the traditional spirituality of the indigenous peoples in the region—especially the Maya, who view the devastation as a rupture of the proper relationship between man and nature, presaging disaster. Along the way, six young Mayans talk about both the racism they have faced and government military action against their people, while also describing their personal journeys to recapture their ancient rituals and a life in accordance with the natural order. One young man, for example, has chosen to live in the forest and practice the old ways, while a young woman, who found herself mistreated when she attempted to assimilate, has returned to traditional dress. Their stories are tied together by recitations from creation myths drawn from Mayan texts, set against haunting landscapes and skies. Scenes showing that even historically significant sites are being reduced to rubble by bulldozers take on particular poignancy here, although the spirit of *Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth* is more elegiac than angry—expressing a mournful yet dignified attitude toward those who cannot comprehend the consequences of their destruction. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Hill ★★★

(2013) 60 min. DVD: \$99.95; public libraries; \$310; colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. ISBN: 0-7815-1444-4.

Filmmaker Lisa Molomot's documentary *The Hill* focuses on the citizens of Prospect Park—a mixed-race district—who not only protested a plan for urban redevelopment, but also took their dispute to federal court. Rather than renovate two area high schools, officials in New Haven, CT, decided to raze three blocks in order to build one magnet school, an action that would displace 94 families. From the city's perspective, construction would create jobs and also allow for the expansion of the Yale-New Haven Hospital, but residents on "the Hill" fear the higher costs of living elsewhere. As the film begins, some have sold their homes, while others are holding out. One resident notes that he has paid off his mortgage, and has no incentive to start all over again (he's also visually impaired, and has memorized the complete interior of his house). Another man, who runs a diner, has been losing money as customers are moving away. Some who originally supported the development change their minds after they see how poorly the implementation is going, and a coalition is formed to hire a civil rights attorney and file suit against the city and the Board of Education. On the plus side, the

judge is sympathetic to their concerns, but the timing of the suit proves problematic—by waiting two years to pursue legal action, the litigants end up with a limited range of options. *The Hill* documents the trial, decision, and paths that the participants end up taking in its wake. Telling a timely human story about the potential downsides of urban planning, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Homegoings ★★★1/2

(2013) 56 min. DVD: \$24.95; individuals; \$49.95; public libraries & high schools; \$195; colleges & universities. California Newsreel. PPR. Closed captioned.

Christine Turner's PBS-aired POV documentary primarily focuses on the work of Isaiah Owens, founder of the Owens Funeral Home in Harlem, NY. Owens recalls his lifetime fascination with mortuary sciences, dating back to his childhood in rural South Carolina, where he would stage funerals for dead animals (Owens also runs an establishment in his hometown, where his 95-year-old mother works part-time as a receptionist). Owens' story serves as a foundation for a wider exploration of long-held customs related to African-American funeral rites. The Jim Crow era forced black communities to handle their own arrangements for taking care of their dead, which over the years led to a protocol that involved boisterous memorial services celebrating the departed, coupled with widely attended processions

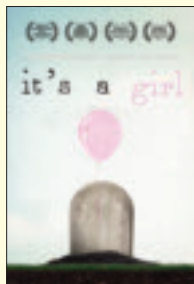
that often rivaled parades in their size and scope. Although shifting attitudes and rising expenses have taken a contemporary toll on Owens' business, he manages to keep this important community tradition alive, aided by his adult sons. Turner wisely avoids showing the more graphic aspects of preparing a body for burial (instead, Owens carefully explains how embalming fluid works, comparing it to Botox in its ability to remove the signs of aging). A heartfelt, deeply invigorating portrait, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Life and Death in Assisted Living

★★★

(2013) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-963-6.

With Baby Boomers aging, assisted living facilities have become a multibillion dollar industry. In this PBS-aired *Frontline* documentary, correspondent A.C. Thompson investigates this weakly regulated business sector that has become "the rock we don't want to look under." Of particular concern is Alzheimer's disease or dementia, which affects one in five Americans at some point. Under pressure by Wall Street to remain profitable, flagship companies such as Emeritus have not only cut corners, but their low-paid staff members are also not really qualified to care for the special needs of Alzheimer's residents. This film details several tragedies, including a former pro football star who



It's a Girl ★★★1/2

(2012) 63 min. DVD: \$24.95; individuals; \$39; public libraries; \$295 w/PPR; colleges & universities. Shadowline Films (avail. from www.itsagirlmovie.com). Closed captioned.

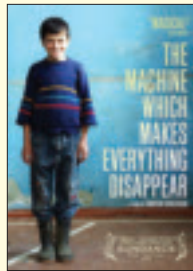
Director Evan Grae Davis's disquieting documentary sheds light on the practice of gendercide in India and China. *It's a Girl* opens with an Indian woman who killed eight of her infant daughters because she was hoping for a son. While she may have been acting on a cultural preference, it's hard to sympathize with her actions—no matter how neatly she buried the bodies.

But Davis wisely continues to take a non-inflammatory tone towards this upsetting topic, using animated drawings along the way to illustrate statistics, including the shocker that one out of four Indian girls do not live past puberty. Sons can bring prosperity to parents through the antiquated dowry system, but since marriage-age daughters represent a financial loss, poorer families see them as a drain on their resources. Other unwanted girls meet their ends through abandonment and abortion in a situation that activist Rita Banerji describes as "systemic negligence." In China, the one-child policy, which went into effect in 1979, has produced similar outcomes, including forced abortion and sterilization. Although rural families may have two children, many also hope for boys. When a woman named Li and her husband had a third girl, they left their children with relatives and went into hiding, hoping to reunite with them someday. The consequences for parents who break the law include steep fines and a lack of citizenship (and its attendant benefits) for their "extra" children, but the subsequent shortage of women for men to marry has led to a rise in kidnapping and sex-trafficking. Some of the white-collar subjects here experience more positive outcomes, but they also have greater financial means at their disposal with which to fight cultural and policy norms. DVD extras include extended interviews, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a discussion guide. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear ★★★

(2012) 101 min. DVD: \$29.98. Icarus Films Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

The mournful reality of life in post-Soviet Georgia is the subject of this anecdotal documentary by Tinatin Gurchiani, who put out a call for people aged 15-25 to audition for roles in a movie, and then filmed their responses to her disarmingly probing questions, which reveal a pervasive attitude of demoralization resulting from both the country's abject poverty and the shadow of its repeated wars. In some cases, Gurchiani expands on the impromptu interviews by following the subjects to their homes and filming brief segments of their day-to-day lives—including a boy working on his struggling family's small farm, and a young man prevented from joining the army by a criminal conviction who traipses from one friend to another beseeching them to visit his imprisoned brother. The only false note comes near the end, when a young woman confronts her mother, who abandoned the family years earlier; their meeting ends in hysterical weeping that comes across as contrived (especially since the girl is an acting student). But overall this is a moving depiction of the desperation that pervades Georgian society in the aftermath of the fall of the USSR. The title, incidentally, comes from a question about what one might choose to make disappear if the titular machine actually existed. DVD extras include an interview with Gurchiani. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



escaped his memory care wing and died after swallowing industrial strength dishwashing liquid; a woman who jumped (or fell) from a second story window; and a case of severe neglect in which a woman developed life-threatening bedsores. Former staffers recall the lack of training and pressure to keep the facilities fully occupied at all times, while also noting that many dementia patients should not have been in an independent living facility in the first place, but are because they can be charged higher rates for care. Terrible incidents have led to time-consuming and emotionally-wrenching litigation, and viewers will hear testimony from the Emeritus CEO, attorneys on both sides, whistleblowers, and distraught family members. Offering an urgent and timely report on a "ticking time bomb" that promises more injuries and deaths, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

Lucky Express: India's Forgotten Train Kids ★★★

(2013) 86 min. In English & Indian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$19.95. Cinema Libre Studio (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Anna Fischer's documentary on the homeless children who populate India's vast network of railroad depots offers an unusual insider view, thanks to the input of Vijay "Lucky" Bahadur. Born in Nepal, Bahadur escaped an abusive family at the age of 5 and wound up at the central station in New Delhi, where he fell into a Dickensian life as a *chai wallah* (tea server) pickpocket within a juvenile gang. Today, he's a film school student, but still retains an ability to connect with the new wave of young orphans who barely survive in and around the nation's train platforms and stations. The extent of

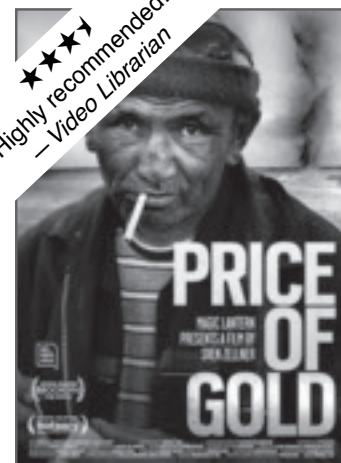
this population is uncertain—the number cited here is approximately 18 million, with more than 120,000 newcomers arriving each year—but the degree of poverty and danger they face is clear. Sexual abuse by predators and drug usage are matters of daily life, and there is little evidence of government intervention to address the crisis, although Fischer does include a brief segment on Inderjit Khurana, who runs a network of social workers seeking to provide healthcare and education to these youngsters. DVD extras include a photo gallery. Presenting a shocking overview of a grave social crisis, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Mothers of Bedford ★★★1/2

(2011) 96 min. DVD: \$89; public libraries; \$350; colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

Eighty percent of American women in prison are mothers of school-age children. Filmmaker Jenifer McShane explores how programs at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility—a maximum security penitentiary north of New York City—allow inmates to be moms to their kids, even over extended periods of incarceration. Filmed over four years, *Mothers of Bedford* focuses on five women from diverse backgrounds who have been convicted of crimes ranging from robbery to second-degree murder, serving sentences from two to 15 years. None are career criminals, and viewers will likely empathize as they talk about the actions and decisions that landed them in Bedford (their parents and children also share thoughts on what it's like to have a daughter or mother in prison). Bedford's model program provides classes, a baby nursery, and guidance geared toward teens. Scenes filmed in the Bedford's Children's Center capture weekend visits, and Center founder

★★★★
Highly recommended!
— Video Librarian

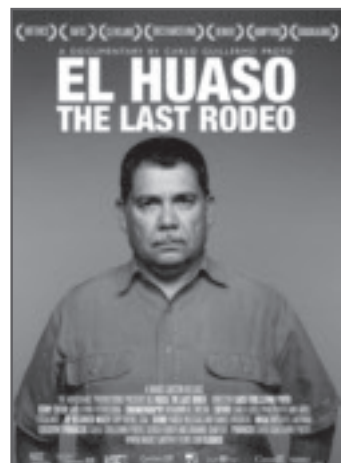


Inside illegal Mongolian mining.
"Terrifying!" — *The New York Times*

★★★★
Highly recommended!
— Video Librarian



Group childrearing under Pinochet.
"Fascinating!" — *The Village Voice*



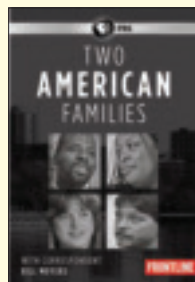
Depression in a Chilean family.
"See this film!" — *Boston Phoenix*

MAGIC-LANTERN-FILMS.COM

Two American Families ★★½

(2013) 90 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-962-9.

In the last few decades, working Americans have been whipped by downsizing, outsourcing, and the slow erosion of the American Dream, as many high-paying full-time positions have been replaced by non-union, part-time jobs with no benefits. For the past 20 years, PBS host Bill Moyers has periodically checked in with two Milwaukee families as they struggle to maintain their foothold in the middle class: the Neumanns and the Stanleys, who suffered a significant drop in income when the breadwinners' jobs at a major manufacturer were outsourced to cheaper foreign labor. At first, the husbands and wives engage in further education and retraining, while juggling childrearing and bill-paying priorities. Eventually, however, both families wind up having to cope with a cascading set of problems, ranging from dealing with collection agencies and threats of home foreclosure, to subsequent job losses. Family members describe their feelings of hurt and loss of pride as they navigate a new reality of food pantries and rummage sales. Not surprisingly, there are anger issues, marital strife, and family stress, as one spouse misses scout meetings and other important family occasions, and night shifts leave little time together for the family. Moyers acknowledges the role of the church and wider community support, but these benevolent efforts are inevitably merely a band-aid on a life of living paycheck to paycheck and amassing credit card debt, while facing a future of lowered prospects and expectations. Offering a sobering and timely tale of lost dreams and dashed hopes, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)



Sister Elaine Roulet notes that the time served gives some women the opportunity to admit that they weren't "great" mothers and to begin again—an observation borne out here in serious efforts to break cycles of addiction and neglect. It's evident that families are strengthened through these efforts, which makes it particularly distressing to learn that after filming was completed, the program's budget was cut by 40 percent. Offering a thought-provoking and inspirational look at an effective social program, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Puffer-Rotherberg)

Musicwood ★★½

(2012) 80 min. DVD: \$99.95: public libraries; \$350: colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR.

A story about beautiful guitars unexpectedly turns into a major environmental case study in this interesting documentary, during which several top manufacturers—Gibson, Taylor, and Martin among them—overcome competitiveness in order to work together towards saving what is left of old-growth forest in Southeast Alaska, a major source of spruce for their instruments. Not surprisingly, the melodic sounds that come from the best acoustic guitars require different types of wood: mahogany, rosewood, ebony—all of which are in increasingly short supply due to deforestation in various parts of the world. Filmmaker Maxine Trump shows how, in a kind of shotgun alliance, companies are working with two adversaries, Greenpeace and Sealaska (the latter a corporation managing and selling Native American tribal assets), to find a solution to the mass destruction of

timberlands in Alaska. The story of give-and-take and compromise between all parties is heartening although hardly magical: at film's end, many issues remain unresolved even as hugely profitable clear-cutting continues. Still, this is an inspiring film about people—who don't usually see eye to eye—looking for a common cause, and with virtuosos such as Kaki King, Yo La Tengo, the Antlers, and Steve Earle contributing to the soundtrack, the message here is particularly resonant. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

The Other Town ★★★

(2011) 45 min. In Greek & Turkish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$59.95: public libraries & high schools; \$175: colleges & universities. Third World Newsreel. PPR.

Some neighbors just cannot get along. Case in point: Greece and Turkey, whose respective populations view each other with a strident contempt that makes other ethnic conflicts look like zany misunderstandings. Greek filmmaker Hercules Millas and Turkish director Nefin Dinç have mercifully chosen not to follow the examples of their countrymen in their collaborative documentary that highlights how the residents of Dimitsana in Greece and Birgi in Turkey have successfully kept the hatred alive. The enmity stems all the way back to the 1821 war that led to Greek independence after centuries of Ottoman rule. Subsequent conflicts between the nations have only added to the bitterness, and today it seems impossible to find anyone on either side who can say a positive word about folks across the border. These feelings are passed down across generations—school

textbooks inevitably portray the other side as being heinous villains, while children take an active role in denigrating their neighboring foes during nationalist holiday celebrations. A frank and disturbing portrait of neighboring peoples who prefer animosity to brotherhood, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Pandora's Promise ★★★★★

(2013) 80 min. DVD: \$149 (\$250 w/PPR). Kino Lorber Edu.

In a media marketplace where anti-nuke attitudes have reached critical mass, filmmaker Robert Stone's provocative documentary—featuring nuclear engineers, as well as converted environmentalists who are now in favor of atomic energy—offers a different take. Authors such as Gwyneth Cravens, Richard Rhodes, and *Whole Earth Catalog* founder Stewart Brand claim to have thoroughly investigated atomic-energy technology from both sides, and now consider it to be a sustainable and wise choice over climate-devastating fossil fuels (wind, tidal, and solar power being inadequate to realistically meet needs). *Pandora's Promise* argues that a large amount of anti-nuclear propaganda has been secretly underwritten by the oil and gas industries, and also suggests that meltdown sites such as Three Mile Island, Fukushima, and even the eerie ruins at Chernobyl, are not quite the uninhabitable wastelands depicted. France, an eco-conscious and politically progressive nation, converted to a nuclear-based infrastructure and now has the cheapest and cleanest power grid in Europe. It is truly a Through-the-Looking-Glass moment when Margaret Thatcher, warning in 1989 against CO2 emissions (nuclear power being her solution) sounds like the voice of reason, while opponents of nuclear power (with Dr. Helen Caldicott unfortunately looking like a raving lunatic) are lumped in with global-warming skeptics, Holocaust deniers, and other enemies of science fact. Although some of the film's points can certainly be debated, *Pandora's Promise* provides much-needed balance on a hot topic. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

TEEN ISSUES

Sleepless Epidemic ★★★

(2013) 32 min. DVD: \$79.95 (downloadable teacher's guide available). Learning ZoneXpress. PPR. Closed captioned.

Hosted by author Mary Sheedy Kurcinen (*Sleepless in America*), this guidance program focuses on the benefits that adolescents receive from getting enough sleep at such a crucial time during their development. Estimating that only 15-20% of youths get the rest they need, *Sleepless Epidemic* looks at various factors—such as the jump from younger

grades to junior high (where there's more homework at night and an earlier start time in the morning)—that might explain the difference between a normally irritable kid and a truly exhausted teen. Touting sleep as a priority, Kurcinen shares good tips on setting your body clock seven days a week (avoiding those weekend sleep-ins), possibly downsizing commitments, eating breakfast (and maybe a bedtime snack), reducing TV/computer/phone screens ("your bedroom is not a place for technology"), and developing a good nighttime ritual to help the body reset. While this suffers somewhat from some stilted interviews with teens and parents, it offers fine advice, overall, and is therefore recommended. Aud: I, J, H, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

EDUCATION

More Time to Teach: Building Community in a Challenging Classroom

★★★

(2013) 21 min. DVD: \$79.95 (teacher's guide included). ChildSense. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-0-615-83901-1.

Educational coaches Jeff Fink and Jon Halpern share practical ideas in this program about building community in the classroom in order to proactively manage and avoid behavioral problems. Three vignettes here demonstrate how a teacher's reaction to various behaviors can make a dramatic difference in the instructional environment. Each scenario is first presented with an undesirable adult reaction to a student's action, after which viewers are encouraged to pause, evaluate what happened, and consider other methods of dealing with the situation. The scene is then repeated, with a more constructive educator response. The examples illustrate straightforward cause-and-effect methods that help build an atmosphere conducive to creating strong relationships between both teacher and students, and among the youngsters themselves. The film demonstrates how shaming and making judgments—whether good or bad—about individual kids can lead to peer isolation, suggesting instead that instructors stay focused on behavior. A simple but powerful presentation that could inspire meaningful change, this is recommended. Aud: E, I, J, H. (K. Cruver)

Schools That Change Communities

★★★★1/2

(2013) 58 min. DVD: \$39: public libraries (\$79 w/PPR); \$195 w/PPR: colleges & universities. The Video Project. Closed captioned.

Director Bob Gliner's absorbing documentary about schools that incorporate community-based activities in the curriculum includes brainstorm-spurring stories

from teachers, students, and residents. At Crellin Elementary School in Maryland, children receive hands-on experience in projects related to stream studies (which are polluted due to acid mine damage in the Appalachians), a playground makeover, and tree planting. At the Young Achievers Science and Math Pilot in Mattapan (near Boston), urban kids learn about civic engagement and farm/orchard systems, and produce their own radio show. In Howard, SD, teens unhappy about the lack of entertainment talk with the 27-year-old mayor about options for keeping their money local. Also looking at projects at the nonprofit career skills center Aprovecho and alternative Kennedy High School in Cottage Grove, OR, as well as a venture for making documentary shorts at the Watsonville High School Video Academy near Silicon Valley, *Schools That Change Communities* serves up solid examples of collaborative projects that produce real-life local benefits. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

LAW & CRIME

In a Town This Size ★★★

(2011) 71 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Bartlesville, Oklahoma—a well-off town that is home to a populace of 35,000, and serves as the headquarters for Phillips Petroleum—is the setting for Patrick V. Brown's quietly devastating documentary, which focuses on episodes of child abuse involving respected pediatrician Dr. Bill Dougherty Jr., who took advantage of numerous patients during the 1960s and '70s. Supplemented with archival material—stills, TV news clips, and newspaper articles—this sad story is primarily told through recollections by those who were abused, and their relatives, who grieve not only over the damage to their children's lives but over their own failure to realize what was happening in the office and home of a trusted doctor and friend. During a conversation with a therapist who discusses the psychological effects of such cases, Brown reveals that he was one of Dougherty's victims, and he eventually goes to the perpetrator's house, receiving no response when he hammers on the front door. *In a Town This Size* importantly calls attention to the ineffectiveness of laws requiring those victimized to bring charges within two years of being abused—a loophole that allowed Dougherty to escape punishment. DVD extras include bonus interviews, deleted scenes, a resource guide, and an epilogue detailing the film's screening at various festivals and in Bartlesville. Offering a moving treatment of a challenging subject, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

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North America ★★★

(2013) 2 discs. 329 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99. Gaia (avail. from most distributors).

Tom Selleck narrates this seven-episode Discovery Channel-aired series showcasing breathtaking nature footage from the "indomitable" North American continent (Latin America counts here, for variety's sake), often matched to alt-pop music. *North America's* basic point seems to be that U.S.-region viewers need not go abroad to witness great wonders, offering fresh takes on common critters including chipmunks (fighting ferociously over their caches), garter snakes (mating in a giant mass in Manitoba), and coyotes (a Death Valley specimen actually does coexist with the road runner, but prefers catching lizards and bugs over the bird). Nature also appears red in tooth and claw here, as a baby humpback whale is killed by a pack of orcas, wild mustangs violently battle for mates, and several species of predators munch on tiny sea-turtle hatchlings. The next-to-last episode focuses on the actual wildlife cinematographers and their reactions to what they've filmed, while the finale counts down a poll of the home-audience's top 10 favorite North American wild places. Extras include select episode commentaries by the filmmakers, and a narration-less option. A solid but not especially groundbreaking nature travelogue series—more notable for its gorgeous imagery than its lackluster narration—this is recommended, overall. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

Physical Geography: Making Sense of Planet Earth ★★★1/2

(2012) 4 discs. 232 min. DVD: \$199.99 (teacher's guide included). Ambrose Video Publishing. PPR. Closed captioned.

Noted geographer Dr. Alexander B. Murphy, a professor at the University of Oregon, is the perfect host for this engaging eight-part series (Murphy has followed in the footsteps of his father, who contributed an innovative map to the classic *Goode's World Atlas*). Murphy explains how the science of geography broke away from geology during the 19th and 20th centuries to become "human geography," i.e., studies of how terrain shapes the cultural and economic development of humankind—and, vice versa, as human beings today are able to drastically alter the environment. Touring the world, *Physical Geography* addresses the plate tectonics model of continental drift; the "hydrologic cycle" as exemplified by the catastrophic flooding of Nashville in 2010; the impact of landscape on the ancient civilizations of Rome and the Mayans; and the fallacy of "geographical determinism," which once dictated that jungle-dwelling

societies were by definition primitive and backwards. Murphy makes reference to Jared Diamond's 1997 Pulitzer Prize-winning nonfiction bestseller *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, which made the intricacies of geography a subject of fascination to the masses (well, that and Google Maps). Extras include an instructor's guide, and printable maps and graphics. A fine companion series to Murphy's *Human Geography: Making Sense of Planet Earth* (VL-11/13), this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Resonance: Beings of Frequency ★★★

(2012) 88 min. DVD: \$24.95. Patient Zero Films (dist. by Janson Media). ISBN: 978-1-56839-455-3.

Are artificially created radio waves killing honeybees? Can cell phone towers cause health problems? These concerns and others are explored in this documentary that plays like a real-life episode of *The X-Files*. Starting with the premise that the Earth's atmosphere has a "frequency" (called the "Schumann resonances," which are excited by thunderstorms across the globe) that is identical to one created by alpha waves in the human brain, *Resonance* makes a case that manufactured sources of other frequencies (of greatest concern here: mobile phone technology) are disrupting nature, with health effects ranging from interfering with circadian rhythms to causing cancer. The interviews included are compelling—some people are so sensitive to emissions that they have created rooms with special shielding (even in the glass) to give them space in their home that is free of electromagnetic (EM) radiation. Others share their experiences related to drastically dropping bee populations and speculate on the possibility of EM as a cause. And some talk about how studies dismissing any possible harm were poorly conducted or funded by companies with a

conflict of interest. Although some scientifically-minded viewers are likely to question aspects of the methodology described here, others will find this to be a solid discussion starter on a controversial topic. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

Smarter Brains ★★★

(2013) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-942-1.

Our abilities to reason, solve problems, and adapt to changing situations are part of what makes us human. But how is intelligence acquired and can it be improved? Peter Coyote narrates this PBS-aired documentary from filmmaker Jim Hoppin that examines the most complex and mysterious organ in the human body. Different parts of the brain carry out various functions, ranging from handling the most primitive of activities, to using language, reasoning, and memory (at any given time, billions of neurons are communicating in a process called "neuronal chatter"). Contrary to earlier beliefs, new scientific evidence shows that the human brain is always evolving, and can be improved at any age. Scientists are busy with a fresh initiative called the "Human Brain Project," using computers to map the brain in order to find out more about how it works and why it breaks down. Like cardiovascular exercise for the body, brains also need to stay in shape so that people can "be as smart as you can be at any age." Some ways to keep the brain healthy include physical exercise, "active experiencing," and meeting new challenges (whether it be acting, dancing, or learning sign language), or just getting out to meet others, and trading memories and perceptions. Offering a solid mix of information and encouragement, this guide to understanding and nurturing the brain is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

**How I Became an Elephant ★★★1/2**

(2013) 82 min. DVD: \$19.99: individuals; \$49: public libraries & high schools; \$149: colleges & universities. Green Planet Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Juliette West cares passionately about elephants, so much so that she and her father travel from their suburban California home to Thailand to witness close-up the abuse inflicted on animals in captivity and to help Thai activist Lek Chailert rescue a victim named Ratre. Filmmakers Tim Gorski and Synthian Sharp follow then-14-year-old Juliette, who was aware of the pachyderms' plight before her trip to a country that is known for "loving" elephants but also subjects them to abuse that appears to be ingrained in Thai culture. The animals are beaten, starved, and struck with harpoon-like hooks that leave deep wounds as they are trained for seemingly benign uses such as carrying riders on treks or painting pictures with their trunks. Ratre, confined with chains and forced repeatedly to mate, has a broken hip as the result of a violent coupling. *How I Became an Elephant* is sometimes tough to watch (with hidden-camera footage of beasts being hideously treated), but it powerfully documents Juliette's odyssey, which has sparked a movement to increase awareness of the problem. DVD extras include deleted scenes, and comments from primatologist Jane Goodall on the importance of hope. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

Wild Things with Dominic Monaghan: Deadliest Critters

★★★

(2013) 180 min. DVD: \$14.98. BBC Worldwide Ltd. (avail. from most distributors).

Although it is not self-evident from the DVD cover, this BBC-Canadian series focuses more often than not on the littler species in the animal kingdom, which may be fitting since it's hyper-enthusiastically hosted by Brit actor Dominic Monaghan, best known for his supporting role as a diminutive hobbit in *The Lord of the Rings* series. Here, the "deadly" predator animals showcased include a scorpion, an ant, and a water beetle. But even if it comes across as a bit of a tongue-in-cheek affair—less *Crocodile Hunter* than *Leech Whisperer*—kudos should go to adrenaline-junkie Monaghan for pulling it all off with solid dashes of travelogue and pop science. The first destination is Guatemala, where Monaghan handles the rare Mexican beaded lizard, which is the only venomous lizard beside the Gila monster. In Namibia, he seeks the black thick-tailed scorpion (seen glowing in ultraviolet light). In Ecuador, he explores the rainforest canopies and undergrowth, looking for the notorious swarming army ant. And in Vietnam he confronts a variety of snakes and crocodiles (Monaghan seems to be quite the reptile enthusiast) before finally glimpsing the giant water bug *in situ*, preying on fish in a murky lake. A somewhat gonzo but still worthwhile nature series, this is recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)



HEALTH & FITNESS

The Genius of Marian ★★★

(2013) 84 min. DVD: \$95. high schools & public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Ro*co Films Educational.

When filmmaker Banker White started filming in 2009, his 61-year-old mother, Pamela White—a former model and social worker—was working on a book about her own mother, painter Marian Williams Steele. Pam would abandon the project after she found out she had Alzheimer's disease—the same illness that led to Steele's death in 2001. Banker continued to document his mother's life over the next three years. At first, Pam refuses to acknowledge the diagnosis even as she loses the ability to drive and read books, although she still meets regularly with her singing group. She also rejects having a professional caregiver, so her husband, Ed, opts to work from home in order to look after her. Ed says he doesn't mind, but as the years pass, resentment begins to kick in, since he has to help his wife with almost everything. The children do what they can, but Ed still feels isolated (the couple refer to each other as "Mom" and "Dad," which says something about their passion for parenting). Pam doesn't want to end up in a facility like her mother, but she does finally learn to accept some outside help. *The Genius of Marian* is not an easy film to watch, and the handheld camerawork can feel invasive, but there is real psychological value in this profile, which not only never sugarcoats the debilitating effects of Alzheimer's, but also underscores the toll that the illness takes on friends and relatives. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Femmessy)

Leslie Sansone—Just Walk: Walk it Off in 30 Days ★★★½

(2013) 64 min. DVD: \$14.98. Anchor Bay Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Bubbly instructor Leslie Sansone brims with enthusiasm during this presentation of two fast-paced 30-minute walking-in-place workouts. Sansone's six-days-a-week program alternates a "burn" routine, which focuses on fitness walking, with a "firm" sequence, which covers toning. Sansone shares her philosophy and explains the basics of her regime, which was partially molded by feedback she received from fans via social media. The soundtrack can be played with her instructions or music only, the latter a handy option once the pattern has become familiar. A refreshingly diverse group of assistants demonstrate how people of different ages, genders, and abilities approach the exercises, and they're a remarkably fired-up bunch, with Sansone's encouragement adding considerable energy to the proceedings. The steps, lifts, stretches, and kicks—all performed at an increasing pace—are intense and will definitely work up a sweat. Also featuring floor work in the toning section (which requires an exercise mat, although hand weights are deemed "optional"), this "faster, smarter fitness" workout is highly recommended. Aud: P. (K. Cruver)

Tracie Long—Focus Series: Kickback ★★★

(2013) 30 min. DVD: \$9.98. Shelter Island/TDC (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-939517-10-4.

Instructor Tracie Long jumps right into the workout in this volume from her *Focus* series. Suggesting both light and medium-

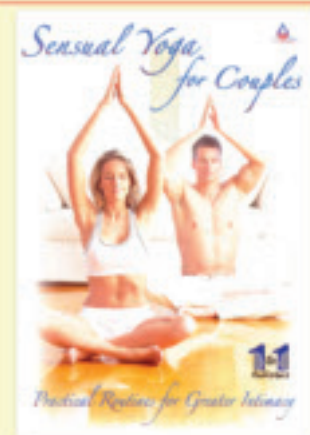
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Rodney Yee: Yoga for Your Week ★★½

(2013) 100 min. DVD: \$14.98. Gaia (available from most distributors).

Veteran yoga teacher Rodney Yee brings his characteristically peaceful approach to this compilation of five 20-minute routines. Each section is tailored to achieve specific results, including increasing energy, strength, and flexibility. Yee works on a simple platform set up on a deserted beach, where the soothing rhythm of the ocean waves provides an effective soundtrack for both his movements and the natural ebb and flow of breath necessary for a successful practice. Narration provides basic instruction, which is probably most effective for those who already have some yoga experience, although it should not be too difficult for alert beginners to catch on. The program is bookended with morning warm-up and evening cool-down routines. Yee is an encouraging presence, exuding calm and strength, and frequently flashing a smile at his students. With several basic poses and a fair number of more challenging positions, this should satisfy a wide range of abilities. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (K. Cruver)



to-heavier weights (Long tells viewers when to “heavy up” during the routine), *Kickback* starts off with a cardio interval that includes slow jabs/squat sequences, upper cuts, hooks, rowing, cross-block, and a “jab and jack” combo. The lower-body weight training segment features moves such as sidekicks, pulses, plies, side lunges, and step-squats; and the matwork floor section presents ab-focused moves, along with side plank, push ups, and hip-presses, plus straddle stretching at the close. While the dance-y, club-ish soundtrack doesn’t altogether mesh with the tempo of the moves, this workout could burn calories and improve balance. Other titles in the *Focus* series include *Lift Higher* and *Power Up*. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Treat Yourself Therapy: Thumb CMC Arthritis ★★½

(2011) 30 min. DVD: \$35. *Treat Yourself Therapy*. ISBN: 978-1-4507-9438-1.

Certified hand therapists Jessica Karge and Kathleen Papi-Baker present this program on managing the symptoms of a degenerative joint condition known as thumb CMC arthritis. Describing the different stages, the pair show viewers how to ameliorate symptoms with treatments including a moist heating pad, paraffin baths, massaging, splinting, range-of-motion exercises, cold packs, and strengthening techniques. Some of the advice sounds obvious (“avoid activities which require forceful pinching”), and the fairly heavy commercial content—with onscreen blurbs for specific websites or item brands—detracts from the useful information featured here. Still, given the dearth of similar material on this specific subject, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Vitality ★★★

(2012) 55 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Dr. Pedram Shojai’s hour-shy documentary

advocating for a new paradigm in healthcare seems mainly to rehash—in bullet-point style—the conclusions of earlier feature-length films such as *Forks Over Knives* (VL-9/11), *Food, Inc.* (VL-11/09), and *The Future of Food* (VL-1/06). Still, this makes for a solid compact primer, as viewers are reminded that modern medicine tends to treat symptoms (and makes Big Pharma rich), instead of promoting general well-being—or “vitality,” as defined in Dr. Shojai’s holistic/preventative worldview. According to Shojai, stress, lack of proper sleep, and eating a conventional American diet (including ghastly “fast food” from livestock animals that are fattened on non-nourishing castoffs to save money) all contribute to some of the more pernicious medical syndromes. Organic and small farms offer better food options, and for those who are lucky enough to live near a local farm-market, prices can be competitive with the GMO-stuffed corporate agri-product. High-profile diet and medical guru-authors appearing here include Dr. Bruce Lipton, Dr. Hyla Cass, Eliezar Ben Joseph, and Dr. Tim Brown. Serving up a solid side dish that will supplement the main course of longer related documentaries, this is recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

CHILDBIRTH & PARENTING

Bringing Joshua Home ★★½

(2013) 25 min. DVD: \$14.99. Ideal Images Entertainment (dist. by Vision Video).

This short documentary looks at the lengthy and costly process of adopting a Russian orphan—a complex business, especially if the prospective parents happen to be American. The subject of *Bringing Joshua Home* is North Carolina couple Arthur and Hanna Rasco’s adoption of baby Joshua from a Moscow orphanage, which occurred before Russian president Vladimir Putin signed into law a bill banning U.S. adoptions of

his country’s children in December 2012. Made by the Rascos, the film chronicles the numerous obstacles to gaining legal custody of Joshua, which required multiple trips to Russia at the couple’s expense. Viewers witness that drawn-out process here step-by-step, as scenes build suspense about the ultimate outcome while also capturing the Rascos’ drive and love. Even if adopting Russian children is currently no longer an option for Americans, this heartwarming documentary could inspire some to look to other nations where youngsters without families hope to find a real home. DVD extras include a featurette about the adoption experience of another family (in China), and tips related to international adoption. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY

Children of Srikandi ★★★

(2012) 74 min. In Indonesian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99: individuals; \$295: institutions. Outcast Films. PPR.

Made by young female filmmakers, this compilation of eight short films exploring lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identity in Indonesia (which has the world’s largest Muslim population) combines dramatic scenes with symbolic or poetic expressions of thoughts on diversity and acceptance. Billed as an anthology and divided into chapters, the directors here are identified only as “the children of the Srikandi Collective.” In one of the more effective pieces, a young woman describes her transition from polite Muslim conformist to becoming an out lesbian; over time, her clothing changes to reflect her changing perspectives on God and sexuality. In another, a gay law student talks about life on the streets following her family’s rejection. And one offers a humorous look at the range of words that women might use to describe their diversity. Interspersed throughout are beautifully filmed scenes of a traditional Indonesian puppet show about the legendary Srikandi, who was born a girl but became a man, as well as backstage interviews with the puppeteer (“I’m neither a man nor a woman”) and a male singer (who performs in traditional feminine costume). Serving up provocative personal perspectives on LGBT issues, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

Undressing Israel: Gay Men in the Promised Land ★★½

(2013) 46 min. In English & Hebrew w/English subtitles. DVD: \$19.99. Breaking Glass Pictures (avail. from most distributors).

This jaunty, informative documentary extols Israel’s progressiveness on LGBT issues, especially regarding homosexual males. Acknowledging that Israel’s liberalness might

surprise some, filmmaker Michael Lucas provides both anecdotal and statistical evidence suggesting that in recent decades the nation has accelerated changes in laws and policies to make life more open for everyone. Drawing on numerous interviews, *Undressing Israel* finds affirmative answers to questions about the legality of homosexuality in Israel, the ability to be open about sexual orientation during required military service, the rights to marry and have children and to hold positions in government, and much else. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's positive references to gays and lesbians in recent speeches (including one at the United Nations) are cited, as well as official sanction for an annual Gay Pride event that draws tens of thousands from around the world. The documentary focuses almost exclusively on attractive guys with beautiful bodies, but all are well-spoken and many are successfully raising kids in long-term relationships. DVD extras include audio commentary with Lucas, and a film festival Q&A montage. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

FOOD & SPIRITS

Dare to Cook: Barbecue & Grilling

★★★

(2013) 74 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.95. Bennett-Watt HD Productions. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-60490-075-0 (dvd), 978-1-60490-109-2 (blu-ray).

Seattle-area Chef Tom Small offers his tips on cooking meat in this primer that includes techniques for barbecuing, grilling, and smoking. An admitted aficionado of the "sport" of BBQ (some people even think of it as a lifestyle), Small explains the distinction between BBQ (indirect heat over low temp) and grilling (high heat), looks at different cuts of meat (demonstrating how to rip the membrane off, and noting that it's the marbling fat inside the meat that adds flavor, not the excess on the outside), and contrasts vertical electrical vs. trigger pellet smokers, while also explaining why he uses a gas grill (mainly, for convenience). Serving up spareribs, pork shoulder, hot links, brisket, and chicken, Small spruces up the recipes here with various sauces and rubs for those who want sweet or spicy, or fancier seasoning (including a citrus Cuban marinade, red eye coffee glaze, and Indian-style concoction with yogurt and garam masala). Also including a printed ingredient list, this informative addition to the *Dare to Cook* instructional series is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

A Year in Burgundy ★★★1/2

(2013) 88 min. In English & French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors).

Wine enthusiasts will enjoy David Ken-

nard's breezy documentary about winemaking in the Burgundy region of central France. *A Year in Burgundy* follows the travels of Martine Saunier, a French native who imports wines (from families she has known for generations) to her adopted city of San Francisco, and each year visits her suppliers back home. Wine has been made in Burgundy for 2,000 years, thankfully kept alive during the Dark Ages by the needs of Christian monasteries and communion services. Saunier's meetings with various suppliers reveal much about winemaking practices, including optimum times and methods for taking grapes from the vine, techniques for pressing and fermenting, as well as what to do with grapes

damaged by weather extremes. It turns out that the personalities of winemakers are reflected in their practices and attitudes, raising the question of whether making wine is an art or a craft, as well as whether it is better to be freewheeling or academic in one's approach. Viewers will see vast wooden wine presses that are still standing after centuries, while also delving down into ancient cellars full of dusty, cobwebbed bottles, along the way also learning something about the cultivation and harvesting of grapes (the latter of which requires armies of temporary workers to get the job done). Likely to appeal to oenophiles and armchair travelers, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



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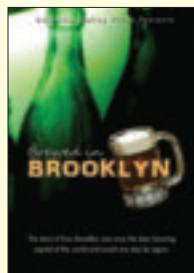
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Brewed in Brooklyn ★★½

(2013) 45 min. DVD: \$24.95. Delaware Valley Video (dist. by Janson Media). ISBN: 978-1-56839-463-3.

"You could argue that Brooklyn was the brewing capital of the United States," says one expert in filmmaker John Weber's well-crafted documentary tracing the history of beer making in the New York borough from the early 1800s through the present day. Vintage and contemporary footage accompanies input from historians, brewers, and beer lovers, who talk about the origins of the industry, including the German immigrant family behind classic brands such as Rheingold (whose "Miss Rheingold" pageants were a hugely successful promotional effort in the mid-20th century). Viewers learn about the days when brewing only took place at certain times of the year, and blocks of ice (cut from lakes during the winter) kept in ice-houses were the only way to have cold beer available during the warmer months. By the late 1880s, Brooklyn boasted 35 breweries, which generated \$8 million in sales annually, but things really took off in the 1900s thanks to pasteurization and canning, which allowed for longer shelf life and regional distribution. Of course, then came Prohibition, which hit "like a sucker punch in a Bensonhurst ballroom." In response, the industry limped along, making lemonade, soft drinks, and "near beer" until Prohibition was repealed in 1933. But other challenges beset the producers—labor difficulties and outside competition among them—leading to a collapse by the 1970s. However, in 1988, the startup Brooklyn Brewery launched a renaissance that now also includes a multitude of enthusiastic home brewers. An entertaining and informative documentary sure to appeal to brew fans, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)



SPORTS, GAMES & RECREATION

Age of Champions ★★★

(2013) 72 min. DVD: \$59.99 (\$149 w/PPR): public libraries; \$245 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Collective Eye.

Age is just a number—like point scores—in filmmaker Christopher Rufo's easygoing profile of competitors at the 2009 trials for America's National Senior Olympics. Notable among these jock great-grandparents are 100-year-old tennis star Roger Gentilhomme and 86-year-old pole-vault prodigy Adolph Hoffman. Two elderly African-Americans in Washington, D.C. (one undergoing chemotherapy for cancer concurrent with the games) specialize in swimming and the high dive; both are old enough to remember Jim Crow segregation, when the only public pool they could visit was the reflecting pool on the National Mall. One grace note that may strike many viewers is the mellow good sportsmanship shown by many of these athletes, who—unlike so many young superstars in the pros—are gracious in defeat and compliment their opponents. One major exception seems to be women's basketball, in which the Tigerettes of Louisiana—a sassy, fiercely competitive bunch of gals—get particularly physical against arch-rivals from Pennsylvania and Tennessee (their matches could form the basis for a whole separate movie). An uplifting sports documentary, this is

recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Rising From Ashes ★★½

(2013) 80 min. DVD: \$27.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Shot over a period of six years by filmmaker T.C. Johnstone, *Rising From Ashes*—narrated by Forest Whitaker—follows the fortunes of several young Rwandan men who are gradually transformed into a team of competitive cyclists vying for a spot at the 2012 Olympics. Reaching out for that improbable goal entails a long and arduous process that demands not only discipline and determination, but also coming to terms with a haunting, bloody past, since these racers are survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda that resulted in a million gruesome deaths in a matter of weeks. The group is composed of individuals who once would have been enemies, making reconciliation an important theme here. Equally stirring is the theme of redemption, particularly as it relates to cycling legend Jock Boyer, the first American to compete in the Tour de France. Derailed by a crime (lewd behavior with a minor) that sent him to prison in the mid-2000s, Boyer was offered the opportunity to reinvent himself in Rwanda, where he coaches the cyclists to push past pain in order to become world-class competitors. The healing implications of Boyer's strategy are not lost on the athletes, one of whom says that suffering for a good cause is a new and liberating experience. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Bill Cosby: Far From Finished ★★★

(2013) 95 min. DVD: \$16.99, Blu-ray: \$19.99. Paramount Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 1-4157-7575-3 (dvd), 1-4157-7574-5 (blu-ray).

It is said that the celebrity factor for the best-known comedians affords them perhaps a 10-minute grace period with audiences before they have to legitimately bring the funny. No elder comedian is more beloved and esteemed than Bill Cosby, who appears here in his first standup special in 30 years, confirming his status as the dean—although "standup" is a bit of a misnomer, as Cosby sits throughout. But even sitting, Cosby's body language and facial expressions effectively help sell his observations and stories, which mostly revolve around marriage and the Mars/Venus divide. While Cosby's delivery hasn't dated, some may feel his views have (mainly, variations on how men are powerless against their controlling girlfriends or wives). Cosby compares marriage to chess, in which the queen moves wherever she wants. Cosby doesn't tell jokes per se, but stories in which he is at odds with, or in the doghouse of, "Mrs. Cosby." Among the better ones here is a bit about when he forgot his security alarm code. Director Robert Townsend here wisely keeps the camera trained on the performer, with no gratuitous or pandering audience reaction shots. Extras include a conversation between Townsend and Cosby (who talks about his start in comedy), and behind-the-scenes featurettes. Recommended. Aud: P. (D. Liebenow)

Bone Wind Fire (Désert Vent Feu)

★★★½

(2011) 30 min. DVD: \$150. National Film Board of Canada. PPR.

Inspired by Sharyn Rohlfen Udall's book *Carr, O'Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own*, filmmaker Jill Sharpe's documentary illustrates how the visual aesthetics of 20th-century artists Emily Carr, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Frida Kahlo were inspired by their surroundings. The cinematography here is gorgeous, displaying O'Keeffe's stark New Mexico deserts, Carr's lush British Columbia rainforests, and Kahlo's colorful Mexico City home and neighborhood. What the artists saw in these environments is reflected in the bold, richly envisioned images they created: O'Keeffe's oversized flowers and sun-bleached skulls, Carr's native totem poles, and Kahlo's hallucinatory scenes of illness and isolation. *Bone Wind Fire* imagines the artists' daily lives in brief dramatic re-enactments accompanied by narration drawn from their letters and journal entries—musings about the creative process and their approach to

painting—punctuated with occasional low-key visual effects. Sadly, the women's works initially suffered from a scathing critical reception that was based as much on their personal lives as on artistic merit. Serving up compelling visuals and evocative first-person narrative, this well-crafted, informative documentary is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

Cartoon College ★★½

(2012) 76 min. DVD: individuals: \$19.95, institutions: \$199 w/PPR. L.B. Thunderpony Productions. ISBN: 978-0-9728678-4-8.

White River Junction, VT, has the honor of hosting the recently instituted Center for Cartoon Studies, a two-year MFA college for aspiring cartoonists and “comix” creators. CCS nurtures its visionaries less along the Marvel/DC superhero line and more in the edgy, fine-art tradition of *Maus* creator Art Spiegelman (interviewed here). Although watching a person sweat over panel penciling and inks at a sketching table is not terribly cinematic, filmmakers Josh Melrod and Tara Wray succeed in drawing (sorry) the viewer's interest with a narrative that follows the travails of various aspiring artists undergoing the rigors of cartoon-theory class and the dreaded thesis presentation. Students range from Al Wesolowski, an elderly, half-deaf, semi-retired Boston archaeologist, who hopes to turn his whimsical stick-figures into a new career, to young and brash Jen Vaughn, whose comics tend to center on mermaids and menstruation. Aside from the fact that young comics-creators tend to be thoughtful peer-group outcasts, the chances of making a living out of being a cartoonist are slim, so a DIY industry of self-published and very personal graphics has arisen. Big-name cartoonists making guest appearances here include Scott McCloud, Francoise Mouly, Lynda Barry, Jules Feiffer, and Gabby Schulz. Extras include updates on the students and the school. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Eric Fischl: The Process of Painting

★★½

(2012) 38 min. DVD: \$45 (\$150 w/PPR). Checkerboard Film Foundation.

Contemporary American artist Eric Fischl is perhaps best known for depictions of suburban life that are often charged with erotic undertones. But as Edgar B. Howard's documentary—made in conjunction with the 2012 exhibition *Dive Deep: Eric Fischl and the Process of Painting* at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts—makes abundantly clear, Fischl's work has embraced a variety of media (including sculpture and photography) and subjects, although the human body has remained his primary focus. In what is basically an autobiographical self-portrait created from a series of interviews conducted at Fischl's

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The Best of (The Original) An Evening at the Improv

★★★★1/2

(2012) 4 discs. 720 min. DVD: \$29.98. Somerville House (avail. from most distributors).

Even with the occasional lame skit and gratuitous musical number, comedy gold can be found in this compilation from the cable-TV series *An Evening at the Improv*, which began in 1982. The comics on parade here at the Los Angeles branch of Bud Friedman's Improv range from the great ones early in their career (Phil Foster introduces young Jerry Seinfeld as having been in standup for only about the last half-hour) to others who never became household names, but perhaps should have (Marc Weiner, Maurice LaMarche). Viewers will see Michael Keaton before his acting career and Robert Townsend prior to his becoming a film director. Other stars here include guest hosts Leslie Nielsen, John Byner, James Coco, Ed McMahon, Don "Father Guido Sarducci" Novello, and—reminiscing about working with/covering for Lenny Bruce—Mort Sahl. Rising comics include Arsenio Hall, Steven Wright, Howie Mandel, Jim Carrey, Richard Lewis, and Elayne Boosler ("Pac-Man is the history of the Jewish people—being chased while eating."). And look for celebs in the audience, including Johnny Carson and Pia Zadora. Serving up 12 hours of comedy from over 100 comedians, this set admittedly features some dated material, but also some gem routines, and the price is right. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)



New York studios, Fischl talks about his early education—during which he rejected abstraction in favor of figurative painting at the California Institute of the Arts—and his struggle to find his own creative voice, which he claims is the essential process every artist must go through, although he also readily admits the importance of those who have influenced his style. Fischl also discusses the practical aspects of his work, commenting on the different ways in which he approaches painting (with either oils or watercolors), photography, and sculpture, as well as the technological aids he has adopted—sometimes reluctantly—in recent years. From a technical perspective, the production is hardly slick—with spartan cinematography and sometimes rough editing—but it will certainly appeal to fans of Fischl's work, as well as aspiring young painters who may appreciate his musings about his training and career. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Golden Slumbers ★★★★★1/2

(2011) 96 min. DVD: \$398. Icarus Films. PPR.

From 1960 through 1975, Cambodian filmmakers made more than 400 feature films, but the ascension of the Khmer Rouge brought things to an abrupt halt: the creative talents involved either fled into exile or were arrested and killed by the Khmer Rouge (and many of the movies were destroyed or lost). Davy Chou's poignant documentary offers a glimpse into the halcyon days of Cambodian cinema—no mean feat, considering that so little footage is available to recall the triumphs of this period. Directors Ly Bun Yim, Ly You Sreang, and Yvon Hem join onetime leading lady Dy Saveth in discussing the

distinctive challenges of building a national motion picture industry. Despite its considerable output, the Cambodian film world was relatively small, with numerous actors working together in multiple productions, many of which focused on either mild melodrama or horror/sci-fi inspired by Cambodian folklore, with musical interludes permeating nearly every work. Today, young Cambodians appear to be indifferent to this lost heritage, and the once-grand movie palaces of capital city Phnom Penh are either dilapidated or have been transformed to serve other purposes. Poster art, publicity stills, and snippets of soundtrack music offer clues to the quality of the original material, while several elderly movie buffs cite factoids about their favorites. Offering a tragic reminder of the ephemeral nature of popular culture, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Music & Monarchy ★★★★★1/2

(2013) 2 discs. 234 min. DVD: \$49.99. Athena (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-59828-995-4.

In this four-part series, historian David Starkey—who has built a 35-year career as a TV host—discusses how monarchs have used music to express authority since the 15th century, and how composers have served rulers' needs. The first episode concentrates on Henry V, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I, emphasizing not only their particular tastes but also their patronage of the Chapel Royal as a training ground for composers and performers. The second focuses on Henry Purcell, recognized as the greatest of native-born English composers, while the third looks at George Frideric Handel, who although German came to epitomize 18th-century English music. The final segment covers the 19th and 20th

centuries, with particular attention paid to Edward Elgar and William Walton. Although Starkey devotes some time to various rulers' domestic musical activities—his portrait of Queen Victoria and her beloved Prince Albert performing duets together and hosting a visit by Felix Mendelssohn is rather touching—the emphasis here is on the importance of compositions written for public occasions, especially coronation ceremonies. Starkey's comments are bolstered by musical excerpts, artwork, and ornate on-location filming. DVD extras include longer performances of nine pieces, and a booklet. Sure to appeal to Anglophiles and music buffs, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Muybridge's Strings ★★★★★1/2

(2011) 13 min. DVD: \$99. National Film Board of Canada. PPR.

The title of this short by Koji Yamamura—one of the masters among Japanese animators—refers to photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), whose experiments with successive stop-motion stills of running animals and sprinting humans (projected through a device called the zoopraxiscope) represented a pioneering stage in the development of motion pictures. Yamamura incorporates some of those strips into his film, while adding impressionistic sequences drawn from Muybridge's life, including an episode in which he suffered an injury in a stagecoach accident, and an incident in which he shot his young wife's lover, an act for which he was tried but acquitted. Yamamura juxtaposes this material with images depicting a Japanese mother as she watches her daughter grow up, offering a meditation on the irresistible nature of time and change. *Muybridge's Strings* is obviously a far cry from mainstream American animation, which has come to increasingly depend on impersonal CGI technology and cookie-cutter stories. But this will certainly appeal to those who appreciate a more traditional if idiosyncratic short that also features thematically thought-provoking material. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Noise of Cairo: Arts After the Arab Spring ★★★★★1/2

(2012) 52 min. DVD: \$295. Filmmakers Library (dist. by Alexander Street Press). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-4631-1726-9.

Although the outcome in Egypt of the 2010 Arab Spring (and its continuing reverberations) was not quite what optimistic revolutionaries had in mind, the uprising in Cairo had an enormous effect on a cultural level. Filmmaker Heiko Lange presents a broad overview of freedom's impact on everything from street-level artistic expressions (murals, paintings on roads, graffiti) to galleries, to dance companies, and music. Told primarily through the perspectives of 12 artists representing various genres—whose comments

are interspersed with footage of the protests and everyday life in the city—the essential message here is that Egyptians feel a greater connection to the arts since the Arab Spring, and those who create art have wider latitude to make works about liberty or anything else on their minds. In fact, one artist says, some people are looking to the art world in Egypt to instruct them on what to think about current events. Not everything is wonderful: with the Egyptian army assuming control of the government and an unexpected crackdown on the civilian population, the situation was certainly unstable at the time of filming (and continues to be so). But as a vibrant snapshot of blossoming creativity in a society undergoing tumultuous upheaval, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Portrait of Wally ★★★1/2

(2012) 90 min. In English & German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$99; public libraries; \$350 w/PPR; colleges & universities. Seventh Art Releasing.

An investigation into the fate of a single painting serves as an entrée into a dark cultural world in Andrew Shea's exceptional documentary. The work in question is the titular portrait that Austrian expressionist Egon Schiele painted of his mistress in 1912. In 1939, the painting was confiscated by a Nazi-affiliated dealer from its owner, Lea Bondi, and it wound up in the Austrian National Gallery after the war, but was soon purchased by Rudolf Leopold, becoming part of the private collection that formed the basis for the state-sponsored Leopold Collection, which opened in 2001. A celebrated legal case over its ownership arose in 1997, when it was loaned to New York's Museum of Modern Art

and Bondi's heirs sued to regain possession. Museum officials worldwide argued that interfering with the painting's return to Austria could poison the common practice of loaning artworks across national lines, and the case resulted in a long period of litigation and a negotiated settlement. Using file footage, other archival material, and extensive interviews with many of the major players, Shea expertly covers each phase of the story, showing how the legal jockeying revealed the extent of Nazi plundering of European artworks—as well as the ways in which museums, while publicly mouthing high principles, have used dubious means to hold onto pieces that were stolen from Jewish owners. DVD extras include footage from a 2010 ceremony at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and excerpts from Leopold's 2006 deposition about his acquisition of the painting. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Speak the Music: Robert Mann and the Mysteries of Chamber Music ★★★

(2013) 58 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

When the Juilliard String Quartet began performing—in the late 1940s—it brought to the repertoire a mixture of transparency, energy, passion, and refinement that quickly earned the group a reputation as one of the finest of all chamber ensembles. Founding member Robert Mann was Juilliard's first violinist for an astonishing 52 years. Allan Miller's celebratory documentary includes generous excerpts from interviews with Mann as he recalls his boyhood in Oregon and key moments

from his career (including reflections on the joys and difficulties of compromising with his fellow players), coupled with archival footage of Juilliard rehearsals and performances at various venues—including the White House. Colleagues such as Itzhak Perlman and Seiji Ozawa testify to Mann's musicianship and his camaraderie, while members of his own family—including son Nicholas, a longtime violinist with the Mendelssohn String Quartet—salute him as a husband and father. Special attention is given to Mann's devotion to contemporary music—notably, the quartets of Béla Bartók, which Juilliard helped popularize with audiences, and pieces by composer Elliot Carter, who here offers thanks for Juilliard's premieres of his works. Mann's tireless efforts as a teacher—nurturing many of the finest contemporary string quartets—are also covered in insightful clips from master classes. A revealing, affectionate portrait of a man who continues to be an inspiration to others well into his 90s, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Superheroes: A Never-Ending Battle

★★★1/2

(2013) 180 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR), Blu-ray: \$29.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-974-2 (dvd), 978-1-60883-975-9 (blu-ray).

Hosted and narrated by Liev Schreiber, this three-part PBS-aided documentary devoted to American comic-book superheroes (sorry, Astro Boy) serves up an entertaining history while also updating aging collection mainstays such as *Comic Book Confidential* and *Stan Lee's Mutants, Monsters & Marvels*. The late-1930s intros of Superman and Batman (the latter was actually Bob Kane's inspired rip-off of the pulp's leading dark-knight crimefighter, the Shadow) led to a comics explosion up through World War II. During the ensuing peacetime, however, comics were blamed for juvenile delinquency and sexual deviance, so the superhero market slumped. Stan Lee's 1960s-era Marvel Comics, beginning with the Fantastic Four, introduced (relative) emotional nuance and real-world issues to the genre, attracting more mature readers. Eventually censorship was banished, and mainstream acceptance was achieved for costumed heroes and heroines (thanks in part to blockbuster Hollywood adaptations). Comics geeks might complain that the saga is too tightly focused on Marvel and DC Comics, but most viewers will enjoy this fine survey that features interviews with genre greats and affiliated authors, actors, and artists—including Stan Lee, Carmine Infantino, Jerry Robinson, Adam West, Lynda Carter, Michael Chabon, and Frank Miller. Extras include bonus interviews. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Last Will. & Testament ★★★

(2012) 85 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-984-1.

Debate about the true authorship of the plays and poems ascribed to William Shakespeare has been going on since at least the 19th century (if not earlier). Over the last hundred years, the focus has increasingly centered on one alternative candidate—Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, a well-educated man who was deeply involved in Elizabethan court intrigue. This so-called Oxford theory has been dramatized—not very successfully—in the movie *Anonymus* (VL-3/12), featuring Sir Derek Jacobi (one of de Vere's strongest adherents), who also appears in this PBS-aided documentary by Lisa and Laura Wilson. Comprised largely of excerpts from interviews with theatrical professionals (such as Jacobi and Vanessa Redgrave), as well as scholars, *Last Will. & Testament* is supplemented by illustrative artwork and archival material, play excerpts, and period re-creations that provide historical context—as well as an amusing clip from a mock trial on the controversy argued before several U.S. Supreme Court justices. Roughly the first half of the documentary is devoted to observations casting doubt on Shakespeare's authorship, with the remainder given over to arguments in favor of de Vere, and while the coverage is not exactly balanced, critics of the Oxford hypothesis are included. All told, the film makes a sober, visually elegant case for the contrarian view of who wrote the Shakespearean corpus, while also noting that admiration for the works themselves will always transcend the question of their authorship. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



Photo ★★★

(2013) 2 discs. 312 min. DVD: \$49.99. Athena (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62172-065-2.

The subtitle—"A History from Behind the Lens"—of this ARTE-France TV series is a bit misleading, since *Photo* offers no A-B chronology of photography's evolution and milestones, but rather presents a non-linear set of English-narrated segments that make creative use of CGI while addressing different aspects of photography considered as art. Various movements (chiefly Pictorialism) sought to make photography as distinct, symbol-laden, and expressive as painting, ultimately leading up to the influential Düsseldorf School, which stressed hyper-realism and an illusion of objectivity (producing in 2007 the world's most expensive art-photo print: Andreas Gursky's "99 Cents"). Individual chapters include "Staged Photography," "Press Usage," "Conceptual Photography" and "Surrealism Photography," but it's not until the ninth out of the dozen episodes here that viewers will hear a discussion of the birth of photography (with a proud Gallic boast that once Louis Daguerre made photo-imaging practical, the French government gave him a stipend to free up the process for all mankind), although the conclusion is up-to-date, plunging into a post-celuloid world of digital cameras and artifice. No portfolios by the scandalous Robert Mapplethorpe are presented here, but the work of other edgy shutterbugs (such as Japan's Nobuyoshi Araki) feature nudity and sensuality. DVD extras include a booklet with a timeline on the history of photography. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)



Trash Dance ★★★1/2

(2012) 68 min. DVD: \$21.95: individuals; \$59: high schools & public libraries; \$299: colleges & universities. Panther Creek Pictures (avail. from www.trashdancemovie.com). PPR. ISBN: 978-0-9893430-0-8.

Garbage collection literally becomes art in Andrew Garrison's *Trash Dance*, which documents the creation of a performance piece built around sanitation workers. Garrison follows Austin choreographer Allison Orr for a year as she brings the project to life by embedding herself with the city's Solid Waste Services Department in order to get a feel for their work and to recruit participants. As in her previous productions, Orr aims to make invisible people visible. Although their jobs are undeniably necessary, citizens still tend to take these workers for granted—if they notice them at all. Orr, who is white, ends up with 24 performers, mostly black, who work in recycling, litter abatement, street cleaning, and dead animal collection. Spending time with her troupe, she finds that some are single parents, while a few have second jobs to make ends meet. She also discovers a world of talent that becomes integrated into the finished piece: Ivory Jackson Jr., for instance, contributes a rap, while Orange Jefferson plays harmonica on composer Graham Reynolds' stirring score. At the end of the film, Garrison presents a deftly edited overview of the performance which played out on an abandoned airport runway and attracted more audience members than the stands could hold. By shining a light on these unrecognized citizens, Garrison and Orr don't just put names and faces to these blue-collar positions, but also reveal the grace and artistry inherent in their everyday

movements. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

TuTuMuch ★★★

(2010) 83 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

No mean girls appear in Elise Swerhone's pleasant documentary about the summer audition program of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, a month-long intensive course in which some 70 young dance students, chosen from 1,000 or so applicants worldwide, live in dormitory-style housing and vie for invitations to join the company's professional school the following year. *TuTuMuch*, filmed at the 2005 camp, focuses on nine participants, some of whom—such as petite, bespectacled Canadian Alicia—are brash and outspoken—while others are quiet and reserved. Swerhone interweaves footage from class sessions together with observations from both the girls and their instructors. Viewers will also see the girls away from the barres, having fun on outings and comforting one another over bouts of homesickness. (A few boys are glimpsed during the audition process, but there's no hint of gender interaction off the floor.) The students' relatives, particularly parents, are also interviewed, offering perspectives on the girls' home lives and other interests, as well as the sacrifices that the families have made in order to provide opportunities for their children. The film ends with the company's final decisions about who will be invited to the professional school, leading to scenes of jubilation, disappointment, and—in one case—ambivalence about accepting the offer. While all nine aren't able to immediately fulfill their dream, *TuTu Much* impresses on viewers both their

talent and their dedication to dance. An inspiring documentary, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Welcome to the Machine ★★★1/2

(2013) 90 min. In English & German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$16.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

German director Andreas Steinkogler's *Welcome to the Machine* opens with a wonderful (and likely apocryphal) Hunter Thompson quote: "The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free and good men die like dogs. But there's also a negative side." Presenting the "12 Commandments" of the music business, this how-to/documentary offers gut-level advice that is more timeless than trendy. Viewers follow the tribulations of a wannabe group, "The New Vitamin," as it tries to make it to the big time, a quest complete with squalid practice halls, inflated egos, and infighting—interrupted by the occasional gig. Steinkogler draws on interviews from pros who offer firsthand guidance, including Kim Wilde, Fatboy Slim, members of Buckcherry, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, Cypress Hill, and Kool and the Gang, as well as industry press, promoters, managers, hangers-on, and many others. Covered topics include the purpose of awards shows (not a flattering portrait), the mechanics of making music (including writing, performing, and recording audio and video), the horrors and triumphs of first live concerts, dodgy lodging on the road, a hilarious segment on good and bad band names, trying to make a "hit," shady money deals, relationships with critics and music journalists, and more. Well worth the watch for aspiring musicians, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Block)

HISTORY & CURRENT EVENTS

The Contradictions of Fair Hope

★★★1/2

(2013) 67 min. DVD: \$24.98. Shelter Island/TDC (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-939517-12-8.

Narrated by Whoopi Goldberg, this documentary tells the story of the Fair Hope Benevolent Society, one of many such organizations that were founded by freed slaves following the Civil War. Fair Hope was established in Alabama in 1888 to help formerly enslaved blacks live productively by pooling resources and labor. Inhabiting adjoining properties, its members crafted a constitution, a dues-paying structure, a somewhat arcane leadership format (including selection of a queen), and protocols for dealing with illness and death. Their sense of ritual and identity was so powerful that they held an annual event with formal trappings and an air of worship. These traditions carried from

one generation to the next, and many Fair Hope participants born in the 1920s and '30s speak here with a deep sense of history. About midway through, directors S. Epatha Merkerson and Rockell Metcalf switch their focus to the state of Fair Hope today, specifically their yearly celebration. Now called Foot Wash, the once worshipful occasion has become a lewd festival, rife with prostitution, gambling, automatic weapons, and an aura of lawlessness. But the bawdiness here (including nudity) makes a statement: something happened to Fair Hope over time, and why that occurred is a major point of the film. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

JFK: 50 Years, A Commemorative Collection ★★★

(2013) 6 discs. 480 min. DVD: \$34.99. TOPICS Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-61894-360-6.

The 50th anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 has inspired a cascade of books and TV documentaries about his presidency and the circumstances of his death. While this five-disc set (with a bonus audio CD) offers nothing new, it does provide a useful selection of archival footage, culled mostly from contemporary theatrical newsreels, TV broadcasts, and films produced by the United States Information Agency, with some home movies added to the mix. Many of Kennedy's most famous speeches are included here (at least in truncated form), including the campaign event to assuage Protestant concerns about his Catholicism, the Inaugural Address, the Berlin Wall speech, and others on civil rights, the space program, and the Cuban missile crisis. Although the order isn't chronological, the coverage is broad, starting with Kennedy's days in the House of Representatives and proceeding through the senatorial years, the 1960 presidential run, and the major events of his presidency, concluding with the assassination itself. The technical quality is, of course, variable (a 1952 Longines Chronoscope with then Representative Kennedy is afflicted by a wavy image and poorly synchronized sound, and the silent home movies are predictably primitive). But overall the footage, drawn largely from the holdings of the National Archives, is in reasonably good shape considering its age. Both a solid collection of source materials from the so-called Camelot years and a commemoration of a national tragedy, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Kennedy Half-Century ★★★1/2

(2013) 58 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-5077-4.

Paul T. Roberts' documentary looks at the long-running impact of Kennedy's death on the American presidency. But first, *The Kennedy Half-Century* covers the 1963 assassination itself and immediate aftermath, talking

here with a couple of eyewitnesses (including one woman who took a famous photograph just before JFK was shot). The long trail of subsequent presidents embracing or capitalizing on Kennedy's legacy and unfinished agenda began with Lyndon Johnson, who strategically employed the beloved memory of his predecessor to further civil rights and social reform. Richard Nixon labored under the shadow of his late rival; Gerald Ford incurred the wrath of Ted Kennedy by pardoning Nixon for alleged Watergate-related crimes; Jimmy Carter made the mistake of alienating the Kennedy clan and paid for it; and Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama all have been—in one way or another—favorably or unfavorably compared to JFK and his dreams for America. JFK's trip to Dallas on that fateful day was supposed to help set the stage for his reelection a year later; instead, his ghost has hovered over the White House ever since. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Manhunt: The Inside Story of the Hunt for Bin Laden ★★★

(2013) 103 min. DVD: \$19.98. HBO Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

The killing of Osama bin Laden in his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011 marked a hard-won if also long delayed triumph for the American intelligence community. Greg Barker's

HBO-aired documentary explores how the ultimately successful operation was built on decades of painstaking investigation, analysis, and fieldwork—especially within and by the CIA. Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden emerged as a victor, and—while denying ties to terrorism—began secretly financing the beginnings of a global jihad against perceived enemies. CIA analysts, seeing similarities in terrorist strikes in different places, became aware of al-Qaeda (an al-Qaeda "unit" existed at the CIA by 1995). Years of further intelligence gathering led to the first memo written for the White House about al-Qaeda in 1998, but it would be the tragic events of September 11, 2001 that would lead to a global war strategy aimed against the organization. *Manhunt* covers the long search that eventually resulted in the raid on bin Laden, but what is most fascinating here is the network of analysts and operatives who together doggedly made incremental progress in locating him. These individuals come across as regular people in extraordinary jobs, which can almost make one forget (until a CIA administrator reminds us) how much of their success was the direct result of coercive interrogations, so-called "black sites," and outsourced torture sessions rendered by U.S. allies. Still, this is a solid documentary chronicle of the events covered in the Hollywood blockbuster *Zero Dark Thirty*. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



The March ★★★1/2

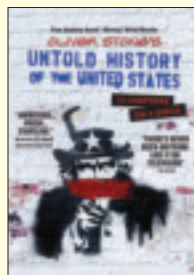
(2013) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-958-2.

For the civil rights struggle in America during the last century, 1963 was a turning point: NAACP executive Medgar Evers was gunned down in Mississippi by a white supremacist, and Birmingham, AL, police commissioner "Bull" Connor loosed dogs and high power fire hoses on peaceful demonstrators, including many women and children. With sit-ins and local marches not having wider impact, civil rights activist and labor leader A. Philip Randolph urged a massive march on Washington D.C. Narrated

by Denzel Washington, filmmaker John Akomfrah's PBS-aired documentary describes the build-up to August 28, 1963's "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," which backers hoped would arouse the nation's conscience and lead to a Civil Rights bill in Congress. At best, John F. Kennedy was a "reluctant partner," fearing that the march would spark violence, while FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was openly hostile, claiming that the movement was nurtured and inspired by Communists. Surviving activists here recall the feelings of misgiving, hope, and excitement, while also noting the challenges and divisions that plagued the planned march. Civil rights leader Bayard Rustin was vulnerable both because of his leftist background and the fact that he was openly gay, and young firebrand John Lewis (now a senior congressman) rattled nerves with his planned speech promising a Sherman-like march on the south, if progress wasn't made. To help reassure the establishment, singer Harry Belafonte recruited a broad spectrum of entertainers, including Marlon Brando, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez. But, of course, the centerpiece of the event was Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech—improvised at the last moment—which electrified the crowd of hundreds of thousands. Comments from historian Taylor Branch, Oprah Winfrey, and Congressman Lewis are interwoven with vintage footage of this unforgettable moment in American history. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Untold History of the United States ★★½

(2013) 4 discs. 796 min. DVD: \$23.98, Blu-ray: \$49.99. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors).



Oliver Stone's 10-hour *Untold History of the United States* bows on Blu-ray with a DVD release slated later for March 4. Let's get the big caveats out of the way first: 1) most of this history has been told, 2) it is limited to roughly the last 75 years, and 3) it's less about the United States, per se, than about U.S. foreign policy (very little attention is paid to domestic matters). That said, this is not the 20th-century American history you learned in school. Based on the titular book by Stone and historian Peter Kuznick, the series takes viewers on an often fascinating waltz down memory lane that is surprisingly less revisionist than one might expect from Stone (who has been labeled a conspiracy theorist in the past). Stone himself narrates—in a sincere but somewhat monotone voice that occasionally fights the often bombastic classical music on the soundtrack—against a backdrop of extensive archival material. Although the wealth of details (which are not always well-tied to the central arguments) can be overwhelming, the overall narrative here is compelling. In chronicling American missteps and misadventures during WWII and the Cold War, as well as in Vietnam, Latin America, Iraq, and Afghanistan—among other locales—the series elevates some semi-forgotten Americans, such as FDR's progressive vice-president Henry Wallace (who was bumped off the final FDR ticket in favor of Harry S. Truman—the man who would authorize dropping the atomic bombs on Japan), while questioning the saintly aura surrounding others, such as Ronald Reagan, who squandered a chance for nuclear disarmament because of his Star Wars space defense initiative pipe dream during the '80s. Does the series lean a bit to the left? Of course it does, but viewers will gain a much better understanding of two key points. First, like the British, French, and Dutch before us, America has been engaged in empire building over the last three-quarters of a century; unlike those other nations, America has preferred indirect involvement, supporting puppet political figures who back American interests. Second, the cost of our apparently unwavering belief in American exceptionalism has been very high. Blu-ray extras include two bonus prequel episodes (with some overlapping material), a stimulating conversation between Stone and author/pundit Tariq Ali, and a booklet. Sure to spark heated debate (Stone/Kuznick and historian Sean Wilentz have already sparred off in a public exchange in the *New York Times*), this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (R. Pitman)

Unsung Hero: The Story of the Horse in the Civil War ★★

(2013) 56 min. DVD: \$69.95. TMW Media Group. PPR.

Kent Masterson Brown's documentary focuses on the millions of horses that participated in the War Between the States, during which as many as 1.5 million possibly died. Written and narrated by Brown, *Unsung Hero* relies largely on shots of battlefields and loads of vintage photographs (with the pans and zooms so common to the historical genre), coupled with stories of famous steeds such as Old Baldy, Cincinnati, Winchester, and Traveller, which are sometimes told via excerpts from soldiers' memoirs. Interviews with a farrier (whose company is one of the film's sponsors) and some Civil War re-enactors are interspersed throughout. It's hard to imagine the vast problem of feeding the animals once they were separated from the supply wagons, some of which traveled in caravans 50 miles long. Starvation was unavoidable and widespread; after Gettysburg alone, Union Gen. George Meade's army lost 15,000 horses due to a lack of fodder. The horses also perished in battle: the dozens required to pull cannons

were essentially tethered victims once the barrages began. Offering a decent tribute to its titular subjects, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Gardner)

Voices from Mariel: Los Marielitos, Then and Now ★★

(2011) 80 min. DVD: \$179.95. Films Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62102-978-6.

Voices from Mariel revisits the epic 1980 "Mariel boatlift" mass exodus of 125,000 refugees—packed in 1,700 boats—from Fidel Castro's Cuba to Florida. Then and now, the Marielitos were regarded as criminals, according to filmmaker James Carleton. This argument is mainly made through the voice of one of his subjects, Dr. Jose Garcia, a Marielito making a return visit to Cuba 30 years later. Interviewed vets of the boatlift here describe positive upbringings in Castro's Cuba with Marxist indoctrination, but noted that disenchantment set in after hearing about better lives 90 miles away in the USA. After handfuls of Cuban dissidents sought refuge in the Peruvian embassy, Fidel granted blanket exit visas to all counter-

revolutionaries—assuming that a hundred or so embarrassing troublemakers would leave. When tenfold more appeared overnight—all disillusioned with the regime—Castro added prostitutes, convicts, and homosexuals to the mix, denouncing all wholesale as "filth." The Cuban-Americans interviewed here (many of whom were children at the time of the boatlift) have made successful lives, but in Cuba, Dr. Garcia—unsurprisingly—finds poverty and no on-camera admiration for Fidel. Also featuring an introduction by Cuban-descended actor Steven Bauer (*Scarface*), and comments from author Brian Latell (*After Fidel*), this solid update on a major contemporary historical event is recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY

Aerial America: New England Collection

★★½

(2013) 276 min. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Inception Media Group (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

The Smithsonian Channel's *Aerial America* series stages flyovers featuring important historical sites, here in the New England states of Maine, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Rhode Island. The latter, being the smallest state in the union, practically receives a house-by-house (or rooftop-by-rooftop) treatment, but fortunately they are some very interesting houses. Viewers will behold such spectacles as the mansions belonging to Mark Twain, Robert Frost, and Stephen King; a haunted lighthouse; an environmental anomaly that has produced "deserts" in Maine; the Atlantic arsenal of nuclear submarines at Groton; and the pleasure homes of Katharine Hepburn and the Kennedys. This leg of the series was shot during bright autumn days, so the fall foliage of New England appears in all its storied pictorial splendor. Sure to appeal to armchair travelers, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

Discoveries...America National Parks: Arches, Canyonlands & Natural Bridges

★★½

(2012) 50 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.95. Bennett-Watt HD Productions. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-60490-161-0 (dvd), 978-1-60490-184-9 (blu-ray).

This entry from Jim and Kelly Watt's acclaimed high-definition-filmed *Discoveries...America National Parks* series takes viewers to the wild and rocky lands of southern Utah. Beginning in Arches National Park, home of the iconic Delicate Arch, the travelogue offers an introduction to the 76,000 acres of sandstone arches, buttes, and other geologic wonders, capturing 17th-century Native American art painted on desert rocks,

while a park ranger offers explanatory comments. In nearby Canyonlands, the wear and tear wrought by two rivers over millennia has left a magnificent canyon and a visual feast of varied shapes. Here, trails lead intrepid visitors deep into the back country, while the raging Colorado River offers a perfect (if also dangerous) venue for whitewater rafting. The filmmakers also stop at the Natural Bridges National Monument (established by Theodore Roosevelt and boasting fantastic stone formations), as well as ancestral Pueblo sites. Footage of recreational drivers steering souped-up jeeps through chasms and up and down rock walls might sound environmentally perilous, but it sure looks like fun. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

BIOGRAPHY

Bob and the Monster ★★★

(2012) 85 min. DVD: \$16.95, Blu-ray: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

Many documentaries revolve around musicians who have battled substance abuse, but director Keirda Baruth profiles an indie rocker who became a drug and alcohol counselor. Bob Forrest admits that he wanted to try heroin ever since he discovered Lenny Bruce. In the 1980s, Forrest moved from Palm Springs to Hollywood, where he hobnobbed with bands like Fishbone and Jane's Addiction. His interest in poetry and literature led him to front Thelonious Monster, whose ascent coincided with his own descent into coke, crystal meth, and heroin use (Baruth uses claymation sequences to depict Forrest's chemically-enhanced experiences). Just as

the band was rising, Forrest took a considerable advance from RCA to leave and made an ill-fated solo album. As Monster's drummer Pete Weiss puts it, "He was one of the largest assholes ever to walk the planet." The band would eventually reunite, but Forrest's drug problems only worsened. Forrest believes that his downward spiral began when he learned the truth about his origins (which involved adoption) at the age of 13. After hitting bottom, he started to get his life back together following a series of rehab stints. From there, he went on to help fellow addicts, including Courtney Love and Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante, in conjunction with the Musicians Assistance Program. Through celeb rehab expert Dr. Drew Pinsky, he studied the science of addiction and became a proponent of abstinence-based treatment (although Baruth is a little vague about Forrest's falling out with the Las Encinitas program, which utilizes prescription drugs). Forrest ultimately formed his own recovery centers, where he promotes the same non-religious, prescription-free techniques that were effective for him. Offering an interesting portrait of one man's triumph over addiction and subsequent good work, this is recommended. [Note: this is also available on DVD for \$99.95 w/PPR for public libraries, and \$350 w/PPR for colleges and universities from The Cinema Guild at www.cinemataguild.com.] Aud: C, P. (K. Femmessy)

In Search of Blind Joe Death: The Saga of John Fahey ★★★1/2

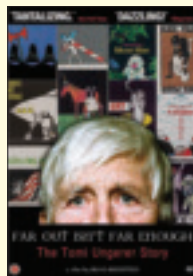
(2012) 57 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

John Fahey (1939-2001) was "a provocateur in the Romantic mode" says a friend of

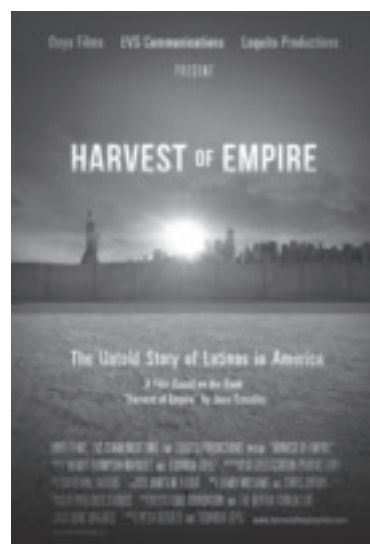
Far Out Isn't Far Enough: The Tomi Ungerer Story ★★★1/2

(2012) 98 min. DVD: \$27.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Children's book author-illustrator Tomi Ungerer shunned the limelight for years before recently reappearing. Brad Bernstein's fascinating, beautifully-made documentary is essentially an autobiographical piece, featuring extended excerpts from interviews with Ungerer, who discusses his childhood in Nazi-occupied Alsace before proceeding to his move to the United States in 1956, where he found work as a magazine cartoonist. Ungerer also wrote popular (albeit idiosyncratic) children's books, and produced a series of devastating anti-war posters during the Vietnam protest era. But his career was derailed when it was revealed that he was also creating works of erotica, and he left New York, first for Nova Scotia, and then Europe, and is only now reemerging to widespread but belated acclaim. Ungerer's recounting of his life is both deeply moving and filled with wry observations, which Bernstein accompanies with plentiful examples of his illustrations—some transformed into animation—as well as stills, other archival material, and comments from relatives and friends such as Jules Feiffer and the late Maurice Sendak. DVD extras include audio commentary by Bernstein, deleted scenes, a conversation between Ungerer and Feiffer, and a tour with Ungerer of his home in Ireland. A powerful portrait of uncommon depth and perception, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



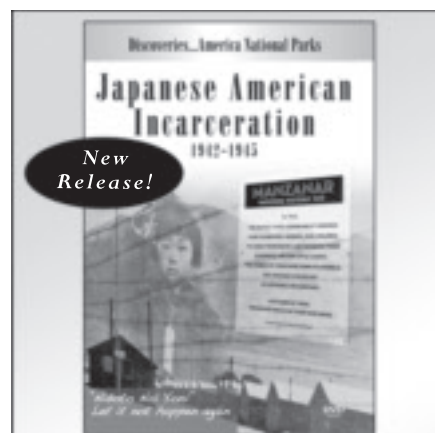
"The recent reemergence of immigration as a pressing matter in U.S. politics... makes **HARVEST OF EMPIRE** a especially timely documentary. Getzels and López's intelligent film should broaden the discussion... Recommended." —Video Librarian



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Strongman ★★★★★

(2009) 113 min. DVD: \$24.95. *Passion River* (avail. from most distributors).

Even big guys get the blues, as viewers will see in this powerful (in more ways than one) and engaging cinematic character study. Zachary Levy's debut film serves up a winning profile of Stanley "Stanless Steel" Pleskun, of South Brunswick, NJ. An old-school strongman who could have stepped out of Coney Island in the days of vaudeville, Stan lifts cars in parking lots, pounds nails with his hands at private-booking kiddie parties, hoists platforms loaded with people using one finger, and (his personal specialty) folds coins in his big hands, turning a penny into a two-year anniversary present for his chain-smoking love, Barbara. Stan shoulders domestic friction with Barbara and her disapproving sister, while also harboring professional envy for better-paid fake strongmen in Cirque du Soleil, all the while pining for something more meaningful in his "craft." Stan also avidly watches *The Honeymooners*, and after a while he really comes to resemble Ralph Kramden (albeit with the ability to bend horseshoes) in this incredibly entertaining fly-on-the-wall portrait of a fascinating character. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)



the late seminal guitarist in this engrossing documentary. Fahey, an American original who freely explored—even created—genres and styles on a journey of restless expression, was a steel-string instrumentalist and non-vocalist who energized the folk music scene in the early 1960s with his cyclical, repetitive rhythms. According to The Who's Pete Townshend, Fahey lived and created "in a bubble." Filmmaker James Cullingham interweaves archival footage, animation, and interview clips as he explores both the psychological and artistic reasons for Fahey's determination to remain a remote iconoclast sheltered by mystique. The film covers the musician's mental decline during his later years, when he lived in squalor while seeing his artistic stock rise among a younger generation of experimental musicians (such as Sonic Youth), but it also looks at the more vital years of Fahey's youth, when his laidback personality and sharp wit suited his mesmerizing sounds. Musically inclined viewers might wish there were more details on Fahey's deliberate experiments in jazz, classical, and electric guitar composition, but the trade-off here is that the film does deliver penetrating commentary on Fahey's influences (including nature), his passion for the guitar as a personal instrument, and his legacy. DVD extras include performance clips of Fahey and others, as well as extended interviews. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

JFK ★★★★★

(2013) 2 discs. 240 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99. PBS Video (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-965-0 (dvd), 978-1-60883-966-7 (blu-ray).

Of the many TV documentaries made to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, filmmaker Susan Bellows's *JFK*—aired on PBS's *American Experience* series—was

clearly the best. Comprehensive, sober, and balanced, the two-part profile proceeds in chronological fashion from Kennedy's privileged birth up through his funeral. Part one covers Kennedy's school years, early physical problems, decorated service in World War II, successful runs for both the U.S. House and the Senate, and the 1960 presidential campaign—both the primaries and general election. Part two concentrates on his thousand-day presidency, offering detailed examinations of early missteps—most notably the Bay of Pigs—and the turnaround that came with his skillful handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, opting for a sea blockade instead of more hawkish alternatives. Kennedy's escalation of American involvement in Vietnam and his reluctant embrace of the Civil Rights movement receive penetrating analysis here, as does the Camelot glamour that he and wife Jackie exuded, bringing them virtual rock-star status. Narrated by Oliver Platt, *JFK* expertly blends archival footage with commentary from a variety of scholars/authors (including Robert Caro and Robert Dallek), who don't hesitate to point out Kennedy's failings—including his inveterate womanizing—along with his virtues. And they remind us that Kennedy's presidency was a work in progress: many initiatives stalled when he died, and were only brought to fruition by successor LBJ, whose hand was strengthened by Kennedy's martyrdom. An excellent biographical portrait, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.video librarian.com) for more reviews during January and February, including: *An Apology to Elephants*, *Honor Flight*, *Is School Enough?*, *Mallamall*, and much more!

Series Update

The following titles are new additions to series that were previously recommended. Titles are available from most distributors unless otherwise noted.

Recently released by PBS Home Video is **Craft in America: Forge** (60 min., DVD: \$19.99), the latest episode of the Peabody Award-winning series exploring handmade and modern crafts, here focusing on artists forging metal transformed by fire. See review of *Craft in America: Messages* in VL-11/11.

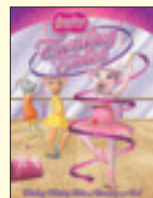


The newest program in Lionsgate and HIT Entertainment's animated series based on *The Railway Stories* by the Rev. W. Awdry is **Thomas & Friends: The Thomas Way** (58 min., DVD: \$14.98), which includes the title episode, plus "The Switch," "Percy's Lucky Day," "Calm Down Caitlin," and "The Lost Puff." See review of *Thomas & Friends: Santa's Little Engine* in VL-11/13.

The latest addition to Paramount Home Video and Nickelodeon's popular preschool series *Dora the Explorer* is **Dora's Ice Skating Spectacular!** (69 min., DVD: \$14.98), which includes the wintery title story and the bonus episodes "Catch That Shape Train" and "Dora and Perrito to the Rescue." See review of *Dora's Christmas Carol Adventure* in VL-11/10.

Lionsgate and HIT Entertainment's **Barney: Perfectly Purple** (52 min., DVD: \$14.98) is the latest title in the series featuring the purple dino and pals Baby Bop, BJ, and Riff, who explore friendship and fun in the episodes "A Perfectly Purple Day," "Arts," and "Neighborhood." See review of *Barney: Best Manners* in VL Online-3/04.

Also newly available from HIT and Lionsgate is **Angelina Ballerina: Twirling Tales** (61 min., DVD: \$14.99), the latest in their computer-animated series about the titular dancing mouseling, who here prepares for a Spring Fling performance. See review of *Angelina Ballerina: The Show Must Go On—Christmas in Mouseland* in VL-11/03.



AKB0048: Season One

★★★1/2

(2012) 325 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$69.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5345-8 (dvd), 978-1-6161-5346-5 (blu-ray).



AKB0048 is set in a future where all forms of entertainment have been banned on the inhabitable planets in the universe. Enforcing this ban is a group known as DES, which will stop at nothing to ensure that no singing takes place. But DES's reign of terror is being challenged by the young girls of AKB0048, futuristic fictional heirs to the real-life all-girl Japanese pop band AKB48. The 13-episode debut 2012 season starts with *American Idol*-style auditions, after which the chosen girls learn to work together as performers and as fighters against DES treachery. Unfortunately, however, the characters are bland, the plots uneventful, and some viewers may find the J-pop soundtrack to be something of an acquired taste. Nonetheless, the idea of girl singer-soldiers rocketing around the galaxy with guns on their hips and songs on their lips carries a certain charm, and the series deserves some credit for its good-humored musical spin on a well-worn anime genre. Presented in DVD and Blu-ray dual-language sets, rated TV-PG, this is a strong optional purchase. [Note: AKB0048: Season Two is slated for release on Feb. 4.] (P. Hall)

Campione! Complete Collection ★★★

(2012) 325 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$69.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5405-9 (dvd), 978-1-6161-5406-6 (blu-ray).



In this manga-derived *Clash of the Titans*-ish series, the gods naturally can show up attired as Tokyo schoolgirls. Japanese teen Kusanagi Godo is traveling in Italy when he realizes his destiny of becoming a "Campione," a superhuman able to slay gods. With an approaching doomsday-prophecy deadline, Kusanagi is challenged by numerous "rogue" deities (most derived from Greco-Roman sources) and monsters, as well as unethical rival Campiones, who hoard the powers of gods they have vanquished...or something like that. Epic battles typically cue sidebar-soliloquies about the origins and taxonomy of gods such as Apollo, Mithras, and Athena. But the standard texts of Joseph Campbell and Edith Hamilton were never like this "harem comedy" in which Kusanagi suddenly finds himself amidst a servile quartet of sexy, scantily dressed paranormal girls, all competing for his love. And the kicker: these goddesses can only download vital mythological intel to Kusanagi via kissing

(preferably with deep-tongue action). Even with the kitsch and cheesecake erotica, *Campione!* still boasts some genuinely stirring moments. Presenting all 13 episodes from the 2012 series in dual-language sets on DVD and Blu-ray, rated TV-MA, this is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Kokoro Connect: The Complete TV Series

★★★★1/2

(2012) 325 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$69.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5410-3 (dvd), 978-1-6161-5411-3 (blu-ray).



The old comic plot twist of body swapping (remember *18 Again!* or *Freaky Friday*?) receives a strange twist in this anime series about five students—three girls and two boys—who belong to a school-based project called the Cultural Study Club. One day, they discover that they can switch bodies among each other, and through this newfound talent the club members learn painful and often harrowing lessons about previously hidden neuroses and jealousies. The group also must deal with a mysterious adult who is aware of their powers (having exchanged physical forms with one of their teachers, this individual now has access to their everyday lives). While one of the segments is played for crass laughs—a girl who's afraid of men after a would-be sexual assault learns the value of placing martial arts kicks to an attacker's crotch—the series features a surprising number of mature scenarios that cruelly expose the characters' emotional vulnerabilities. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2012 in a dual-language set, rated TV-14, *Kokoro Connect* is a fine series that serves up morality lessons cloaked in a light sci-fi setting. Highly recommended. [Note: *Kokoro Connect: Original Anime Selection* is also newly available.] (P. Hall)

Last Exile: Fam, The Silver Wing—Part One

★★★★

(2011) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2671-6.



In the comics-derived *Last Exile* franchise, after calamity struck the water-dominated Blue World, most of humanity was evacuated via mysterious, powerful giant machines called Exiles, which later returned them home (and now remain in dormant orbit like multiple moons). But these events also created rival kingdoms: the former refugees vs. the Ades Federation of heavily militarized, hardened survivors who never left the planet. Under pretext of peace talks with the returnee kingdom

of Turan, the Ades Federation launches an attack, and Millia—the last Turan princess—finds protection with the ragtag Sky Pirates, who prowl the Blue World airways in Robin Hood fashion (assuming that the Merry Men were more like perky 15-year-old girls on cool flying cycles). Fam, an alpha Sky Pirate, becomes Princess Millia's BFF and protector in her quest to gather allies against the Federation. Handsomely visualized (partial CGI brings to life a steam-punk-techno look), this set of the first 12 episodes from the 2011 series features flashbacks to help desperate newbies catch up with the tangled mythology and it ends with a cliffhanger. Presented in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries, short sketches, and a Q&A with the animators at Anime Expo 2011. Recommended. [Note: *Last Exile: Fam, The Silver Wing—Part Two* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)

Michiko & Hatchin, Part One ★★★1/2

(2008) 4 discs. 275 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2718-6.



What's the difference between the anime series *Michiko & Hatchin* and a Robert Rodriguez movie? Well, Rodriguez is actually more cartoon-y, and his films can feature full female nudity, whereas this Nippon TV entry simply teases viewers with the skimpy garb of hot-tamale heroine Michiko, a notorious outlaw and recent prison escapee living in a pulp-fictional amalgam of Mexico and Brazil (although everyone has Japanese names, except for Russian mobsters). Michiko swings by the cruel household of an evil priest to rescue from Dickensian foster-misery the 9-year-old blonde waif Hana, aka Hatchin, who may or may not be Michiko's own child. Together the pair search for the mysterious Hiroshi Morenos—Michiko's lost love—who vanished amidst underworld intrigues (Hiroshi may or may not be Hatchin's father). The loosely-plotted quest varies wildly in tone, from action antics in which a Lara Croft-y lead pretty much ignores all of the bullets being fired at her, to moody character-based episodes, making for a striking, if also somewhat uneven series. Compiling the first 11 episodes from the 2008-09 run on a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include episode commentaries, a featurette with lead American voice actress Monica Rial, and a Japanese press conference with (female) director Sayo Yamamoto. A strong optional purchase. [Note: *Michiko & Hatchin, Part Two* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)

Ashton Celebration: The Royal Ballet Dances Frederick Ashton

★★★1/2

(2013) 84 min. DVD: \$29.99,
Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte
(dist. by Naxos of America).



The premier British choreographer of the 20th century, Frederick Ashton (1904-1988) served as the artistic director of the Royal Ballet from 1963 to 1970 (the company's golden age). Filmed at the Royal Opera House, this 2013 program celebrating Ashton's prodigious talent features five of his short ballets, which not only demonstrate his variety and creativity over a two-decade span—from 1958 to 1977—but also underscore his enduring influence on the Royal Ballet and English ballet in general. The first piece, set to Ravel's increasingly corrosive *La Valse*, features the full company ensemble. Next up is a rapturous *pas de deux* for Leanne Benjamin and Valeri Hristov based on the *Méditation* from Massenet's opera *Thaïs*, followed by a lighthearted pairing for Yuhui Choe and Alexander Campbell drawing on Johann Strauss II's *Voices of Spring*. The fourth segment, set to music by Erik Satie, is *Monotones I and II*, featuring two groups of three dancers who ultimately join together. The fifth and longest piece is *Marguerite and Armand*, a mini-romantic-tragedy set to Liszt that was originally danced by Fonteyn and Nureyev, and is performed here by Sergei Polunin and Tamara Rojo, the latter in one of her final performances as the company's principal dancer before taking over the artistic directorship of the English National Ballet. All of the music is expertly conducted by Emmanuel Plasson. Presented in DTS 5.0 (DTS-HD 5.0 on Blu-ray) and LPCM stereo, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Black Label Society: Unblackened

★★★1/2
(2013) 165 min. DVD: \$14.98,
Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock
Entertainment (avail. from
most distributors).



It's hard to get excited about a rock band that sports such a generic sound, but fans who've been following guitarist Zakk Wylde since his years with Ozzy Osbourne certainly may feel otherwise about *Unblackened*, which captures a stripped-down set at Los Angeles's Club Nokia in 2013 featuring Wylde, guitarist Nick Catanese, and bassist John DeServio, who all remain seated the entire time (ironically, concertgoers on the floor have to stand due to the lack of seats). The other players include drummer Chad Szeliga, vocalist Greg Locascio, and keyboard player Derek Sherinian. The songs are serviceable, and Wylde doesn't have a bad voice, but the end result plays like a less distinctive, mumble-heavy

cross between Lynyrd Skynyrd and Alice in Chains. Within the "unplugged" configuration, Wylde alternates between rockers and power ballads on songs including "Stillborn," "The Blessed Hellride" and "In This River." Extras include an interview with Wylde, a visit to a British prison where Wylde plays two songs and takes questions from the audience, and a music video for "Losin' Your Mind." Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Bye

★★★
(2012) 22 min. DVD: \$19.99.
Kultur International Films
(avail. from most distributors).
ISBN: 978-0-7697-5062-0.



Distinguished Swedish choreographer Mats Ek created this impressionistic one-woman work in 2010 as a quasi-farewell showpiece for Sylvie Guillem, who was the prima ballerina of the Paris Opera in the late 1980s before moving to London's Royal Ballet and later to Sadler's Wells Theatre. Set to Beethoven's final piano sonata (in an eccentric 1983 recording by then-young Croatian wunderkind Ivo Pogorelich) and seen here in a 2012 performance, *Bye* is a virtuoso piece that straddles the line between ballet and modern dance, exhibiting Guillem's prowess in both. Guillem passes through a brightly lit door in mid-stage and then energetically struggles toward and away from other doors in which various human figures can be glimpsed—an expression of the mixture of trepidation and liberation that comes with any major life transition (as Ek explains in an accompanying bonus featurette). The role is demanding, and Guillem tackles it with passionate artistry, making it a fine capstone to her remarkable career. Presented in LPCM stereo, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Caro Emerald in Concert

★★★
(2013) 111 min. DVD: \$14.98,
Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock
Entertainment (avail. from
most distributors).



Jazz-pop entertainer Caro Emerald (Caroline Esmerelda van de Leeuw) turns on the charm in this 18-song 2013 concert from the BBC Radio Theatre in London. Adding electronic touches, the Dutch vocalist reinvents a classic style for traditionalists and modernists alike. Both Emerald and her band come dressed for the occasion in black and white, which fits the retro vibe—with a black dress and white bolero jacket for Emerald (the fashion lover also sparks up her look with red lipstick and silver-glitter heels). As they segue between upbeat and down tempo selections, Emerald

sings smoothly, but lightly—so lightly that the brassy accompaniment sometimes threatens to drown her out, but she always manages to come through. Occasional audience shots reveal attendees swaying to the beat, but director Helen Scott wisely keeps the focus on Emerald, who sings, dances, and converses between songs. Alongside conventional instruments like piano, bass, guitar, and drums, a DJ adds samples of record scratches and vocals from Louis Armstrong (some jazz fans may balk, but it's fairly subtle and unobtrusive). Performing hits including "Stuck," "Back It Up," and "A Night Like This," Emerald introduces "Completely" by noting that, "This might be the most personal song I've ever written." Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an interview with Emerald, who cites John Barry and Shirley Bassey as influences. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

CeeLo Green is Lobrace: Live in Vegas

★★★1/2

(2013) 85 min. DVD: \$14.98,
Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock
Entertainment (avail. from
most distributors).



Grammy-winning singer-songwriter CeeLo Green takes center stage in this 2013 performance filmed at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas. Backed by plenty of bling and booty-shaking babes, the portly vocalist opens this 18-song set (including a few medleys) with "Lady Killer" and "Bright Lights, Bigger City," before segueing into a Stevie Wonder-ish version of INXS's "Need You Tonight," followed shortly by his rendition of "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy" (short answer, no). And then things start getting weird on this *Lobrace* showcase, with a three-part medley featuring "Boy George" (as a RuPaul superfan, I immediately recognized the impersonator as *Drag Race* contestant Shanel, aka Bryan Watkins) but no CeeLo. The unremarkable tunes "Nothing's Shocking Anymore," "Sideshow," and "Fool for You" lead into Green's version of his Pussycat Dolls hit "Don't Cha" (revised with manlier lyrics about being rich) and "Whoever Loves Me," which features a sample of the theme to the classic sitcom *Soap*. The audience seems to warm up considerably for a "Freak" medley, a neat old-school influenced reunion of Green's old hip-hop group Goodie Mob (my favorite moments, hands down), and the radio anthems "Crazy" and "Forget You." Unfortunately, the music is undercut by the gyrating chorus girls, horrible jokes, and blatant onstage shilling for CeeLo's green liqueur product. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an interview with Green. A strong optional purchase. (J. Williams-Wood)

Deep Purple: Perfect Strangers Live ★★1/2

(1984) 141 min. DVD: \$14.95.
Eagle Rock Entertainment
(avail. from most distributors).

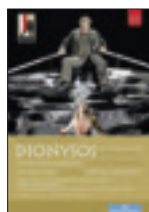
It's safe to say that most hard rock bands from the last three decades would cite Deep Purple as one of their major influences. Along with Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, Deep Purple defined the emerging genre of heavy metal in the early '70s. This live concert filmed at Melbourne, Australia, during 1984 was part of a self-proclaimed reunion tour to promote the album *Perfect Strangers*, a release that ended an eight-year hiatus for the band, who appear here in their seminal lineup with vocalist Ian Gillan, guitarist Ritchie Blackmore, drummer Ian Paice, bassist Roger Glover, and Jon Lord on keyboards. Along with the title track and other numbers from the then-new album—including "Knocking at Your Back Door"—the 14-song set features many early favorites, such as "Space Truckin'," "Strange Kind of Woman," "Highway Star" and an extended sing-along encore of their signature anthem "Smoke on the Water." While the '80s-era video quality is characteristically substandard, the audio—with DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo options—is efficiently mastered, making the wailing, pounding, and crunching sound of this proto heavy metal band loud and clear. Extras include a behind-the-scenes tour featurette. A strong optional purchase. (T. Fry)



Dionysos ★★1/2

(2010) 2 discs. 122 min. In German w/English subtitles.
DVD or Blu-ray: \$39.99.
EuroArts/Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).

The spectacle is as important as the music in Wolfgang Rihm's opera, captured here during its 2010 Salzburg Festival premiere. Rihm constructed the libretto from scattered lines of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Dionysos-Dithyramben* poems, arranged here as a series of scenes from the philosopher's life and presented in the phantasmagorical terms he might have experienced as he slid into insanity. But Nietzsche's disorientation is also portrayed as an ascent to Dionysian ecstasy, complete with Greek gods, bevvies of nymphs, and bizarre masked figures placed against settings that have a pop-art feel. Essentially an atonal score, the music is full of lush romantic overtones similar to those Berg brought to *Lulu*, and is deftly played by the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester of Berlin under the baton of conductor Ingo Metzmacher. The singing is also remarkable, with sopranos Mojca Erdmann and Elin



Rombo vocally sailing into the stratosphere, while Johannes Martin Kränzle is powerful as N. (for Nietzsche) and Matthias Klink equally strong as the foppish guest who is skinned but emerges as the god Apollo. Presented in DTS 5.0, Dolby Digital 5.0, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.0 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a booklet, and Bettina Ehrhardt's documentary *Ich Bin Dein Labyrinth*, which is almost critical viewing in order to decipher what is happening onstage, and includes interviews with Rihm, director Pierre Audi, designer Jonathan Meese, Metzmacher, and the main singers. For the musically adventurous, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Don Giovanni ★★

(2010) 183 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).

In this 2010 staging at the Aix-en-Provence Festival of Mozart's 1787 opera about the lecherous Don Juan, director Dmitri Tcherniakov not only updates the piece to the present and extends the action over months, but also portrays the originally unrelated characters as the psychologically damaged members of a single family. In the process, Tcherniakov has removed every trace of humor from what the composer called a *dramma giocoso*, turning it into a dark domestic tragedy set entirely in a richly appointed private library and focusing on the decline of an aging lothario left with only a pitiful remnant of his seductive powers. The musical performance does not salvage this production: the playing by the original-instrument Freiburger Barockorchester under the baton of Louis Langrée is fiercely dramatic, missing much of the music's gracefulness, and the cast members—especially Bo Skovhus as the severely depressed Don Giovanni—are actually often more convincing in their acting than their singing. Why the festival—turning out sane and respectful Mozart performances since 1948—chose to take such an uncharacteristic approach to this masterpiece remains a mystery. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a "making-of" featurette. A much better choice here would be the 2008 Covent Garden mounting (VL-9/09). Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)



Dream Theater: Live at Luna Park ★★★

(2013) 231 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$17.98; Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

The New York prog-metal band Dream Theater de-



livers bang for the buck in *Live at Luna Park*, performing an epic 2012 concert at the titular soccer stadium in Buenos Aires. Drummer Mike Mangini, who joined in time for *A Dramatic Turn of Events* (the band's 11th full-length studio album), rounds out the lineup of James LaBrie (vocals), John Petrucci (guitar), Jordan Rudess (keyboards), and John Myung (bass). The quintet serve up a 17-song set during a 160-minute main show that incorporates material dating back to their 1989 debut, *When Dream and Day Unite*, along with guitar, drum, and keyboard solos (they're also joined by a local string quartet for four numbers). Highlights include fan favorites such as "The Silent Man," "Beneath the Surface," "The Spirit Carries On," and "The Root of All Evil." Extras include six bonus songs, a behind-the-scenes documentary (in which members discuss the departure of drummer Mike Portnoy), and a multi-angle version of the song "Outcry." Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

East End Babylon: The Story of the Cockney Rejects ★★★

(2013) 90 min. DVD: \$10.95.
Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

For those who watch Richard England's documentary on punk rock legends the Cockney Rejects—presented entirely from the perspective of the band members themselves—it might help to have more than a passing acquaintance with various aspects of British subculture. Formed in 1978 by the brothers Jeff and Micky Geggus, along with their brother-in-law Chris Murrell on bass, and drummer Paul Harvey, the group was signed by EMI a year later, and in 1980 their single "Oi! Oi! Oi!" set the foundation for what later became the Oi genre. While their musical advocacy of West Ham Football and distaste for British politicians initially limited their appeal to working-class Britain, it also drew the attention of local neo-Nazi groups and the notorious hooligan element that turned sporting events into brawling riots. This nasty edge ultimately spilled into their concerts, and the Cockney Rejects' political messaging was frequently twisted by the local media as expressions of severe antisocial behavior. Personnel changes and shifting tastes saw their star power ebb and flow over the years, but time has ultimately been their ally, as they continue to enjoy a worldwide base attracted by their visceral energy. Punk aficionados will savor the rich soundtrack mix of the band's best music, while Anglophiles will certainly get a kick out of this rocking portrait of Britain in the 1980s. Recommended. (P. Hall)



The Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert ★★★

(1992) 270 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



This concert honoring the late Queen frontman and rock icon was a major entry in the age of mega-productions that began in 1985 with Live Aid. Organized by surviving Queen members Brian May, Roger Taylor, and John Deacon, the show marked the establishment of the Mercury Phoenix Trust for AIDS education and research (Mercury died from AIDS in November, 1991). Presented in April 1992 at London's Wembley Stadium before an audience of 72,000, the opening act included tribute performances by Metallica, Def Leppard, Guns N' Roses, and others, while the main show found Queen playing as the house band for the likes of Roger Daltrey ("I Want It All"), Robert Plant ("Crazy Little Thing Called Love"), Seal ("Who Wants to Live Forever"), Liza Minnelli ("We Are the Champions"), and others. The 30-plus performances of primarily Queen and Mercury compositions here are topped by a pair of duets: Annie Lennox and David Bowie on "Under Pressure" and Elton John and Axl Rose on "Bohemian Rhapsody." Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and LPCM stereo, extras include a 10th anniversary documentary, and rehearsal footage. Recommended. (T. Fry)

The Great Hip Hop Hoax

★★★★1/2
(2013) 88 min. DVD: \$16.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

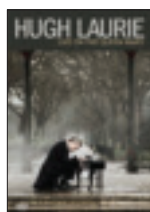


As a brazen act of defiance—fueled by desperate ambitions to transcend their boring lives—the titular hip-hop identity fraud perpetrated by the Scottish duo Silibil N' Brains definitely goes beyond faking a little street cred. Gavin Bain and Billy Boyd—best friends blessed with a fair amount of rhyming/rapping talent—initially have their dreams of stardom dashed: during a humiliating audition in London, record execs snidely dismiss them as the "rapping Proclaimers." But with their talent for mimicking American accents, Gavin and Billy set out to meticulously craft for themselves an image of snotty Eminem-type California rappers...and almost immediately begin to see doors opening. After a single gig, the pair attract major-label interest: nearly literally overnight their wildest visions of fame seem to be coming true. But will the industry out them as frauds? Although director Jeanie Finlay's *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* doesn't always show Gavin and Billy in the most sympathetic light, it's hard to fault the pair of gutsy Scots for effectively exposing the shallowness and gullibility of an industry that talks smack

about "authenticity" but thrives on fabricated image and fakery (phoniness embodied by one of the film's primary interviewees, Chris Rock of Island Records, a white Londoner who has remade himself in the image of a South Central L.A. gangsta). A fascinating and entertaining music documentary, this is highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Hugh Laurie: Live on the Queen Mary ★★★1/2

(2013) 106 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Like many actors whose celebrity has allowed them to indulge other interests, Hugh Laurie parlayed his success as the star of the Fox drama *House* for eight seasons into a side career as pianist and lead singer of a blues ensemble called the Copper Bottom Band. This PBS-aired 2013 concert is filmed on the Queen Mary in Long Beach, CA, where Laurie's idol, New Orleans blues legend Professor Longhair, recorded an album in 1975 that Laurie says changed his life. The 18-song set features mostly blues standards—including "Staggerlee," "Louisiana Blues," and "Swanee River"—interspersed with engaging remarks from Laurie. While reasonably pleasant entertainment, no one would seriously argue that Laurie is anything more than a competent keyboardist or that he has a great voice (it's no wonder that he turns over several numbers to his backup crew—singers and instrumentalists—who are excellent.) Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an interview with Laurie. While it feels a bit like a vanity project, this will no doubt appeal to Laurie's many fans, making it a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

James Morrison: The Wizard from Oz ★★★

(1989) 54 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-5061-3.



This engaging profile, which aired on Australian television in 1989, spotlights a unique musical talent. James Morrison is not only one of the rare antipodean citizens who have made a mark on the international jazz scene, he's also a multi-instrumentalist (playing the trumpet, trombone, and euphonium). This music documentary combines interviews and performance clips, including a session with Morrison's mentor, Don Burrows; an engagement with the World Superband in New York; and a concert at Switzerland's prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival. The horn player, who also races cars and pilots planes, hails from a musical family, who appear here to sing and play with

him at home and at church. As a teenager, Morrison studied at the New South Wales Conservatorium, where he so impressed Burrows that the band leader added him to his quintet (Morrison played with Burrows for six years before striking out on his own). Another influence, Dizzy Gillespie, proclaims Morrison "one of the best." As an entertainer, Morrison likes to joke around on stage, but he takes his music seriously. Other notable speakers praising his work include Australian guitarist Tommy Emmanuel and jazz critic Leonard Feather, who caught a gig at the Village Vanguard, and found Morrison to be "equally adept on the trumpet and the trombone." Presented in LPCM stereo, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

La Fanciulla del West

★★★
(2012) 140 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. EuroArts/Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



European directors appear to be more frequently adopting the idea of reframing operas in cinematic terms, which is the approach taken here by Christof Loy to Puccini's 1910 *Wild West* piece in this 2012 staging for the Royal Swedish Opera. The orchestral prologue is set to a filmed credits sequence aping the style of 1950s Westerns—complete with Monument Valley vistas—and projections mimicking the onstage action appear periodically against the rear of the stage. Fortunately, the concept doesn't overwhelm the story, which for the most part is presented in proper period costume (the sets are relatively spare, but some striking visual effects offer compensation). Happily, the musical side of the production is excellent, with Nina Stemme in powerful voice as Minnie, the barkeeper who rescues her lover, bandit Dick Johnson, from the clutches of Sheriff Jack Rance. John Lundgren cuts a menacing figure as the lusty lawman, and although Aleksandrs Antonenko seems a trifle weak as Johnson, the rest of the cast registers strongly, while Pier Giorgio Morandi leads the company orchestra and chorus in a committed reading that misses only the final measure of fire and passion. *The Girl of the Golden West*, as the title is usually translated, lacks the famous tunes of the composer's more popular works, but it's an expertly crafted piece, and this performance is preferable to the visually wacky mounting from the Netherlands Opera (VL-3/11). Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Lucrezia Borgia ★★★1/2

(2013) 127 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$24.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America).

The prospect of hearing much-loved Renée

Fleming in a demanding coloratura role in one of Gaetano Donizetti's *bel canto* operas is enticing, but this 2013 San Francisco Opera mounting of the composer's titular 1833 romantic tragedy centering on the notorious Renaissance femme fatale is disappointing—largely because of Fleming's subpar contribution. The libretto is historical nonsense: after Lucrezia discovers her long-lost son Gennaro, her husband Alfonso suspects her of having an affair with the lad and hatches a plot to poison him; even though Lucrezia intervenes, Gennaro prefers to die along with the other victims of Alfonso's dastardly scheme. Fleming cuts a striking figure as the dubious heroine, but her singing lacks the focus and spark demanded by Donizetti's vocal pyrotechnics, coming across as rather cautious and even pallid. By contrast Michael Fabiano is a ringing Gennaro and Elizabeth DeShong is fine in the trousers role of his comrade-in-arms Orsini, although director John Pascoe overplays the sexual attraction between the two men. The remainder of the cast is good if unexceptional, Riccardo Frizza's conducting seems more efficient than inspired, and the sets and costumes veer from dark and uninteresting to simply garish. Ultimately, this production demanded an outstanding Lucrezia to rise above the ordinary, and Fleming simply doesn't fill the bill. The 2009 Munich performance with Edita Gruberova (VL-5/10) is preferable, despite its minimalist staging. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include interviews with Fleming, Fabiano, and DeShong, and a behind-the-scenes featurette. Optional. (F. Swietek)



Lulu ★★½

(1996) 183 min. Blu-ray: \$29.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-5063-7.



Despite some limitations, this Blu-ray release of a 1996 Glyndebourne production is a formidable contender amongst the various versions available of Alban Berg's 1937 opera about the ultimate femme fatale, an amoral seductress who disposes of several husbands and suitors before being killed (along with her lesbian lover) by Jack the Ripper. For a long time, *Lulu* had a reputation as a somewhat forbidding exercise in 12-tone serial composition, and performances were relatively rare. But since the unfinished third act was completed by Friedrich Cerha in 1979, the full piece has gained recognition as one of the modern masterpieces in the repertory, and been served well on disc, with excellent recent versions from Zurich (VL-9/04),

Covent Garden (VL-11/10), and the Salzburg Festival (VL-5/12). In this particular staging, the drawbacks—somewhat dated sound and a cramped aspect ratio reflecting the standards of the time—are overridden by the musical attributes. Andrew Davis draws lush playing from the London Philharmonic, giving the score romantic ripeness without sacrificing its spiky underpinnings. Christine Schäfer is a masterly Lulu, both in terms of her properly fierce acting and her ability to cope with the role's vocal demands (she's also ably supported by Kathryn Harries, Wolfgang Schöne, and the rest of the cast). Even the vaguely modern costumes and the spare stage set (a tall curving brick wall with a circular staircase) work in this case. Presented in LPCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Moby-Dick ★★½

(2012) 142 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$24.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America).



Since 2000's *Dead Man Walking*, American composer Jake Heggie has created a string of operas that have been warmly received by critics and the public alike. His latest, *Moby-Dick*—an adaptation of Herman Melville's literary classic written for the opening of the new Dallas opera house in 2010—is performed here in this 2012 mounting by the San Francisco Opera. While certainly his most ambitious work to date, *Moby-Dick* still boasts a traditionally tonal and immediately accessible score that often sounds like film music, albeit with hints of Benjamin Britten. The libretto by Gene Scheer obviously prunes down the novel, but does so with sensitivity, producing a well-flowing narrative that gives Heggie numerous opportunities for expressive touches. The physical production is elaborate: Robert Brill's shipboard set with riggings, masts, and whale-rendering apparatus is supplemented by Elaine J. McCarthy's imaginative rear projection imagery, which allows sailors to appear to be perched in whaleboats in a surging sea—paddling about amidst huge waves—among other special effects. Conductor Patrick Summers leads the orchestra with a sure hand, and the vocalism is excellent, with Jay Hunter Morris an obvious standout as the obsessive Captain Ahab, and Stephen Costello impressive as Greenhorn (ultimately revealed as Ishmael). Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include interviews with Heggie, Scheer, Summers, and major cast members, and a behind-the-scenes featurette. A large-scale contemporary opera that is easy on the ear and attractive to the eye, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Morrissey: 25Live

★★★

(2013) 92 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

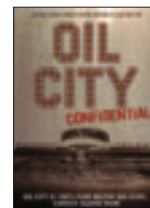


Indie rock legend Morrissey—who fronted The Smiths from 1982-87—takes the stage at Hollywood High School for this intimate 19-song set from 2013, celebrating 25 years of a solo career (albeit two-phase: 1988-1997 and 2003-2010). Backed by an almost entirely buff five-piece boy band, the middle-aged bard of the morose opens with “Alma Matters,” lyrically setting the scene for what’s to follow (“this is my life to destroy my own way”). Morrissey’s velvet vocals (“I have a lovely singing voice,” he says here, and he does) shine on songs that range from the political “Irish Blood, English Heart,” to the heartbreaking “Let Me Kiss You” (“so close your eyes/and think of someone you physically admire/and let me kiss you”), to the aggressively vegetarian in the Smiths’ hit “Meat Is Murder” (“and the turkey you festively slice—murder”). What makes Morrissey so much fun is the combination of eloquent Debbie Downer lyrics with infectious pop rock on songs like “Everyday Is Like Sunday,” “Ouija Board, Ouija Board,” “November Spawned a Monster,” “Speedway,” “You’re the One for Me Fatty,” and “I’m Throwing My Arms Around Paris” (sounds upbeat, I know, but...Paris gets the nod “because only stone and steel accept my love”). Although you wouldn’t know it from watching this solid concert, Morrissey was checked into a hospital with double pneumonia five days after the show. Extras include in-session studio recordings of four songs (three of which are also performed during the concert, including the rousing “Action Is My Middle Name”), behind-the-scenes footage, and a brief interview clip with Russell Brand, who introduced the singer at the concert. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (R. Pitman)

Oil City Confidential

★★★

(2013) 106 min. DVD: \$10.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



The title of filmmaker Julien Temple’s amusing documentary about the British band Dr. Feelgood—who pretty much invented the pub rock genre in 1971—refers to a below-sea-level enclave about an hour east of London called Canvey Island, home to massive refineries that share space with ramshackle cottages and a close-knit community that spawned Dr. Feelgood. *Oil City Confidential* is hosted by original guitarist Wilko Johnson, a manic, bullet-headed whirlwind

who tells the story of both Canvey Island and the band's origins with wacky charm and a touching sense of nostalgia. Temple (who made the acclaimed Sex Pistols opus, *The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle*) directs with a snappy, frenetic style, combining archival concert footage, home movies, real and faux film clips, and contemporary interviews with both the band's surviving members (singer Lee Brilleaux died in 1994) and other sixtysomething characters who were in Dr. Feelgood's dizzying orbit. Although their music was a punky mixture of American southern blues, R&B, and straight ahead rock, it was flavored by the culture of Canvey Island. DVD extras include bonus interview clips. A solid profile likely to appeal to older punk rockers and fans of Temple's other music docs, this is recommended. (T. Fry)

One Direction: This Is Us

★★★

(2013) 92 min. DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$35.99. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Documentary filmmaker Morgan Spurlock catapulted into the national spotlight when he stuffed himself with McDonald's hamburgers in *Super Size Me*. Now he's cashing in on a global pop music phenomenon with this authorized, relatively staid, but mostly insipid concert documentary centered on the wildly popular, British/Irish boy band One Direction. Filmed during the group's 2012-13 world tour, the film draws on live footage from more than 100 shows, ranging from London's O2 Arena to stops in Europe, Asia, Australia, Mexico, and North America, including Manhattan's Madison Square Garden and Los Angeles's Staples Center. Spurlock superficially profiles the five slouching, working-class lads, who range in age from 19 to 21: mop-topped Harry Styles, bland Louis Tomlinson, generous Zayn Malik (who buys his mother a house), acoustic guitar-playing Niall Horan, and heavily-accented Liam Payne. Along the way, the documentary looks at their unlikely beginning in 2010, when they were matched as mates by Simon Cowell on *The X Factor* competition; their squealing, screaming fans; and their adjustment to fame and fortune, which includes visits from Chris Rock and Martin Scorsese, and reportedly selling more than 16 million albums worldwide. Unlike some other pop music documentaries, there's no drinking, smoking, drugs, or sex here (hard partying seems to be verboten, as well as any mention of Styles's brief fling with songbird Taylor Swift). But then again this profile is duly authorized under Pepsi sponsorship, and vetted not only by Columbia TriStar but also by Syco Records (Simon Cowell's production company), and the quintet's management. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 on Blu-ray, extras

include extended scenes, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a music video. Exclusive to the Blu-ray release is a "Fan Cut" version of the film with four additional songs, and more. Optional. (S. Granger)

The Perfect American

★★★

(2013) 120 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



The title of Philip Glass's latest so-called "portrait opera" is definitely ironic, since the piece draws an unflattering picture of beloved House of Mouse founder Walt Disney. The libretto, fashioned by Rudy Wurlitzer from a novel by Peter Stephan Jungk, begins with Disney (Christopher Purves) at the end of his life, dying in a hospital, where he reflects on his childhood and later career. What we see is not the genial Uncle Walt of TV appearances but rather a right-wing ideologue and philandering racist who mercilessly drove a far more artistically talented staff—including Dantine (Donald Kaasch), a dedicated member of the animation team with leftist leanings, who Disney summarily dismissed. The disjunction between Disney's public and private faces isn't a bad premise for an opera, but it's consistently undermined here by Wurlitzer's inability to create a cohesive narrative arc, coupled with obstinately flat, mundane writing that even a fine cast can't quite transcend. Fortunately, the music partially makes up for the libretto's flaws: Glass's score is one of his most interesting, juxtaposing his usual insistent, minimalist propulsion against sweeter, more lyrical moments, with even a few brassy outbursts, as well as richer orchestration than he ordinarily employs. In this 2013 premiere from Madrid's Teatro Real, Dennis Russell Davie superbly conducts the orchestra, and the physical production—which includes projections of approximations of Disney's animal characters—is often striking. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on Blu-ray) and LPCM stereo, extras include a cast gallery. This is an imperfect *American*, but on the basis of the score alone is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Portnoy Sheehan MacAlpine Sherinian: Live in Tokyo

★★★1/2
(2012) 106 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Throughout this November 2012 engagement at Zepp Tokyo, four seasoned musicians play the kind of supercharged instrumental rock more likely to appeal to aspiring players than casual fans, not least because their tour grew out of a series of music clinics. In terms of genres, the hyperdemocratic quartet bridges the gap between

progressive rock and heavy metal by drawing on influences ranging from Deep Purple (Derek Sherinian's dramatic keyboard playing) to Metallica (Tony MacAlpine's rapid-fire guitar leads). As drummer Mike Portnoy, who played with Sherinian in the prog-metal band Dream Theater, explains to an enthusiastic audience, their 12-song (plus solos) set combines work that the members recorded separately and together, such as "The Stranger" from MacAlpine's 1986 *Edge of Insanity* album, which also featured bass player Billy Sheehan (Mr. Big, David Lee Roth). Since the others prefer playing to speaking (and Sheehan's "Shy Boy" from his former band Talas is the only vocal selection), the outgoing Portnoy doubles as master of ceremonies. Aside from the originals, the players cover Jeff Beck's regal track "The Pump." From start to finish, the band moves quickly and works well together, but they eschew memorable motifs in favor of head-banging beats (and air guitar-worthy moves). The editing and camerawork acknowledges the members' secondary roles as music instructors with frequent close-ups on their fingers. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. A strong optional purchase. (K. Femmessy)

The Rolling Stones: Sweet Summer Sun—Hyde Park Live

★★★1/2
(2013) 118 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Most rock bands from the 1960s that are still playing can be found on the oldies circuit, serving up bland hit medleys in hour-long sets before toddling offstage to get an early night's rest. Not the Rolling Stones. Forty-four years after they first wowed the crowd at the Glastonbury Festival in London's Hyde Park, the original bad boys of rock 'n' roll made their second appearance—in summer 2013—for this 16-song hit-laden set in front of 100,000-plus fans. Backed by towering video projection screens on a massive stage with a long runway, the Stones start it up with "Start Me Up," kicked off with Keith Richards' signature guitar riff, while svelte-and-strutting 70(!)-year-old frontman Mick Jagger embarks on his trademark hyperkinetic concert-long walk/run/funky chicken dance (I suspect Jagger put in miles before the end of the show). The third founding member, Charlie Watts, sets the rhythmic pace, while Ronnie-come-lately-Wood (only a Stone since 1975) lays down a wall of guitar sound. And the backup band shines—including decades-long Stones musicians Darryl Jones on bass, Chuck Leavell on keyboards, Bobby Keys on sax, and Lisa Fischer on vocals; even former guitarist Mick Taylor makes a welcome reunion appearance on a wonderfully long

and rambling "Midnight Rambler," as well as on the classic closer, "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction." The nonstop hit parade includes "Street Fighting Man," "Ruby Tuesday," "Honky Tonk Women," "Miss You," "Gimme Shelter," "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Sympathy for the Devil," and a beautiful, chorus-backed rendition of "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Never serving up workmanlike note-for-note versions of their songs, the Stones manage to keep things loose throughout while also sounding amazingly tight for a band playing in a huge outdoor venue. Extras include three bonus numbers (including a fine "Paint It Black"). Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this amazing concert proves that the Stones can still bring it a half-century on. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Shrek: The Musical

★★★1/2

(2013) 130 min. DVD: \$14.98. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$19.98. DreamWorks Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Scoring eight Tony nominations, including Best Musical (and winning for Best Costume Design), *Shrek: The Musical* is a rousing, big-hearted belter of a show based on William Steig's beloved 1990 picture book *Shrek!* and the subsequent DreamWorks hit film. Directed by Jason Moore, and featuring book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire, and music by Jeanine Tesori, this colorful, beautifully-staged 2009 production enhances the now-familiar tale with plenty of wink-wink Great White Way jokes and a fabulous score featuring 17 new songs. Brian d'Arcy James stars as the titular reclusive green ogre whose swamp now teems with squatting fairy tale characters evicted from their homes in Duloc by the ruthless diminutive ruler Lord Farquaad (Christopher Sieber). Since Farquaad needs a princess, and Shrek wants his land back, the pair strike a deal: Shrek—accompanied by the wisecracking Donkey (Daniel Breaker)—must rescue Princess Fiona (Sutton Foster) from a castle guarded by a dragon in return for his swamp. The cast uniformly shines, although the scene-stealer here is Foster, who winsomely combines innocence, heart, beauty, spunk, and the ability to cut a mean fart. And the standout score serves up several hummable tunes, including "Big Bright Beautiful World," "I Know It's Today," "Who I'd Be," "Morning Person," "I Think I Got You Beat," and the foot-stomping tolerance anthem "Freak Flag," not to mention an all-cast closing rendition of the Monkees' "I'm a Believer." Extras include sing-along songs, and a brief "making-of" featurette hosted by Cameron Diaz. A wonderful home video release that will be much appreciated by those who simply don't have access to Broadway

productions, this is highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Springsteen & I ★★★

(2013) 142 min. DVD: \$14.98. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Ridley Scott served as producer for this Bruce Springsteen-centric documentary from Baillie Walsh, in which fans provide the stories, performance footage, and three-word descriptions of the Boss, such as "passion, desire, freedom." One Dutch man caught his first Springsteen concert when he was 9 years old (it clocked in at three and a half hours), and has been a fan ever since. Other speakers describe onstage encounters, including a Scottish woman who got her wish to dance with Springsteen like Courteney Cox in the "Dancing in the Dark" music video, and an Elvis impersonator who realized a lifelong ambition when he performed "All Shook Up" with Springsteen and the E Street Band. Also featured are plenty of offstage encounters, including a jam session with a Copenhagen busker. In other clips, fans simply talk about the role that Springsteen's music has played in their lives, such as the trucker who listens to the acoustic *Nebraska* during her cross-country excursions, calling the album "political, but poetic at the same time." One of the more amusing testimonials comes from a little girl who says, "You can see his veins popping out, because he's working so hard." As viewers will note during performances of "Thunder Road" and "Born to Run," she's right. Extras include additional fan submissions and bonus songs. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (K. Fennesy)

UB40: Live at Montreux 2002 ★★1/2

(2002) 96 min. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Differing from other British 2 Tone groups such as the Specials, Birmingham outfit UB40 put more of a pop or soul spin on ska than the more favored punk (the English Beat borrowed from all three camps). In this 2002 Montreux Jazz Festival performance, they concentrate on old favorites and crowd-pleasing renditions of Motown and Brill Building numbers. The lineup includes brothers Ali and Robin Campbell (vocals and guitar), Earl Falconer (bass), Mickey Virtue (keyboards), James Brown (drums), Norman Hassan and Astro (percussion), and a four-man horn section. As on their bestselling 1983 covers collection *Labour of Love*, they add reggae rhythms to everything, including The Temptations' hit

"The Way You Do the Things You Do" and Al Green's "Here I Am (Come and Take Me)." These up-tempo classics work better than the mid-tempo songs that comprise much of their original material, with the exception of the protest anthem "One in Ten." Although Ali handles the lion's share of the vocals, Falconer picks up the mic to toast on "Reggae Music" and "Rat in Mi Kitchen" (Astro and Hassan also trade vocals on the Slickers' "Johnny Too Bad"). The 21-song set ends with their signature cover, Neil Diamond's "Red, Red Wine." For an encore, they play two more *Labour* favorites, Eric Donaldson's "Cherry Oh Baby" and a version of Jimmy Cliff's yearning "Many Rivers to Cross" (which would have benefited from a statelier pace). While the music comes across clearly, the commentary between some songs could have used a little post-production sweetening, since some words are impossible to make out. Debuting on Blu-ray with DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo sound options, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennesy)

Willy DeVille: Live in the Lowlands ★★1/2

(2005) 119 min. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Late singer and guitarist Willy DeVille combines jazz and soul in this 21-song set from a 2005 performance with his seven-piece band Mink DeVille at Amsterdam's Paradiso Club. The band opens with a cover of War's "Low Rider," featuring Hook Hererra on blues-powered harmonica, after which DeVille takes the stage clad in a black-and-white flamenco-inspired ensemble decorated with silver and turquoise jewelry. If his nicotine-stained voice recalls contemporaries such as Bruce Springsteen and Tom Waits, the instrumentation, which includes accordion and standup bass—shares more in common with a Tex-Mex outfit like Los Lobos. At times, he's hard to understand—DeVille tends to segue from words into growls when he isn't taking a drag from an ever-present cigarette—but his angelic backup singers counterbalance his sour with their sweet. DeVille, who uses a cane, remains seated the entire time, but it's hardly a listless performance; he just has his own unique way of working up a sweat. For the most part, he sticks to roots-oriented material, with the exception of Bryan Ferry's "Slave to Love," a callback to his origins as a player on the fringes of the 1980s new wave and post-punk scene. If DeVille had chosen to perform solo, his voice wouldn't have been up to the task ("Change of Heart" here is especially rough), but with these players his limited range is much less of a liability and his slide guitar playing shines throughout. Bowing on Blu-ray with DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo sound options, extras include an interview with DeVille. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennesy)

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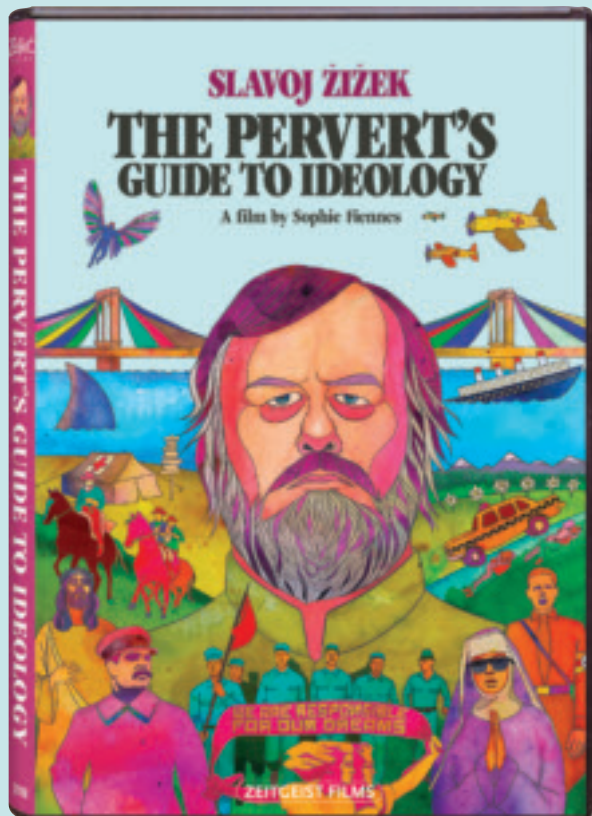
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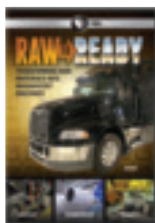
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Mo' Better Docs

Another year (the ninth, actually), another "Best Docs" list. With the latest set of 25 winners (see pg. 49), the total now tops 200 (all appear in annotated annual lists online in the "Resources" section of Video Librarian Plus!, www.videolibrarian.com).

Once again *Video Librarian* staff hunkered down between June and October, watching close to 200 documentaries in order to create the list.

I can think of worse jobs.

Past "Best Documentaries" lists have been a mix of higher-profile films (including *The Cove*, *Grizzly Man*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Inside Job*, *The Invisible War*, *Jesus Camp*, *Man on Wire*, *March of the Penguins*, *Murderball*, *No End in Sight*, *Project Nim*, *Sicko*, *Taxi to the Dark Side*, *Waiting for Superman*, *Waltz with Bashir*, *Wordplay*, and *Young @ Heart*) and lesser-known titles (such as *51 Birch Street*, *Beethoven's Hair*, *Big Enough*, *The City Dark*, *Dear Zachary*, *Family Affair*, *Four Seasons Lodge*, *Hacking Democracy*, *The Hobart Shakespeareans*, *The Learning*, *A Life Without Pain*, *Lucky*, *Monster Camp*, *No Impact Man*, *Nursery University*, *Sister Helen*, *So Much So Fast*, *Sunset Story*, and *Yellow Brick Road*).

This year's list reminds me that the best

documentaries are often built around stories that need to be told—whether of interesting people or pressing social issues.

Folks I won't forget anytime soon include the decidedly quasi-social former Cream drummer Ginger Baker, who takes a cane to filmmaker Jay Bulger's schnoz in the opening scene of the aptly-titled *Beware of Mr. Baker*. Or David Ritz, the tattooed earring-wearing ghostwriter for straight-arrow Ralph Branca—the former Brooklyn Dodgers' pitcher who threw the game-losing pitch known as the "shot heard round the world"—in director Andrew J. Muscato's *Branca's Pitch*. Or Ian Cauble, Dustin Wilson, DLYnn Proctor, and Brian McClintic—four wine buddies who tirelessly work the flashcards and endlessly sip-and-spit into their cups during their quest to become Master Sommeliers in filmmaker Jason Wise's *Somm*. Or Ethel Kennedy, a woman who has seen more than her fair share of tragedy, yet remains a familial and social force of nature, as lovingly depicted in her daughter Rory Kennedy's moving *Ethel*.

There are also things I will look at differently now. And that list starts with SeaWorld, thanks to filmmaker Gabriela Cowperthwaite's disturbing *Blackfish*, an investigative report on the dangers and questionable ethics of keeping orcas (or killer whales) in captiv-

ity in order to perform in staged shows for audiences. Although I am a big football fan (go Seahawks!), I'm worried about the long-term negative health effects of playing contact sports after seeing Steve James' persuasive documentary about concussions, *Head Games*. And I am both amazed and angered by the underlying racism towards blacks, Latinos, and poor whites that lies behind the failed "War on Drugs," an argument forcefully made by filmmaker Eugene Jarecki in *The House I Live In*.

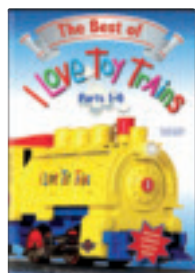
Entertaining, enlightening, endearing, enraging—these are just some of the feelings I associate with watching documentaries, the best of which enrich our lives personally and sometimes even change the world.

I'm already excited about seeing several of the documentaries reviewed in this issue, including our featured cover title on bee colony collapse disorder, *More Than Honey*; the pro-nuke *Pandora's Promise*; the art history doc *Portrait of Wally*; the garbage collection performance piece *Trash Dance*; and the biographical profile *Strongman*.

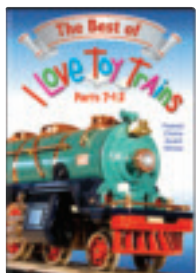
Speaking of "strong," I'd best go gird my loins for the next round of 200 docs.

Randy Pitman

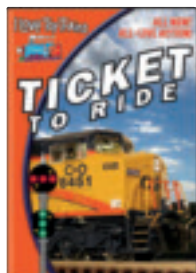
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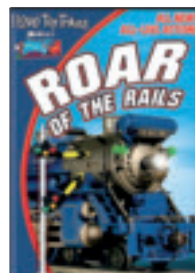
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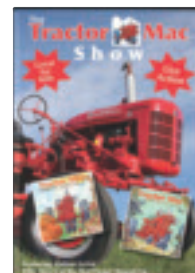
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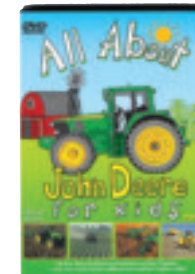
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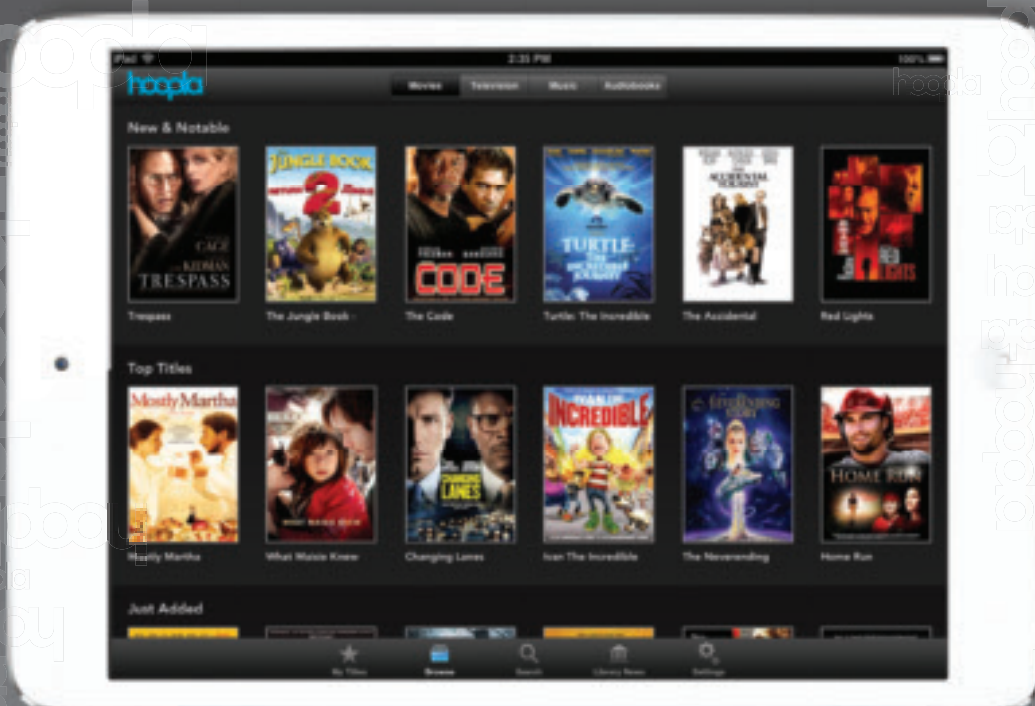
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