

January-February 2013

Video Librarian

VOL. 28 ■ THE VIDEO REVIEW MAGAZINE FOR LIBRARIES ■ NO. 1




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Spotlight Review

Pina ★★★1/2
 (2011) 103 min. In German, English, Russian, French, Italian, Slovenian, Spanish, Portuguese & Korean w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$44.95. *The Criterion Collection* (avail. from most distributors, Jan. 22).



An Oscar nominee for Best Documentary, this exhilarating film from director Wim Wenders celebrates legendary German choreographer Philippina "Pina" Bausch. For nearly 10 years, Wenders worked on the concept with Bausch and the Ensemble of the Tanztheater Wuppertal. Sadly, Bausch suddenly and unexpectedly died on June 30, 2009, at age 68, just days before film production was scheduled to begin. After a period of mourning and extensive re-evaluation, Wenders decided to turn his focus on Bausch's uniquely innovative and highly stylized choreography. Featured among the composed dance selections here are *Café Müller*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Vollmond*, and *Kontakthof*—Bausch's four signature pieces, which had already been prepared for filming before her untimely demise, along with archival footage of Bausch at work. What's intriguing is her creative process:

Bausch would pose questions, like a psychotherapist, and her graceful, multinational dancers would answer—not in words, but with improvised gestures, movement, and body language, expressing their intimate emotions and experiences. Following her example, Wenders asked each of Bausch's distinctive dancers to convey their personal memories of Pina in solo performances, filming them in and around Wuppertal and in the countryside of Bergisches Land. Wenders' *Pina* doesn't include much personal or background information as unidentified dancers pay tribute to their leader (who departed to "dance in the clouds") in reverent voiceovers and talking head interviews, but as a performance documentary, this one shines. Extras include a director's audio commentary, a "making-of" featurette, deleted scenes, behind-the-scenes footage, an interview with Wenders, and a booklet. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Granger)

Video Librarian will be exhibiting at the annual ALA Midwinter Meeting in Seattle, WA, from January 25-28. We hope you will drop by our booth (#737) to say hello!

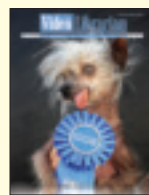
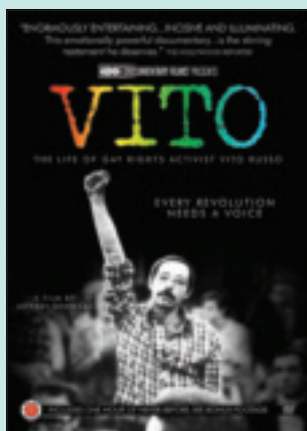


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VITO

93 minutes, color, \$295 w/PPR

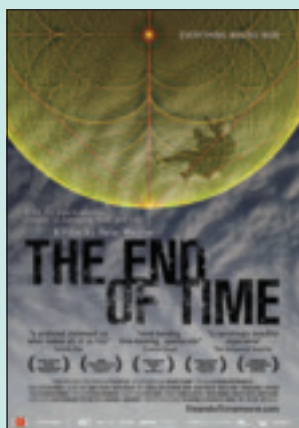
In 1969, a police raid on a gay bar called the Stonewall took a surprising turn when patrons decided to fight back. A riot erupted and a new era was born. Vito Russo, a 23-year-old film student, was among the crowd. Newly politicized, Vito found his voice as a gay activist and critic of LGBT representation in the media. He went on to write "The Celluloid Closet," the first book to critique Hollywood's portrayals of gays on screen. During the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, Vito became a passionate advocate for justice via the newly formed ACT UP, before his own death from AIDS in 1990.

"I highly recommend it to anyone interested in pop culture, in civil rights, or in how the two are deeply connected. Through his story, 'Vito' becomes not just a biography but a history of his times, as a fight against discrimination became a fight for life."

-James Poniewozik, Time

"Moving! 'Vito' is lush with fascinating archival interviews and footage."

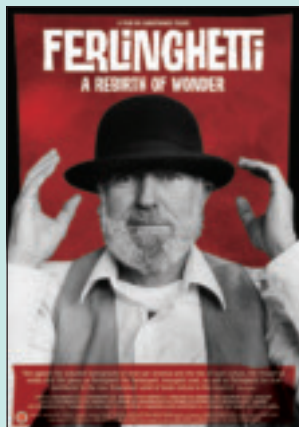
-Hank Stuever, The Washington Post



THE END OF TIME

109 minutes, color, \$295 w/PPR

"Recalling the work of Terrence Malick, Werner Herzog and the late Chris Marker" (Hollywood Reporter), Peter Mettler's new film combines elements of documentary, essay, and experimental cinema to create a tour de force that challenges our conception of time – and perhaps the fabric of our existence. Travelling from the CERN particle accelerator to the lava flows of Hawaii; from the disintegrating Detroit where Ford built his first factory to the tree where Buddha was enlightened, the film explores the links between renewal and destruction, between primordial mysticism and modern science.



FERLINGHETTI: A REBIRTH OF WONDER

73 minutes, color, \$195 w/PPR

This definitive documentary is an incisive portrait of literary polymath Lawrence Ferlinghetti. In one-on-one interviews made over the course of a decade, he reflects on events that began to unfold in postwar America – including the publication of Ginsberg's *Howl*, Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, and Kerouac's *On the Road* – as well as the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, and the founding of City Lights. Ferlinghetti reads his poems, discusses his activism, and offers unguarded insight into nine decades of his life. Features appearances by Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Billy Collins, Dennis Hopper, Robert Scheer, Dave Eggers, and Pulitzer Prize winner Gary Snyder.



ORCHESTRA OF EXILES

85 minutes, color, \$195 w/PPR

From the director of the Oscar-nominated *Sound and Fury* comes the meticulously crafted tale of the man who saved Europe's best Jewish musicians from the Nazis during WWII. As Hitler began firing Jewish musicians across Europe, he unwittingly created a unique opportunity – never before had so many top orchestra players been simultaneously jobless. Overcoming extraordinary obstacles, violinist Bronislaw Huberman moved these virtuosos to Palestine and formed a symphony that would become the great Israel Philharmonic.

"Demonstrates the very concrete way in which culture is preserved and maintained, with transmission and human survival becoming intertwined realities." -The New York Times



56 UP

139 minutes, color, \$195 w/PPR

"Give me the child until he is seven and I will give you the man."

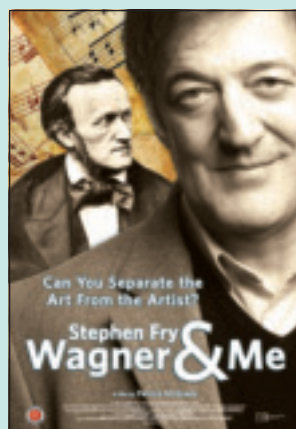
The UP Series has explored this Jesuit maxim for over half a century. The original concept was to interview children from diverse backgrounds from all over England about their lives and their future dreams. Every seven years, renowned director Michael Apted has returned to talk to them, examining their progress. Now they are 56. An extraordinary look at our time, The UP Series is, according to critic Roger Ebert, "an inspired, almost noble use of the film medium. Apted penetrates to the central mystery of life."



MUMIA: LONG DISTANCE REVOLUTIONARY

120 minutes, color, \$295 w/PPR

Focusing on Mumia Abu-Jamal's prolific career from the depths of prison, this film chronicles his life and work as a journalist, philosopher, and revolutionary and his impact on political discourse around the globe. The film spans the events of Mumia's early career in journalism as a writer for the Black Panther newspaper, to his promising future as a reporter for NPR, to his battles with the American justice system over the continuation of his revolutionary journalism and radio broadcasts from prison – both before and after his incarceration on Death Row.



WAGNER & ME

89 minutes, color, \$195 w/PPR

English actor and raconteur Stephen Fry explores his passion for history's most controversial composer, Richard Wagner. Can he salvage Wagner's music from its association with Hitler? Animated by Fry's trademark wit and intelligence and set against the backdrop of Germany's annual Bayreuth Festival, this is a provocative yet enjoyable introduction to the life and legacy of one of music's most complicated geniuses.

"★★★★ With an enthusiasm as genuine as it is infectious, Stephen Fry investigates his fondness for the opera of Richard Wagner."

-Nick Schager, Time Out



COMING SOON TO HOME VIDEO



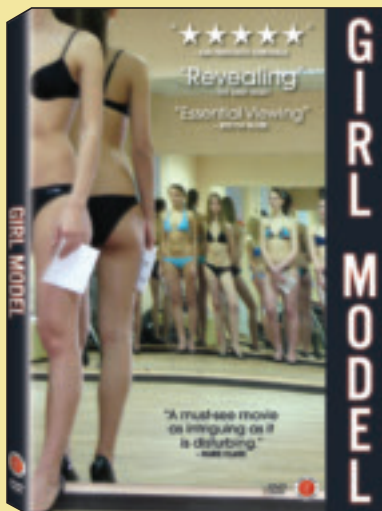
THREE STARS

94 minutes, color, SRP: \$27.95
FRF 915236D
STREET DATE: JANUARY 15

"The dishes dazzle in this cinematic helping of some of the world's finest restaurants. Most tantalizing - serious foodies will chow down!"
-The New York Times

Focusing on ten world-class chefs, *Three Stars* depicts the everyday drama of life in gourmet restaurants and includes exclusive interviews and behind-the-scenes access to these multi-talented culinary artisans as they explore new creations in their gastronomic laboratories, hunt for exquisite ingredients in local markets, and gather rare edible plants along rough coastlines.

By highlighting not only their culinary philosophies but also their daily kitchen routines, the film reveals the business of cooking on the highest level. It also opens a window into what goes into the world's most important restaurant review book – the iconic red Michelin Guide.



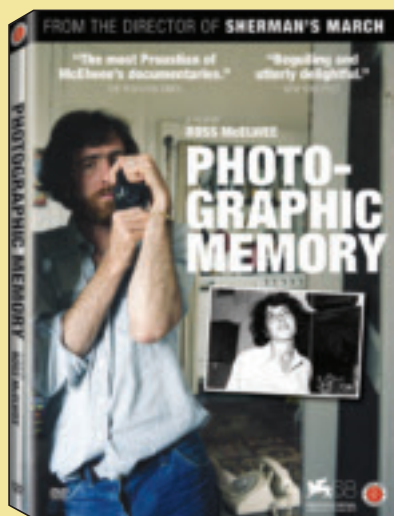
GIRL MODEL

77 minutes, color, SRP: \$27.95
FRF 915342D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 12

"A must-see movie as intriguing as it is disturbing."
-Marie Claire
"A powerful documentary. Essential viewing."
-Boston Globe

Girl Model explores how young girls are discovered in obscure corners of the globe and initiated into the high stakes modeling industry. The film follows two protagonists: a former model and now scout who scours the Siberian countryside looking for fresh faces; and one of her discoveries, a 13-year-old plucked from her rustic home in Russia and dropped into the center of bustling Tokyo with promises of a profitable career.

As the Los Angeles Times said, the film "gets under the skin-deep promises of glamour and wealth that lure an endless stream of very young hopefuls...and captures something beyond hard facts."



PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY

87 minutes, color, SRP: \$27.95
FRF 915335D
STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 12

"Ross McElwee adds another wonderful personal memoir, a film that is both forward-looking and elegiac. Grade: A."
-Christian Science Monitor

Filmmaker Ross McElwee (*Sherman's March*, *Bright Leaves*) finds himself in frequent conflict with his son, a young adult who seems addicted to and distracted by the virtual worlds of the internet. To understand his fractured love for his son, McElwee travels back to St. Quay-Portrieux in Brittany for the first time in decades to retrace his own journey into adulthood. A meditation on the passing of time, the praxis of photography and film, and the digital versus analog divide.

"The most Proustian of McElwee's documentaries," (New York Times), *Photographic Memory* is "beguiling and utterly delightful" (New York Post).



WAITING FOR LIGHTNING

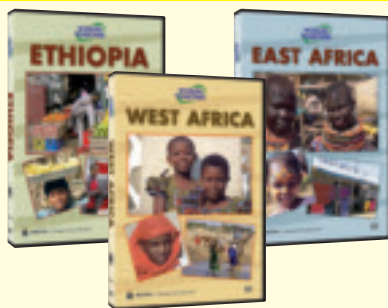
80 minutes, color
DVD: \$24.95 (FRF 915397D)
Blu Ray + DVD Combo: \$29.95
(FRF 915403D)
STREET DATE: MARCH 5

*"★★★★★!
An eye-opening, compelling, inspiring story. Simply put, in skateboarding slang, this is one gnarly film."*
-Noah Lee, FILM THREAT

Waiting For Lightning is the story of Danny Way, a young boy from a broken home whose passion for skateboarding would one day bring him and his creation - a ramp of dangerous proportions - across many cultural and ideological boundaries to attempt the impossible: jump China's Great Wall on a skateboard. It's a film about how much abuse the body can sustain, how deep you have to dig to survive the betrayals of family, and how high and far dreams can fly.

Featuring a who's who of action sports all-stars including Travis Pastrana, Laird Hamilton, Tony Hawk, Rodney Mullen, Mat Hoffman and Ken Block.

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Video Newsbriefs

Criterion February Releases Include Blu-ray Debut of "On the Waterfront"

Criterion's February slate kicks off February 5 with the release of *The Ballad of Narayama* (DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95), Keisuke Kinoshita's gorgeous 1958 film based on a Japanese folk tale set in a remote mountain village, where food is scarce and tradition dictates that citizens who have reached their 70th year must be carried to the summit of Mount Narayama and left to die. Bonus features include a booklet. Coming February 12 is the latest work from the Belgian Dardenne brothers, 2011's *The Kid with a Bike* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), which tells the story of an angry 12-year-old (Thomas Doret) living in a group home who refuses to believe he has been rejected by his single father (Jérémie Renier)—see review in this issue on page 26. One of the most iconic of all American films bows in high-definition on February 19: Elia Kazan's 1954 Oscar-sweeping *On the Waterfront* (DVD: 3 discs, \$39.95; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.95), starring Lee J. Cobb, Rod Steiger, and Marlon Brando in a career-defining role as a prizefighter-turned-longshoreman who struggles with a deepening moral crisis. Bonus features include the 1982 documentary "Elia Kazan: Outsider." Slated for February 26—and newly available for the first time on Blu-ray or DVD in the U.S.—is the landmark cinema vérité snapshot of Paris in 1960, 1961's *Chronicle of a Summer* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), a fascinating collaboration between filmmaker-anthropologist Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin that reveals the hopes and dreams of a wide array of people, from artists to factory workers to an African student. Bonus features include the 2011 companion doc *Un été + 50*. Also newly available on February 26 is the Blu-ray debut of Kenji Mizoguchi's 1954 drama *Sansho the Bailiff* (Blu-ray: \$39.95), a heartbreaking masterpiece from Japanese cinema's golden age that follows an idealistic governor separated from his family after being cast into exile by the reigning feudal lord. Bonus features include a booklet.

"Peter Pan" is Walt Disney's Latest "Diamond Edition" Bowing on February 5

On February 5, Walt Disney Studios celebrates the 60th anniversary of executive producer Walt's iconic animated

adventure *Peter Pan* with its Blu-ray debut (Blu-ray/DVD Combo: 2 discs, \$39.99), which features a new digital restoration and high definition picture and sound. Based on the classic



tale by J.M. Barrie, the 1953 film is the work of Walt's "Nine Old Men" collective of directing animators. The story of the Darling children—Wendy, John, and Michael—who fly with Peter Pan and Tinker Bell past the second star to the right and straight on 'till morning to the enchanted world of Never Land, this timeless film from Disney's "Golden Age" features the voices of Bobby Driscoll, Kathryn Beaumont, and Hans Conried. Also available in a three-disc combo pack (for \$44.99) with a bonus digital copy and storybook app, extra features include an intro by Diane Disney Miller, the featurette "Growing Up with Nine Old Men," deleted scenes, and a never-before-heard deleted song.

Universal Studios Home Entertainment Announces 28-Day Window for Libraries

Beginning with the January 8 release of *Hit & Run*, new releases from Universal Studios Home Entertainment (both theatrical and made-for-video) will be subject to a 28-day embargo before being made available to libraries through distributors. These titles will still be the retail versions, and the new policy will have no effect on TV and catalog titles. Warner was the last studio to adopt an extended window policy for video stores and libraries, but—like Sony, Fox, Paramount, and other studios, who all ultimately abandoned similar plans—Warner reversed their policy (although in Warner's case, the studio continues to sell "rental" versions to libraries—but with no delay period).

Correction

In my November-December editorial "The Digital World," I noted that Morgan Spurlock's documentary *Mansome* had been released in a digital-only format in July and was not available on DVD or Blu-ray. Two days after we went to press, Lionsgate announced a December 11 DVD release date for *Mansome*. The point of the editorial—about how digital releases impact libraries—remains the same. *Randy Pitman, Editor*

NEW!

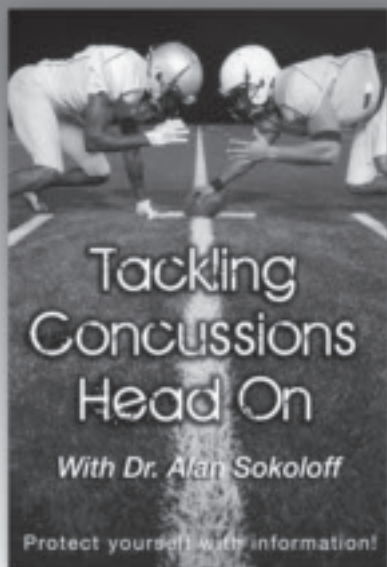
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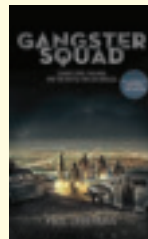
LVN
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www.lvn.org

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

Coming in January

Gangster Squad (Jan. 11) is based on Paul Lieberman's 2012 nonfiction book about a special LAPD unit devoted to battling gangsters in the 1940s and '50s. Directed by Ruben Fleischer, the film stars Josh Brolin, Ryan Gosling, Emma Stone, Sean Penn, and Nick Nolte.



Quartet (Jan. 11, in limited release) is based on the 1999 play by Ronald Harwood. Set at a retirement home for musicians, director Dustin Hoffman's dramedy stars Michael Gambon, Maggie Smith, and Billy Connolly.



Parker (Jan. 25) is adapted from Richard Stark's (aka Donald E. Westlake) 2000 crime novel *Flashfire*. Directed by Taylor Hackford, the thriller stars Jason Statham, Jennifer Lopez, Michael Chiklis, Nick Nolte, and Patti LuPone.

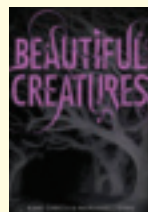


Coming in February

Warm Bodies (Feb. 1) is based on Isaac Marion's 2011 debut novel. A story of romance during a zombie apocalypse—with an undead protagonist—director Jonathan Levine's adaptation stars Nicholas Hoult, Teresa Palmer, and Dave Franco.



Beautiful Creatures (Feb. 13) is adapted from the 2009 *New York Times* bestselling YA fantasy novel by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl. The first book in the "Caster Chronicles"



series, the mystery drama from director Richard LaGravenese stars Alden Ehrenreich, Viola Davis, Alice Englert, Jeremy Irons, and Emma Thompson.

Safe Haven (Feb. 14) is adapted from the 2010 novel by Nicholas Sparks. Directed by Lasse Hallström, the romantic drama stars Julianne Hough, Josh Duhamel, Cobie Smulders, and David Lyons.



Looking Ahead

Slated for March is the third adaptation of Stephen King's 1974 debut novel, *Carrie*. Directed by Kimberly Peirce, the classic horror story stars Chloë Grace Moretz, Julianne Moore, Judy Greer, Gabriella Wilde, and Michelle Nolden.



Also slated for March is *The Host*, based on *Twilight* author Stephenie Meyer's 2008 sci-fi romance novel. A story of aliens taking over human bodies, director Andrew Niccol's adaptation stars Saoirse Ronan, Diane Kruger, Max Irons, Frances Fisher, William Hurt, and Bokeem Woodbine.



Also coming in March is *Oz: The Great and Powerful*, director Sam Raimi's film inspired by L. Frank Baum's 1900 classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. A prequel to both the book and the 1939 movie, the fantasy adventure stars James Franco as the titular magician, along with Mila Kunis, Michelle Williams, Rachel Weisz, and Zach Braff.



Coming in April is *The Company You Keep*, based on Neil Gordon's 2003 novel. Directed by Robert Redford, the political action thriller stars Redford, Shia LaBeouf, Julie Christie, Sam Elliott, Susan Sarandon, Terrence Howard, and Brendan Gleeson.



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Our database includes the full suite of films from **Filmakers Library**, an imprint of Alexander Street Press that has licensed issue-based documentaries for academia for more than 40 years. It also features hundreds of films in counseling and therapy from **Microtraining Associates**, including training films, actual therapy sessions, and talks filmed at the field's leading conferences and events.

With thousands of titles included, there's a film Alexander Street's database to meet the needs and interests of nearly any academic classroom. Recent additions include:

- ***Electoral Dysfunction***, the acclaimed feature-length documentary that uses humor and wit to take an irreverent, nonpartisan look at voting in America.
- ***Freedom***, an award-winning exploration of alternative energy sources following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.
- ***Gods of Rice***, a rich look at the global importance of rice, a crop genetic engineering is poised to change forever.
- ***Lost and Sound***, a dazzling film that weaves its way through the world of three extraordinary people trying to rediscover music after losing their hearing.
- ***Obedience***, a film capturing Stanley Milgram's 1961 study on obedience to authority.
- ***Quiet Rage***, the classic retrospective on Philip Zimbardo's infamous Stanford Prison experiment.
- ***Seventh-Gay Adventists***, an examination of the collision of faith, identity, and sexuality as three gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists strive for acceptance in their religious communities.
- ***Sholem Aleichem***, a riveting portrait of the writer whose stories became the basis of the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.
- ***The Silent Truth***, the story of a couple with grave suspicions about their daughter's death in Iraq, ruled a suicide by the US army, that fights to have her case reopened.

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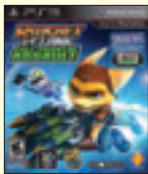
Mixed Media features new release information on upcoming video games and TV series on DVD/Blu-ray, as well as notable older titles that are re-priced or new to DVD/Blu-ray.

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

Ratchet & Clank: Full Frontal Assault (Sony, PS3: \$19.99, Rated: E10+). In the latest installment of this classic third-person action-adventure franchise, the titular duo return to wipe out waves of enemies on battlefields using outrageous weapons in single-player or multiplayer campaigns with new styles of play, including a tower defense mode.



January 6—January 12

Anarchy Reigns (Sega, PS3/X360: \$29.99, Rated: M). Players can choose from eight different human and cyborg characters with unique styles, weapons, and signature kills in this open-world third-person fantasy brawler.

January 13—January 19

DmC: Devil May Cry (Capcom, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this next-gen prequel to the popular third-person action series, players step into the boots of Dante during his early years as he discovers and comes to terms with what it means to be the child of a demon and an angel.



Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 (City Interactive, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). Players suit up as a special ops sniper in this realistic first-person shooter sequel that ranges from Bosnia to the Himalayas.

January 20—January 26

Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch (Namco Bandai, PS3: \$59.99, Rated: E10+).

Featuring animation by the legendary Studio Ghibli (*Spirited Away*, *The Secret World of Arrietty*), this third-person role-playing epic sends young Oliver on a quest into an alternate world to save his mother.

February 3—February 9

Dead Space 3 (Electronic Arts, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). Isaac Clarke is back in this third installment of the bestselling third-person survival horror action game, set on the frozen planet of Tau Volantis, which holds the key to ending the Necromorph plague.



Omerta: City of Gangsters (Kalypso, X360: \$49.99, Rated: T). In this simulation game with tactical turn-based combat, players start with small jobs, eventually establishing their own crime syndicate in order to become the de facto ruler of Prohibition-era Atlantic City.

Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time (Sony, PS3: \$59.99, Rated: E10+). In this stealth-oriented, third-person, action-platform next-gen addition to the popular PS2 series, Sly's old buddy Bentley must round up the gang and save the Cooper Clan legacy from being destroyed forever.

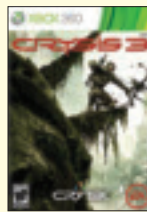
February 10—February 16

Aliens: Colonial Marines (Sega, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this first-person shooter inspired by the claustrophobic and terrifying atmosphere of the *Alien* film franchise, the player steps into the boots of a marine tasked with wiping out the Xenomorph infestation.

Painkiller: Hell & Damnation (Nordic Games, PS3/X360: \$29.99, Rated: M). In this remake of the classic first-person shooter PC game, players take on the role of Daniel Garner, tasked with fighting his way past hordes of demons and fiends.

February 17—February 23

Crysis 3 (Electronic Arts, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this threequel from the popular first-person shooter series, the player returns to the fight as Prophet, wearing a powerful nanosuit while taking on alien hordes in a future New York City that has been

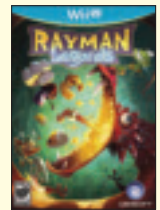


turned into an urban rainforest beneath a giant nanodome.

Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance (Konami, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this third-person action game set in the near future, players control Raiden, a child soldier transformed into a half-man, half-machine cyborg ninja, equipped with a high-frequency katana blade and a soul fueled by revenge.

February 24—March 2

Rayman Legends (Ubisoft, WiiU: \$59.99, Rated: E10+). Making full use of the new Wii U controller, 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.



TV on DVD/Blu-ray

Available Now

Breaking In: The Complete Series (Sony, DVD: 2 discs, \$38.99). Christian Slater, Megan Mullally, and Bret Harrison star in this short-lived 2011-12 series set at a high-tech security firm.

Chiller: The Complete Television Series (CAV, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95). This five-episode 1995 horror anthology features U.K. stars including Nigel Havers, Martin Clunes, Sophie Ward, and Kevin McNally.



Justified: The Complete Third Season (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$55.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$75.99). Continuing with the action-packed duties of U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens (Timothy Olyphant), who protects his rural Kentucky hometown, this 2012 third season based on the character created by Elmore Leonard introduces a new villain (Neal McDonough).

Shipping Wars: Season One (A&E, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.98). Independent shippers take on bizarre cargo in this 2012 first season that includes episodes such as "Cash for Tanks," "Double Down and Bean Town," "Pain in the Caboose," and "Tavern on the Greenbacks."



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Top Shot: Season Four (A&E, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.95). Contestants compete in battles featuring weapons and tactics ranging from medieval crossbows to contemporary sniper missions in this 2012 fourth season of the History-aided reality series.



Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities, Underbelly: The Golden Mile, and Underbelly: War on the Streets (eOne, DVD: 4 discs each, \$39.99 each). Based on the real life 1970s Australian crime wave, these boxed sets compile the 2008-10 series starring Paul Tassone and Caroline Craig.

January 1

Being Human: The Complete Second Season (eOne, DVD or Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$39.99). Sam Witwer, Meaghan Rath, and Sam Huntington star as a trio of supernatural roommates in this 2012 sophomore season of the Syfy-aided stateside remake of the popular British fantasy series.

Trial & Retribution, Set 6 (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$49.99). Starring David Hayman and Victoria Smurfit, this final collection from Lynda La Plante's popular crime series includes four two-part episodes from 2008-09: "Tracks," "Siren," "Ghost Train," and "Shooter."

January 8

Anger Management: Season One (Lionsgate, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$29.98). Charlie Sheen stars as a chaotic private therapist in this FX-aided 2012 debut season of the series (inspired by the 2003 feature film) that also stars Selma Blair, Shawnee Smith, and Brett Butler.



Archer: The Complete Season Three (Fox, DVD or Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$29.98). In this 2011-12 third season of the Emmy-nominated animated comedy, super spy Sterling Archer's (voiced by H. Jon Benjamin) deceased fiancée comes back as a cyborg.

Buck Rogers in the 25th Century: Season Two (Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$24.99). Following a devastating nuclear catastrophe, Captain William "Buck" Rogers (Gil Gerard) and Colonel Wilma Deering (Erin

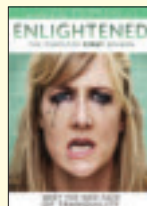
Gray) search for Earthlings on alien worlds in this 1981 second and final season of the sci-fi adventure series.

Dallas: The Complete First Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). Featuring the return of stars Linda Gray, Patrick Duffy, and the late Larry Hagman, among others, this 2012 first season of the reboot of the classic nighttime drama adds Josh Henderson and Jesse Metcalfe as members of the newest generation of the wealthy Ewing clan.

Dance Moms: Season 2, Volume 1 and Dance Moms: Season 2, Volume 2 (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs each, \$24.98 each). Pittsburgh dance instructor Abby Lee Miller clashes with the parents of young performers in these episode collections from the 2012 second season of the Lifetime-aided reality series.

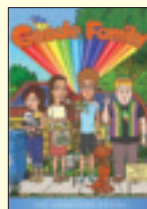
Doctor Who: Shada (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). Filmed for the 1979-80 season, this unfinished and never-broadcast story revolving around the titular lost planet features Tom Baker as the Doctor.

Enlightened: The Complete First Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.99). Laura Dern stars as a fortysomething returning home after learning self-healing tips at a mental treatment facility in this 2011 first season of the HBO series that also features Diane Ladd and Luke Wilson.



Episodes: The Complete First & Second Seasons (Showtime, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.98). A married British writing team (Stephen Mangan and Tamsin Greig) see their work being butchered by a wacky American actor (Matt LeBlanc) after it crosses the big pond in this compilation from the 2011-12 first and second seasons of the Showtime comedy series.

The Goode Family: The Complete Series (Shout! Factory, DVD: 2 discs, \$22.99). Co-created by Mike Judge, this short-lived 2009 animated sitcom about a politically correct family features the voices of Nancy Carell, Linda Cardellini, and David Herman.



The Hour 2 (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Set in the world

of British broadcasting during the mid-1950s and incorporating historical events including the Space Race and the Cold War, this 2012 second season stars Romola Garai, Tom Burke, Peter Capaldi, and Oona Chaplin.

An Idiot Abroad 2 (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Executive producers Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant help pal Karl Pilkington work on his "bucket list" in this 2011 second series of the satirical travelogue show.

Midsomer Murders: Set 21 (Acorn, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$59.99). Midsomer continues to be a treacherous place to reside in this 21st set that features John Nettles and Barry Jackson in episodes culled from the 2011 14th season.



Red Dwarf X (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Featuring the first new episodes since 2009, this 2012 10th season of the sci-fi comedy series about incompetents on the titular mining ship features Craig Charles, Chris Barrie, and Danny John-Jules.

Smash: Season One (Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$59.98). A gifted newcomer (Katharine McPhee) goes up against a veteran (Megan Hilty) for a juicy Broadway role in this 2012 first season of the musical drama that also features Debra Messing and Anjelica Huston.



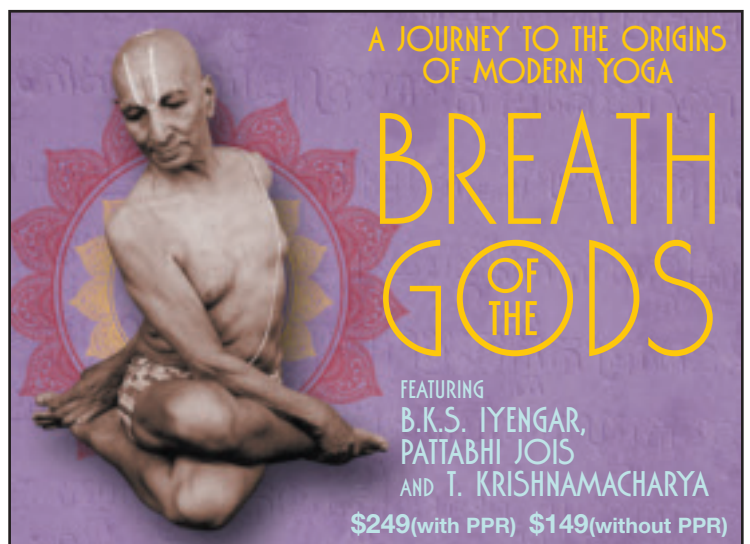
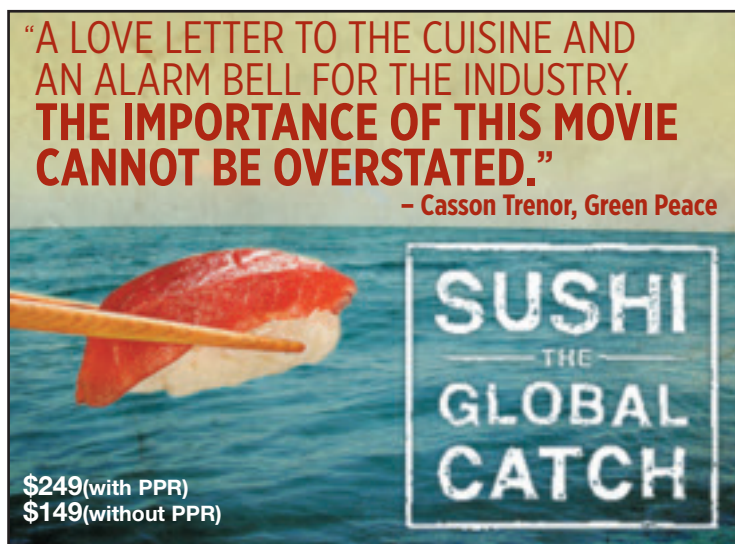
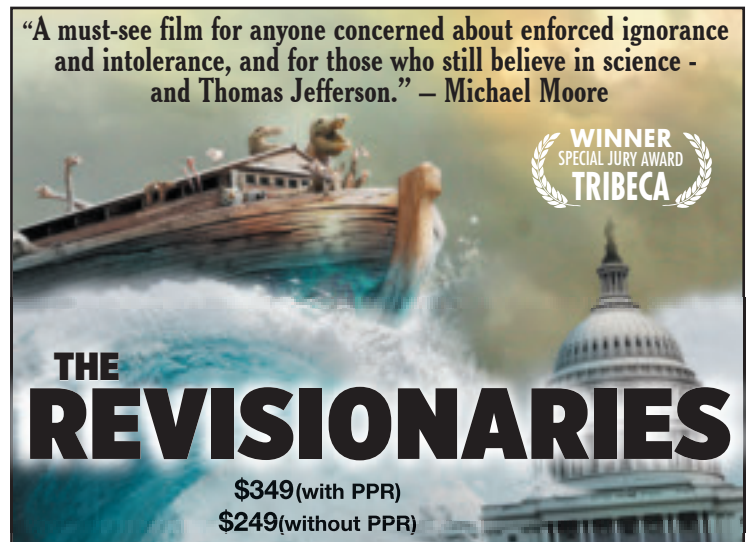
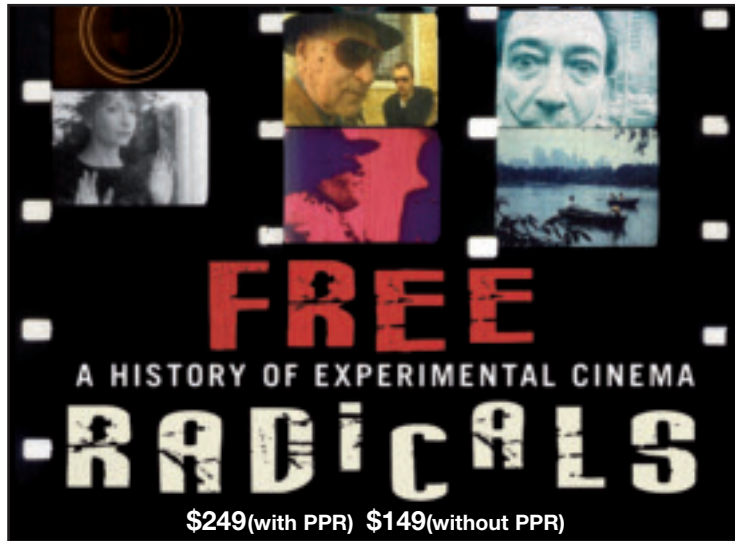
January 15

Being Human: Season Four (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.98). This 2012 fourth season of the BBC original fantasy horror series about supernatural creatures struggling to live like humans stars Leonora Crichlow and Michael Socha.

Ghost Hunters Academy (Image, DVD: 4 discs, \$24.99). Aired on Syfy, this 2009-10 series spin-off from the *Ghost Hunters* franchise follows "students" who learn the tricks of the trade from members of the Atlantic Paranormal Society.

Jackson Five (Classic Media, DVD: 2 discs, \$32.99; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$39.99). Produced by Rankin/Bass, this collection

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includes 23 episodes from the 1971-72 animated series (with 46 original songs) based on the Jackson Five.

James May's Man Lab: Series 2 (BFS, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99). Presenter James May tackles challenges that include building a pool table and reuniting indie rock group Love Fungus in this 2011 second series.

Last of the Summer Wine: Vintage 1997 (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.99). Peter Sallis, Bill Owen, and Robert Fyfe are back in this compilation of episodes from the 1997 18th season of the long-running comedy series revolving around the escapades of an elderly trio.

Life's Too Short: The Complete First Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99). English little person actor Warwick Davis stars in a mockumentary about his life in this 2011 first season of the BBC series that also features Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant.



Men of a Certain Age: The Complete Second Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). Ray Romano, Andre Braugher, and Scott Bakula star in this 2010-11 second and final season of the Emmy-nominated TNT dramedy series following a trio of friends going through midlife crises.

Merlin: The Complete Fourth Season (BBC, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.98). Set in the realm of Camelot, this 2011 fourth season of the adventure fantasy series stars Katie McGrath, Bradley James, and Colin Morgan as the titular sorcerer.

Perry Mason: Season 8, Volume 2 (Paramount, DVD: 4 discs, \$55.98). In this second compilation of episodes from the penultimate 1964-65 eighth season of the Emmy-winning courtroom drama, Raymond Burr stars in his classic role as the titular defense attorney.



Twenty Twelve: The Complete Series (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). This 2011-12 mockumentary series following the ups and downs of the team tasked with organizing the London Olympics stars Hugh Bonneville, David Tennant, and Olivia Colman.

Waking the Dead: Season Seven (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98). DSI Boyd (Trevor Eve) and his mystery investigation crew get to the bottom of unresolved cold cases in this compilation of six two-part stories from the 2008 seventh season.



January 22

Kendra: Season 4 (MPI, DVD: 2 discs, \$24.99). Former *Girl Next Door* and Playboy Mansion resident Kendra Wilkinson and her NFL wide receiver husband Hank Baskett are featured in this 2011 fourth and final season of the E!-aired reality series.

Public Enemies (BFS, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). This 2012 three-part series revolves around a controversy involving a probation officer (Anna Friel) whose former client (Daniel Mays) spent 10 years in jail for strangling his girlfriend.

Scarecrow and Mrs. King: The Fourth and Final Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.98). Bruce Boxleitner and Kate Jackson star as the titular undercover agents in this 1986-87 fourth series finale of the Golden Globe-nominated adventure series.

Spy, Series 1 (BFS, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99). A clumsy single dad (Darren Boyd) is mistakenly recruited as a spy for MI5 in this 2011 first series of the BAFTA award-winning comedy.

January 29

Downton Abbey: Season 3 (PBS, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$54.99). The Great War is over, but all is not well at the titular English country estate in this 2012 third season of the Emmy-winning series starring Dame Maggie Smith, Hugh Bonneville, Elizabeth McGovern, and guest star Shirley MacLaine.



Femme Fatales: The Complete First Season (eOne, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98). Aired on Cinemax, this 2011 first season of the anthology series profiling stories of powerful women features guest appearances by Adam Goldberg, Ryan Bittle, and Richard Kind.

Misfits: Series Two (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$24.98). This 2011 sophomore season of the sci-fi dramedy series about a group of young people whose community service

freak accident results in superpowers stars Antonia Thomas, Iwan Rheon, and Robert Sheehan.

Pan Am: The Complete Series (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$30.99). Christina Ricci stars in this 2011-12 short-lived 1960s-set series focusing on the lives and careers of Pan Am airline flight attendants and pilots.

February 5

Above Suspicion, Set 2 (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99). Kelly Reilly stars as recently promoted DCI Anna Travis in this 2010-11 second set of episodes—also starring Ciarán Hinds—from the crime drama series based on the best-selling books by Lynda La Plante.



Gunsmoke: The Seventh Season, Volume 2 (Paramount, DVD: 5 discs, \$36.99). Marshal Matt Dillon (James Arness) protects the citizens of Dodge City in this second set of episodes from the 1961-62 seventh season of the long-running Western series, also featuring Amanda Blake, Dennis Weaver, and Milburn Stone.

Testimony of Two Men (Acorn, DVD: 3 discs, \$59.99). Based on Taylor Caldwell's bestselling historical novel, this 1977 Emmy-nominated miniseries tells the story of a surgeon (David Birney) practicing in post-Civil War Pennsylvania.

The Virginian: The Complete Season Seven (Shout! Factory, DVD: 9 discs, \$59.99). Set at a Wyoming Territory ranch in the 1890s, this 1968-69 seventh season of the Western series starring James Drury features guest appearances by Tom Skerritt, the Irish Rovers, and Cloris Leachman.

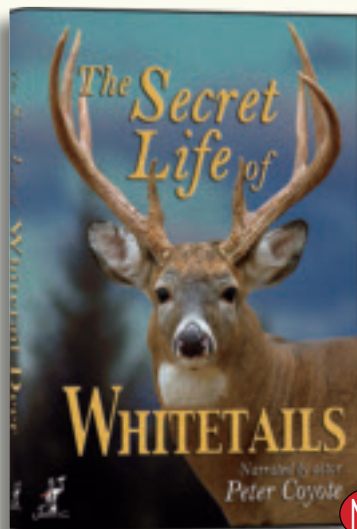
February 12

Bonanza: The Official Fifth Season (Paramount, DVD: 9 discs, \$58.98). The Cartwright family enjoys the ups and downs of life on their Ponderosa ranch in this 1963-64 fifth season set, featuring guest appearances by Gena Rowlands, James Doohan, and Marlo Thomas.



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The Secret Life of Whitetails

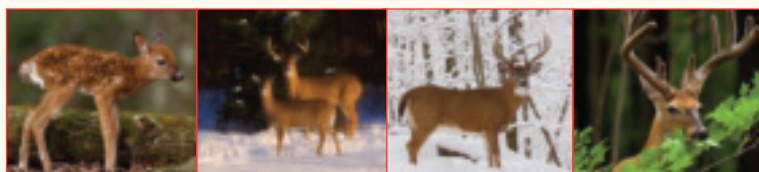


Filmed in high definition, the stunning images and absorbing soundtrack will immerse you in the secret domain of the white-tailed deer.

Narrated by actor **Peter Coyote**, this superb wildlife documentary records in brilliant color and clarity, the life-cycle of deer amidst the breathtaking scenes and natural sounds of the whitetail's world.



LENGTH: 54 Minutes • MSRP PRICE: \$24.95
CATALOG# 20529 • UPC# 6-4603205299-2



Elk in America

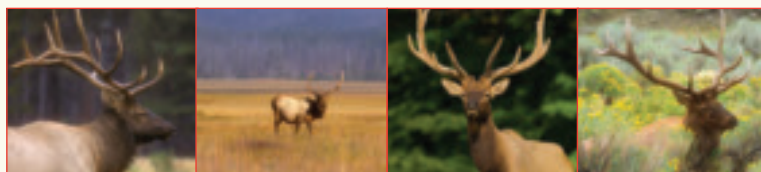


This international award-winning, wildlife documentary captures the life cycle of elk amidst the unforgettable images of the Rocky Mountains. Filmed over three years by renowned, wildlife cinematographer, Gary W. Griffen, the superb images and original soundtrack will immerse you in the elk's natural environment.

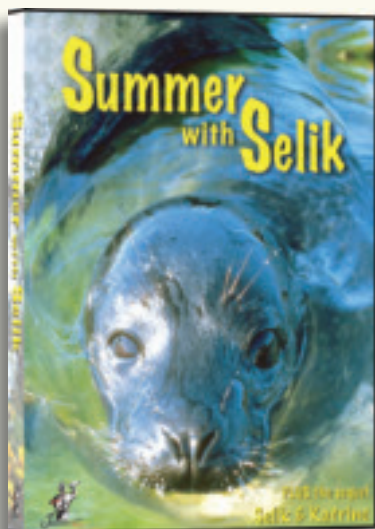
Narrated by actor **Stacy Keach**, *Elk In America* provides the viewer with a better understanding of when elk came to North America, their mystical relationship with Native Americans and their drastic decline when settlers spread westward.



LENGTH: 50 Minutes • MSRP PRICE: \$24.95
CATALOG# 20530 • UPC# 6-4603205309-8



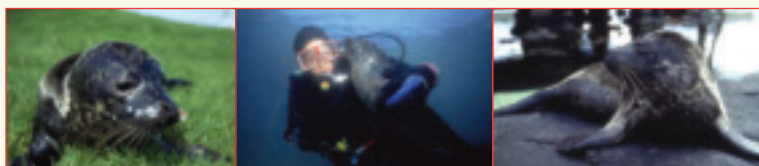
Summer with Selik and the sequel Selik & Katrine



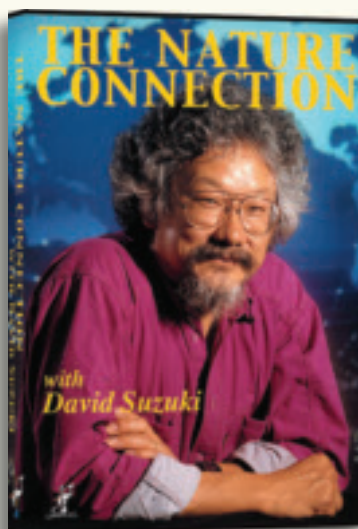
An enchanting story of the relationship between a teenage Norwegian girl named Katrine and a newborn harbor seal.

The bond that develops between Katrine and Selik during the seal's recuperation is all the more poignant because Katrine knows she must return Selik to the open sea once he is healthy and strong and has learned to survive in the wild.

LENGTH: 122 Minutes • MSRP: \$24.95
CATALOG# 20316 • UPC# 6-4603203169-0



The Nature Connection with David Suzuki



In this four-DVD set, Dr. David Suzuki leads a group of children on twelve field trips to discover different aspects of the environment and learn how we are all "connected" to nature.

The collection is designed to inform, stimulate and motivate parents and their children to take up an environmental project. It encourages the natural instinct children have for discovery, and increases their awareness of the beautiful and complex web of life and our place in it.

LENGTH: 360 Minutes • MSRP: \$59.95
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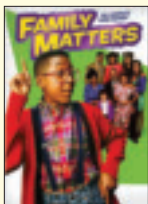
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Doctor Who: The Reign of Terror (BBC, DVD: \$24.99). The TARDIS time traveling craft appears near Paris during the French Revolution in this 1960s story arc starring William Hartnell as the Doctor.

Family Matters: The Complete Third Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99). Irritating neighbor Steve Urkel (Jaleel White) grates on the nerves of the Winslow family in this 1991-92 third season that features guest stars such as Vivica A. Fox, LaWanda Page, and Johnny Gill.



The Hardy Boys: Season Three (Shout! Factory, DVD: 3 discs, \$24.98). Shaun Cassidy and Parker Stevenson star as the titular sleuth siblings in this 1978-79 third and final season of the family series based on the books by pseudonymous author Franklin W. Dixon.

The Loretta Young Show: Best of the Complete Series (Shout! Factory, DVD: 17 discs, \$99.99). This "best of" compilation features episodes from the Golden Globe-winning 1953-61 anthology series hosted by Oscar-winning actress Loretta Young.

Matlock: The Eighth Season (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$49.99). Andy Griffith is back as pricey Atlanta defense attorney Ben Matlock in this penultimate 1993-94 eighth season of the Golden Globe-nominated mystery series.

Nurse Jackie: Season Four (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Starring Edie Falco as a competent but drug-addicted ER nurse, this 2012 fourth season also features Peter Facinelli and Eve Best.

Storage Wars, Volume Four (A&E, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.99). This fourth volume from the A&E reality series follows a group of professionals who bid on repossessed storage units in order to turn trash into treasure.

Weeds: The Final Season (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Featuring all 13 episodes from the 2012 eighth and final season, this Golden Globe-winning drug-crime Showtime dramedy series

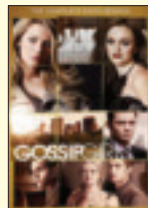


stars Mary-Louise Parker, Kevin Nealon, and Hunter Parrish.

February 19

Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome (Universal, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98). Starring Luke Pasqualino as a pilot protagonist, this 2012 addendum to the popular sci-fi franchise revolves around a battle between Cylon robots and humans.

Gossip Girl: The Complete Sixth Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). The Upper East Side clique tries to uncover Gossip Girl's identity in this 2012 sixth and final season of the nighttime soap starring Blake Lively and Leighton Meester.



The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams: Season Two (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.99). Dan Haggerty stars as the titular wrongly-accused mountain man who becomes friends with a bear he names Ben in this 1977-78 second and final season of the short-lived Western adventure series.

Swamp People: Season 3 (A&E, DVD: 6 discs, \$24.99). This 2012 third season of the History-aired reality series follows the escapades of alligator hunters living in the bayous and swamps of Louisiana's Atchafalaya River Basin.

Top Gear—The Hit US Show: The Complete Second Season (BBC, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.98). Presented by comic Adam Ferrara, pro driver Tanner Foust, and racing analyst Rutledge Wood, this 2011-12 sophomore season of the BBC spin-off car adventure series features guest appearances by comedian Bill Engvall and Maroon 5 singer Adam Levine.

February 26

Law & Order: The Twelfth Year—2001-2002 Season (Universal, DVD: 5 discs, \$36.99). This 2001-02 12th season of Dick Wolf's longest-running crime series stars Jerry Orbach, Jesse L. Martin, S. Epatha Merkerson, Sam Waterston, and Dianne Wiest.



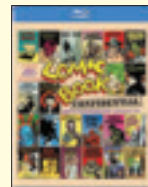
West Point: The Television Series (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.99). Produced in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense, this 1956-57 drama series centering on the iconic titular academy features guest appearances by Chuck Connors, Leonard Nimoy, Barbara Eden, and Clint Eastwood.

Looking Ahead

Coming in March is the second season of **The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp**, the seventh season of **Dalziel & Pascoe**, and the miniseries **Ripper Street**. Slated for April is the complete series of **The Restless Gun**.

Re-priced or New to DVD/Blu-ray

Comic Book Confidential (Strand, Blu-ray: \$24.99). Newly available on Blu-ray, the 20th anniversary special edition of Ron Mann's 1988 documentary profiles 22 of the most significant artists and writers working in comic books, graphic novels, and strip-art in North America. Bonus features include exclusive outtakes, an interview with Mann, and an intro by Kevin Smith.



Decasia (Icarus Films Home Video, Blu-ray: \$34.98). Debuting on Blu-ray, Bill Morrison's haunting 2002 experimental film (VL-3/04 ★★★★★) combines decomposing nitrate footage with music by composer Michael Gordon (of Bang on a Can). Bonus features include Morrison's 2004 short "Light is Calling."

The Escorial: The Dream of a Devout Monarch (Kultur, DVD: \$19.99). Part of the "Sites of the World's Cultures" series, this hour-shy 1999 documentary explores the architecture and history of the titular royal Spanish residence, as well as the story of its patron, King Philip II. Also newly available at the same price from the series is **Hue: The City on the Perfume River**.



Manufactured Landscapes (Zeitgeist, Blu-ray: \$34.99). Newly available on high-definition Blu-ray, Jennifer Baichwal's 2007 documentary (VL-11/07 ★★1/2) on Canadian photographic artist Edward Burtynsky focuses on his pictures depicting massive construction projects that are changing the natural landscape in China. Extras include additional scenes, a discussion with Burtynsky and Baichwal, and an interview with cinematographer Peter Mettler. Also newly available on Blu-ray at the same price is **Bill Cunningham New York** (VL-9/11 ★★).

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5. From Luther's Vicarage to Hefner's Harem: Turning Men into (Play)boys and Women into 'Desperate Housewives'
6. From the Scottish Reformation to the Iraqi War: Does Washington Know the West's Recipe for Freedom?
7. From the Great Awakening to a 'New Age': Beyond Good and Evil
8. From Paul to Paris Hilton: Can a Defeated Messiah Save Hollywood Heroes?
9. From Tolerance to Terrorism: Why Do Taxpayers Pay Advocates to Defend Law Breakers?
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NEW!

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In the summer of 1974, 17-year old Anita Keagy discovered she was pregnant by her boyfriend. Fearing the disgrace it would bring on her family, she considered abortion, but instead gave her child up for adoption. Years later, Anita felt compelled to communicate with her unknown daughter. Through the adoption agency, she began a file of letters. Many painful years would pass before these letters would bring Anita and her daughter, Twila, together again. This is her moving story. Documentary, 40 minutes.

DVD - #501482D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01482 1



NEW!

Rescued

Today, there are over 160 million children worldwide who are without parents. In America there are as many as 144,000 boys and girls in foster care wanting to be adopted. These are staggering statistics. This film inspires people to love and care for the most vulnerable—the orphan. Featuring interviews with R.C. Sproul, Jr., Beall Phillips, and many others, *Rescued* is an invaluable resource for every person who wants to take action and help rescue these innocent children. Documentary, 62 minutes.

DVD - #501483D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01483 8



Briars in the Cotton Patch: 10th Anniversary Edition

This DVD tells the nearly forgotten story of Koinonia Farm, a small community in Georgia where whites and blacks chose to live and work together as equals despite the brutal and frightening consequences. Possibly the most daring social experiment in the South during the last century, Koinonia faced years of terror, boycotts, and intimidation in the years leading up to the tumultuous Civil Rights era. This award-winning documentary examines the remarkable events that planted the seeds for the global work of Habitat for Humanity and more. Documentary, 57 minutes.

DVD - #501491D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01491 3



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This section features reviews of 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

6 Degrees of Hell ★

Breaking Glass, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$21.99

An incoherent, slapdash horror movie, filmmaker Joe Raffa's *6 Degrees of Hell* is notable only for the fact that it features Corey Feldman, who phones in his few scenes as a self-styled paranormal investigator called in to investigate a series of gruesome deaths connected with a Halloween haunted house. Sporting a long strand of hair that hangs over his forehead and constantly puffing on an e-cigarette, Feldman smirks while delivering supposedly witty lines as the story is related to him by a concerned deputy, a tale that has something to do with 1) the possessed items a psychic has collected in her living room, 2) a misguided attempt to summon a demonic spirit, and 3) that haunted house, which turns out to be a portal to another dimension. Also involved are a couple of juvenile delinquents, a psychotic police chief, a TV ghost hunter, and the hayseed proprietor of the haunted house. The entire mess is told not just via flashbacks but flashbacks-within-flashbacks, leading to narrative vertigo. Cheaply made and crudely acted, this is only recommended for diehard Feldman fans. (F. Swietek)



17 Girls ★★★

Strand, 91 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Jan. 15

Inspired by a real-life incident in America, French filmmaker siblings Delphine and Muriel Coulin's debut stars Louise Grinberg as Camille, a popular girl who starts a trend in her coastal community of Lorient after becoming pregnant during a one-night stand. Although Camille is hardly happy with the news, her friends offer their support when she decides to have the baby. Camille even tells her single mother that she thinks she can do a better job, although Camille continues to smoke and

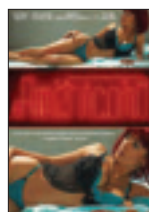


drink. When the unpopular Florence (Roxane Duran) also turns up pregnant, she becomes part of the group, and Camille encourages the other girls to follow suit so that they'll always be together. While not stupid, the girls are certainly naive, since most of them agree, never taking money into account (one teen even pays a boy to sleep with her). The girls want to continue their studies, while taking turns babysitting, but there's no mention of work. Camille's brother, an Afghanistan veteran, stands by her, but the rest of Lorient's parents and school administrators are less enthusiastic. And even though the same boy impregnates two girls, men play no real part in the plan. As the girls head towards term, however, reality begins to set in. The use of first-person plural voiceover here recalls Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides*, which also examined the consequences of teen group-think. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Americano ★★★

MPI, 106 min., in English, French & Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

The erotic box art picture of voluptuous Salma Hayek gives a mildly misleading impression of actor-writer-director Mathieu Demy's debut, a bluesy, border-hopping piece in which Demy stars as Martin, a disaffected young Frenchman with dual U.S. citizenship. Upon the death of his long-estranged mother in Los Angeles, Martin heads stateside to sort out her estate, and is surprised to learn that his difficult mother was close to a neighbor named Lola, the intended recipient of the matriarch's possessions. Martin follows Lola's trail to Tijuana—only to find that Lola is a cynical stripper-prostitute (Hayek), who resists sharing information about Martin's mother. The more he is rebuffed, however, the more obsessed Martin becomes in seeking clues to the past—realizing that he might be mistaken about his childhood and broken family. While Hayek does perform an exotic dance in a transparent fishnet bodysuit, this is mostly a melancholy tale that features some second-generation movie royalty (Geraldine Chaplin, Chiara Mastroianni). The filmmaker is himself the son of French cinema greats Agnes Varda and Jacques Demy, and he shows a sure hand at creating satisfying drama from interpersonal relationships. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)



The Apparition ★

Warner, 82 min., PG-13, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

First-time writer-director Todd Lincoln appears to be trying to ride the coattails of the *Paranormal Activity* found-footage horror phenomenon in *The Apparition*. On May 21,



1973, a para-psychological séance dubbed the "Charles" experiment featured six people concentrating on a drawing of the same deceased being, which produces a spectral figure. Years later, three college students—Patrick (Tom Felton), Ben (Sebastian Stan) and Ben's girlfriend Lydia (Julianna Guill)—try to replicate the experiment using computers and a 3D sculpture of the man they are trying to reach, with electronic help from 500 people. Once again, there seems to be brief contact with the supernatural realm, followed by a tragic incident. Cut to the present: Kelly (Ashley Greene) is busy minding a suburban investment home (owned by her parents) with her new boyfriend Ben—the same guy who unwittingly opened a poltergeist pathway with the reproduced Charles experiment. When the couple begin to notice strange things—lights flickering, black mold spores, and Kelly's clothes being tied into knots—they wonder if the place is haunted. So Ben beckons old buddy Patrick, who blows into their abode babbling pseudoscientific prattle. "The house isn't haunted. You are," Patrick tells Ben before disappearing into a closet. An abysmally lame chiller, this is not recommended. (S. Granger)

The Awakening ★★★

Universal, 108 min., R, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$26.98, Jan. 29

Nick Murphy's directorial debut is an old-fashioned ghost story set in 1921 England, a time when casualties from the Great War and the influenza epidemic spawned a phony spiritualist movement that preyed on people desperate to make contact with lost loved ones. Rational ghost hunter (or more properly, debunker) Florence Cathcart (Rebecca Hall) is asked by Robert Mallory (Dominic West)—a scarred war veteran now teaching at a boys' boarding school—to investigate reports of a spirit that might have been involved in the recent death of a student. It's amusing to watch Cathcart spar with the headmaster over her atheism, and fiddle with her newfangled gadgets designed to detect spirits, but it turns out that there is indeed a ghost haunting the school, whose secret Florence will uncover even while falling for handsome, wounded Mallory. *The Awakening* has a bit of a musty air, playing like a well-mannered relic of a bygone filmmaking age that depended more on suggestion than gore to deliver thrills. But while it offers more goosebumps than gasps, this is ultimately a pleasurable reminder of the sort of discreet supernatural thriller that was once a staple but is now a rarity. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Boogiepop and Others ★★★

BayView Entertainment, 109 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$9.99

Japanese director Ryu Kaneda's live-action

feature film is based on Kouhei Kadono's *Boogiepop* series of light novels that inspired a hit anime series. The story centers on the Shinyo Academy, which is slowly depopulating as female students vanish at night under mysterious circumstances. Rumor has it that a ghostly force known as Boogiepop is responsible for the mayhem, and one student, Nagi Kirima (Maya Kurosu), is eager to uncover the truth behind this mystery, ultimately discovering something far more provocative than a simple ghost story. *Boogiepop and Others* is a genuinely enjoyable film that will delight fans of the Boogiepop franchise while also serving as a delightful introduction for newcomers. The ensemble cast boasts spirited energy, while Kaneda keeps the action flowing at a steady pace. Recommended. (P. Hall)



Booster ★★

Echo Bridge, 72 min., not rated, DVD: \$6.99

This downbeat crime drama set in Boston has been compared to the early films of Martin Scorsese (as well as Ben Affleck's *The Town*), but is actually relatively devoid of spark or style. Anti-hero Simon (Nico Stone) is a low-level thief who singlehandedly supports his senile grandmother, as well as a dying former hood (Seymour Cassel), and an older brother, Sean (Brian McGrail)—the last being a screw-up who lands in jail after a botched armed robbery. Both Sean and a criminal associate (Adam DuPaul) put pressure on Simon to help throw doubt on the case against Sean, but that will require Simon to become a different kind of outlaw. Simon also has love and happiness just within reach, thanks to a new romance with Megan (Kristin Dougherty), but the question remains of which path he will take as he faces a crucial crossroads. This promising story is unfortunately lost in a monotonous succession of dreary moments involving the lighting of cigarettes or watching Sean fence stolen goods, when he isn't busy looking at the floor in a state of emotional repression. Writer-director Matt Ruskin's *Booster* ultimately feels as suffocated as its central character. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)



Branded ★

Lionsgate, 106 min., R, DVD: \$27.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99, Jan. 15

Writer-directors Jamie Bradshaw and Alexander Doulerain's would-be anticapitalist screed gets off to a bad start by identifying Lenin, of all people, as the founder of advertising. In the



Russian-made *Branded*, after fast-food chains find their burger sales dwindling, they turn to the supposed world marketing guru (Max von Sydow), who suggests an outrageous scheme to change public attitudes about beauty by convincing society that thin is ugly and fat is beautiful. As part of the plot, the hero—an ad agency hack named Misha (Ed Stoppard), who is fingered as a villain—undergoes a weird ritual, after which he can see the desires implanted by marketing gurus as taking the form of, uh, bulbous creatures protruding from consumers' backs. Misha ostensibly attempts to destroy the entities driving hamburger consumption by convincing the populace that beef is unhealthy, but his true aim is to wipe out advertising-driven desires—and their related brands—by engineering a ban on all advertising. Wait, did I mention that the film is narrated by a constellation taking the form of an animated cow? Itself advertised as a *Matrix*-like tale of individualism versus authority, *Branded* is not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Bully ★★★

Weinstein, 98 min., PG-13, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99, Feb. 12

Lee Hirsch's controversial documentary about our national bullying epidemic took on the MPAA rating system and won (after cutting a few four-letter words), meaning that the message can reach its target audience with crucial scenes left intact. Beginning with the alarming statistic that more than 13 million American kids would be bullied in 2012, *Bully* personalizes this pervasive universal problem that crosses racial, ethnic, sexual, and socioeconomic boundaries. Utilizing a case-study format, Hirsch focuses on five victims. We meet 12-year-old Alex from Sioux City, whose suffering begins before he boards the school bus and escalates, even as he assures his parents that his predatory tormentors are only "messing with him." Kelby is a 16-year-old athlete who has been shunned since she came out as a lesbian in Tuttle, OK. Pushed to the breaking point, 14-year-old Ja'Meya carried a loaded handgun in Yazoo County, MS; now incarcerated, she's charged with multiple felony counts. Tragically, 17-year-old Tyler Long of Murray County, GA, hanged himself after years of harassment, and—according to his bereaved parents—indifference by school officials (part of the problem lies with unresponsive adults, who often dismiss bullying as "kids will be kids"). And following the suicide of their 11-year-old son, Ty, in Perkins, OK, Kirk and Laura Smalley organized Stand for the Silent vigils. Hirsch allows these poignant stories to speak for themselves (absent instructive commentary or sound bite editing). Likely to spur dialogue, this is recommended. (S. Granger)



Butter ★★★

Anchor Bay, 91 min., R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99

At the Iowa State Fair, few exhibits attract as much attention as the butter sculpture. For the past 15 years, the undisputed champion carver has been Bob Pickler (Ty Burrell), churning out campy, epic-scale tableaux. But now the judges have asked him to retire his trowel and make way for new artists. Bob's prim, prissy, ambitious wife, Laura (Jennifer Garner), is furious; refusing to give up the limelight, she decides to compete herself. So does a sweet-natured, 10-year-old African-American orphan named Destiny (Yara Shahidi), whose unusual talent is encouraged by her supportive foster parents (Alicia Silverstone, Rob Corddry). Meanwhile, Bob's rebellious teenage daughter (Ashley Greene) is befriended by a brassy, bawdy, gold-digging stripper (Olivia Wilde), who's determined to take monetary advantage of Bob's clandestine visit to the club where she pole-dances. Helmed by British sitcom director Jim Field Smith, *Butter* is a quirky, offbeat, sociopolitical satire that sat on the shelf too long (obvious allusions to prominent female Republicans come across as stale now). Nevertheless, the amusing, farcical elements remain relevant, skewering small town politics, sanitized hypocrisy, the foster-care system, and Midwestern Tea Party conservatism. Hugh Jackman seems miscast as Laura's old high-school flame turned smarmy car salesman, but Kristen Schaall and Phyllis Smith score in cameos. Recommended, overall. (S. Granger)



A Cat in Paris ★★★

New Video, 62 min., PG, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

Nominated for an Oscar, filmmakers Jean-Loup Felicioli and Alain Gagnol's French animated feature has been dubbed into English with a starry cast (but plays better with the original French soundtrack—also included). The title actually refers to two characters—honorable cat burglar Nico (voiced by Steve Blum) and his teammate, wayward feline Dino. But both are secondary to the story of the cat's owner, a sad, subdued little girl named Zoe (Lauren Weintraub), whose detective father was killed by a master criminal. Zoe's policewoman mother, Jeanne (Marcia Gay Harden), is intent on tracking down the villain. All of them—along with the kingpin's bumbling crew and Zoe's double-crossing nanny, Claudine (Anjelica Huston)—become involved in a heist that goes awry, leading to a splashy finale featuring chases over cranes and high-rise rooftops. While the animation is stylish—evoking a film noir look, and exhibiting clever touches, such as a sequence

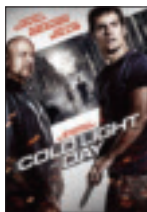


in the dark where the characters are white outlines against a black background—the plot is rather simple. Recommended, overall. (F. Swietek)

The Cold Light of Day

★1/2

Lionsgate, 93 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99, Jan. 29



While director Mabrouk El Mechri's "wrong man" caper flick boasts star power—with Bruce Willis and Sigourney Weaver in supporting roles—*The Cold Light of Day* is a perfunctory action film. Will Shaw (Henry Cavill) runs into trouble while reuniting with his family on vacation in Spain, including his dad, Martin (Willis)—supposedly an attaché with the American embassy—who is actually a CIA agent. When Martin is killed by a gang and his mother and brother are kidnapped, Will winds up becoming a target of both the abductors and the police. The key to the plot turns out to be something as banal as a briefcase containing secret papers, and Martin's old partner (Weaver) shows up exhibiting a very sinister smirk. The movie trades in stock tropes: endless pursuits through streets and over rooftops, as well as an alliance between Will and a beautiful young woman, all of which leads up to a long car chase that causes serious damage to the attractive Madrid locations. Serving up a tedious slog through very familiar territory, this is not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Corpo Celeste ★★★

Film Movement, 99 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

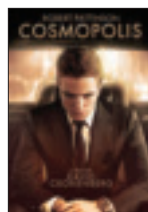


A low-key Italian film about religious awakening in the geographical center of Roman Catholicism, *Corpo Celeste* stars Yle Vianello as Italian-born 13-year-old Marta, who returns to her native country with her mother, Rita (Anita Caprioli), after living abroad for 10 years. Rita takes a job as a hard-toiling worker in a monotonous, pressure-cooker manual-labor job in a sweatshop-style bakery, but insular and introspective Marta slowly begins to show signs of resistance when it comes to being re-indoctrinated into Italy's indigenous religious culture, unlike most of her blandly obedient adolescent peers. Although director Alice Rohrwacher gets an adult-caliber performance out of Vianello, the film suffers somewhat from the heavy-handed symbolism used to articulate the dilemmas these youngsters face when confronted with the inevitable dogmatic pull of the Catholic Church. What is clear here, however, is that the Church remains an elitist, ruthlessly authoritarian body with tremendous influence, and *Corpo Celeste* makes a quiet hero of Marta for subtly resist-

ing its outdated message. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Cosmopolis ★★

eOne, 109 min., R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98, Jan. 2

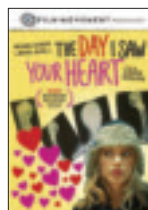


David Cronenberg's pretentious contemporary thriller touches on numerous topics: power, money, control, information, technology, violence, sex, mortality, revolution, destruction and, ultimately, redemption—all within the claustrophobic confines of a white stretch limo. Being driven through midtown Manhattan en route to his father's old barber-shop for a haircut, hotshot investment tycoon Eric Packer (Robert Pattinson) encounters infuriating traffic gridlock. The President is in town with his motorcade, anti-capitalist demonstrations are erupting, and a funeral is underway for a rapper. Despite warnings from his security specialist, 28-year-old billionaire Packer insists on proceeding, holding mobile meetings about his company's massive asset wager against the Chinese currency (the yuan). As his limo inches forward, suave, soulless, self-destructive Packer indulges in sexual encounters on the plush leather upholstery and endures a rectal exam which reveals that his prostate is asymmetrical. *Twilight* star Pattinson maintains a detached, expressionless façade as the impassive, inscrutable Packer, while receiving support from a cast that includes Samantha Morton, Paul Giamatti, and Juliette Binoche. Adapted from Don DeLillo's 2003 short novel, *Cosmopolis* is a cynical, bizarrely stylized, often incomprehensible absurdist comedy. Optional. (S. Granger)

The Day I Saw Your Heart

★★★

Film Movement, 98 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



A lightweight but enjoyable French comedy-drama, *The Day I Saw Your Heart* stars Mélanie Laurent as Justine, the morose youngest daughter of incorrigible 60-year-old Eli (Michel Blanc). The latter's neurotic fixations and trail of broken marriages have not only left Justine perpetually angry but also given her a reason to blame her relationship problems on dear old dad. Meanwhile, Justine's older half-sister, Dom (Florence Loiret-Caille), and the latter's husband are dealing with fertility issues—a case of truly bad timing since Eli's new wife is suddenly pregnant. Tensions and disappointments fly in all directions, but what makes director Jennifer Devoldère's film fun to watch is Blanc's smart performance as well-meaning but impulsive Eli, who surrounds himself with Justine's ex-boyfriends because he's sorry she can't stay committed to anyone.

Devoldère brings a sprightly tone to the story, which boasts a serious heart beneath the fluff. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Diary of a Wimpy Kid:

Dog Days ★★1/2

Fox, 94 min., PG, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Greg Heffley (Zachary Gordon), celebrated hero of the titular, popular YA book series, is looking forward to summer vacation with his friends. But his parents (Rachael Harris, Steve Zahn) have plans for outdoor family togetherness, although that won't include playing video games or reading comics. So Greg joins best friend Rowley Jefferson (Robert Capron), slurping fruit smoothies at Rowley's fancy country club. But things don't quite work out, and when a beach outing Greg was looking forward to is cancelled because the Heffleys don't have enough money, Greg winds up enduring embarrassing calamities at a public pool. The summer continues to slide from bad to worse when a camping trip goes horribly wrong, and Greg's lawn care service is a bust. Plus, Greg must endure Rodrick (Devon Bostick), his obnoxious older brother who's obsessed with his heavy metal band Löded Diper. Based on author/cartoonist Jeff Kinney's third and fourth books, *Dog Days* is more scattershot and strung together than earlier entries in the series, and since Gordon is now a teenager with a changing voice, his angst is taking a more adolescent turn. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Dredd ★★

Lionsgate, 103 min., R, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 8

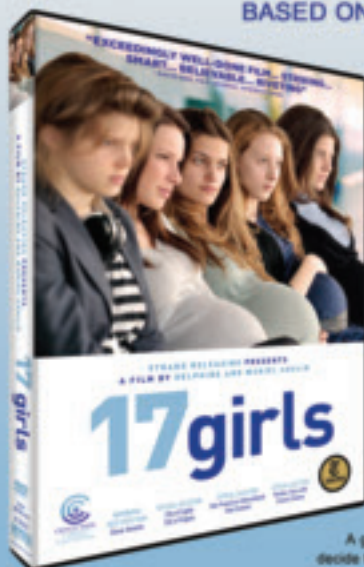


On a bleak, futuristic Earth wasted by wars and divided into overcrowded urban centers known as Mega-Cities, order is maintained by a fascistic, all-powerful law-enforcement force known as Judges. Mythical Judge Dredd (Karl Urban) is the helmeted lawman in charge of Mega-City One, which encompasses the territory between Boston and Washington, D.C. When he's told to train and evaluate mutant rookie Cassandra Anderson (Olivia Thirlby), Dredd discovers that she possesses the genetic ability to read minds. Cassandra's psychic aptitude comes in handy when they respond to a violent, triple-homicide call and encounter scar-faced Ma-Ma (Lena Headey), a former prostitute-turned-drug empress, who dispenses Slo-Mo, a potent, aptly-named narcotic that allows users to experience reality at a fraction of its normal speed. When they arrest their perp, Kay (Wood Harris), the judges discover that they are locked into a massive, 200-story vertical tenement called Peach Trees—on orders from Ma-Ma. Based on a cult comic

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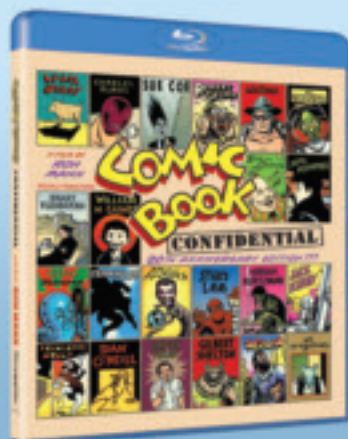
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- *Slant Magazine*

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strip, filmmaker Pete Travis's *Dredd* bears little resemblance to Danny Cannon's 1995 cartoon-like take (which starred Sylvester Stallone in the title role), instead presenting a grim tale full of graphic, gory, gruesome violence—and little else. Optional, at best. (S. Granger)

Dust Up ★

Breaking Glass, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Although *Dust Up* begins as a somewhat spirited satire about outcasts bonding far from civilization, it eventually becomes a witless, grotesque revenge story straining for laughs between acts of rape and cannibalism. Aaron Gaffey stars as Jack—a one-eyed former marine trying to atone for wartime violence—who lives alone in a desert trailer, meditating and earning his living as a handyman. Jack's neighbor and friend is a wannabe Indian named Mo (Devin Barry), with whom Jack talks about living "hectic" days of not doing very much at all. But things change when new mother Ella (Amber Benson) asks Jack to repair some faulty plumbing in her home. Before long, Jack is helping to protect Ella's drug-addicted husband (Travis Betz) from his pathological supplier, Buzz (Jeremiah Birkett), a bar owner and grandiose cult leader whose crazy followers will do anything—including eating the sheriff, after Buzz barbecues him in a fit of annoyance. Writer-director Ward Roberts eschews all limits during the third act, when Jack decides he has to embrace bloodletting once again to protect Ella and her baby. For a would-be exploitation film send-up, there unfortunately isn't much here in the way of redeeming wit or style. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)



Elvis & Madonna ★★

Breaking Glass, 105 min., in Portuguese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Marcelo Laffitte's dramedy about a rocky romance between lesbian photographer Elvis (Simone Spoladore) and transvestite hairdresser Madonna (Igor Cotrim) in Rio de Janeiro gets off to a promising start. Working a night job delivering pizzas, the near-impoorished Elvis meets Madonna after the latter is beaten and robbed by boyfriend João (Sérgio Bezerra). The titular pair quickly enter a relationship that grows complicated due to Elvis's pregnancy and the fact that she happens to snap a photo of João in a criminal act. João's threat of revenge hovers over the new couple at the same time that Elvis's family struggles to adjust to her unorthodox relationship, and Madonna tries to mount a ludicrous stage show. While Laffitte brings a jaunty edge to the film, the multiple story threads never



quite satisfyingly intertwine here, although the performances are strong, with Spoladore a spunky, soulful presence, and Cotrim shining as Madonna. Optional. (T. Keogh)

End of Watch ★★★

Universal, 110 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98, Jan. 22

Filmmaker David Ayer's gritty LAPD procedural stars Jake Gyllenhaal as Brian Taylor, a police officer who always carries a handheld HD camera and wears a mic in his uniform. Taylor is taking pre-law classes and—for his art elective—is surreptitiously making a documentary about law enforcement in the South Central precinct, melodramatically emphasizing that "beyond my badge is a heart like yours." At his side is his loyal Mexican-American partner, Officer Mike "Z" Zavala (Michael Pena). Their arrogant attitude upon returning to the force from leave after grabbing headlines for killing two perps in the line of duty draws resentment from two, non-nonsense female cops (America Ferrera, Cody Horn), among others. Episodic in structure, Ayer and his "shaky-cam" cinematographer have created an intricate character study of men whose lives are not just intertwined but also interdependent, as they cruise around in their squad car, gulping Red Bull and dealing with domestic disputes and foul-mouthed hoodlums. The pair banter and tease each other mercilessly, even when they're hanging out with Zavala's pregnant wife (Natalie Martinez) and Taylor's "badge bunny" (Anna Kendrick). A trail of drugs, guns, and money will eventually lead them into a climactic encounter with street gangs and a rising Mexican cartel in this insightful and intense buddy cop film. Recommended. (S. Granger)



Excision ★1/2

Anchor Bay, 81 min., not rated, DVD: \$22.98, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Richard Bates, Jr.'s gruesome outcast-teen tale—presumably intended as a darkly humorous horror movie—is more repulsive than frightening and likely to produce more grimaces than smiles. AnnaLynne McCord stars as Pauline, a stringy-haired, congenitally nasty high-schooler who dreams (in bloody, vaguely pornographic detail) about being a surgeon. In constant conflict with her mother, Phyllis (Traci Lords), as well as her far more attractive classmates, Pauline persuades the boyfriend of her biggest campus tormentor to sleep with her and then dumps him, while also plotting to save her younger sister's life by performing a lung transplant that requires the kidnapping of a neighbor kid who will serve as the involuntary donor. Throughout—although especially in the



dream sequences—Bates adopts an extravagantly artsy style, emphasizing buckets of blood along with ample doses of nauseating gore and nudity. And McCord's snarling, unhinged performance makes it impossible to work up sympathy for a character who is obviously in need of intensive psychological help. Cameos from reputable actors—such as Ray Wise and Malcolm McDowell—fail to raise the overall quality here to any appreciable extent. *Excision* appears to be aiming for the tastelessly cheesy fun that is the specialty of director John Waters (who also cameos as a minister), but misses the target by a country mile. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Eye of the Storm

★★★

Sycamore, 119 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98, Jan. 29

Based on Nobel Prize winner Patrick White's titular 1973 novel, *The Eye of the Storm* is a handsome dramedy featuring intriguing relationships built on secrets. Charlotte Rampling heads up the superb cast as Elizabeth, a dying widow whose considerable wealth is matched only by the size of her controlling nature. During her final days, Elizabeth is visited by her estranged, middle-aged daughter, Dorothy (Judy Davis)—a princess via a former marriage—and her charmingly obsequious son, Basil (Geoffrey Rush), a mediocre stage actor trying to mount an autobiographical stage play in London's West End. These three characters collide in bruising but also entertaining fashion, while Elizabeth drifts into memories—yet remains lucid enough to insult and dominate everyone. Meanwhile, Basil and Dorothy engage in their own entanglements with others in Elizabeth's orbit, including a nurse (Alexandra Schepisi, daughter of the film's venerable director, Fred Schepisi) and a noble, long-suffering attorney (John Gaden) who might have had a brief affair with Elizabeth. An actors' showcase of a film that eventually delivers a moving and powerful revelation, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)



The Falls ★★★

Breaking Glass, 89 min., not rated, DVD: \$21.99

A sensitive portrait of gay men falling out of favor with the Mormon church, even as they fall in love with each other, *The Falls* is an earnest, well-acted drama, directed with an understated hand by Jon Garcia. Nick Ferruci stars as RJ, a 20-year-old "elder" who dutifully if reluctantly enters upon his obligatory two-year missionary work, joining the more experienced Craig (Justin Koleszar) in the daily grind of trying to convert people to the Mormon faith by talking to strangers



on the street and going door-to-door. Missionary work brings constant challenges to the pair's personal egos and sense of purpose as they are ignored, treated with hostility, ambushed by those looking for an argument, and even physically assaulted. In time, RJ and Craig begin blowing off their daily tasks and finding comfort in one another's company, eventually having to face church authorities as well as their families. The message that the church should be more inclusive comes across loud and clear here, but what makes *The Falls* increasingly enjoyable is the way that RJ and Craig begin allowing more of the big world into their narrow sphere, from trying marijuana to watching a movie that hasn't been pre-censored. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

For a Good Time, Call...

★★★

Focus, 85 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98, Jan. 22



A raunchy, contemporary female relationship comedy, *For a Good Time, Call...* is aimed squarely at the libidinous *Sex and the City* and *Bridesmaids* crowd. Uptight Lauren Powell (Lauren Anne Miller) needs a new place to live (no mean feat in New York City) after she loses her publishing job and is dumped by her boyfriend. Her buddy Jesse (Justin Long) fixes Lauren up with his friend Katie Steele (Ari Graynor), not realizing that—years earlier—Lauren experienced a disastrous encounter with Katie. Nevertheless, Lauren moves into the spacious Gramercy Park apartment that Katie inherited from her grandmother, only to learn that bawdy, uninhibited, foul-mouthed Katie earns her living as a phone-sex operator. Although initially horrified, Lauren soon realizes that fielding calls from horny men—talking dirty, and vicariously fulfilling their pornographic fantasies—is more lucrative than any job she can currently land. So Lauren convinces Katie to set up her own phone-sex business which she will manage, kicking off a formulaic yet amusing story of frenemies in the Big Apple. Director Jamie Travis has assembled a talented cast, headed by Miller and Graynor, who make the concept rise above its low-budget, sitcom roots. Also featuring Mark Webber, Ken Marino, Kevin Smith, and Seth Rogen (Miller's real-life husband), this smutty, salacious, and entertaining romp is recommended. (S. Granger)

The Forgiveness of Blood

★★★1/2

Criterion, 109 min., in Albanian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95



This affecting slice of bucolic realism from director Joshua Marston spotlights a much-ignored

Balkan region—post-Iron Curtain rural Albania—where ancient blood feuds between families are making a post-communist resurgence amidst an unstable agrarian free market. *The Forgiveness of Blood* not only portrays the competition between two entrepreneurial Albanian families but also tells a parallel story of serious intergenerational conflict within the families themselves. The trouble begins when local bread delivery man Mark (Refet Abazi) has his usual route blocked by business rival Sokol (Veton Osmani). Viewers then learn secondhand that Mark and his brother eventually confront the uncooperative Sokol and kill him in some unspecified manner. Mark's brother is sent to jail, and Mark retreats into hiding, leaving his teenage son, Nik (Tristan Halilaj), and adolescent daughter, Rudina (Sindi Lacey), to carry on the family business as best they can. In this tragically tradition-bound society, the sons and daughters of the feuding adults adopt a more pacifist, "adult" attitude toward age-old conflicts and the religion that justifies them; conversely, the adults are depicted as childish: hotheaded, tantrum-prone, and unwilling to learn from mistakes. Highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Frankenweenie

Walt Disney, 87 min., PG, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 8



Filmmaker Tim Burton once again delights fans of the morbid and macabre with this fun-filled, spooky, black-and-white animated tale about a boy and his dog. Shy young filmmaker/scientist Victor Frankenstein (voiced by Charlie Tahan) lives with his parents (Catherine O'Hara, Martin Short) and his faithful bull terrier, Sparky, in the Dutch-influenced 1970s suburban town of New Holland. One fateful day, when Victor hits a baseball into the street, Sparky chases it and is killed by a passing car. Victor's parents try to soothe their grieving son but it brings little comfort to the distraught child. So when his elementary-school science teacher (Martin Landau) demonstrates in class how a dead frog can be seemingly revived, Victor raids the pet cemetery, and—sure enough—a lightning bolt will strike, bringing Sparky back to life, minus an anatomical part or two that must be stitched back on. Although the reanimation experiment was supposed to be a secret, Sparky's presence is soon revealed to Victor's neighbors and classmates, and—before long—more creepy creatures are revived, with amusingly subversive results. Burton originally envisioned this quirky film inspired by horror classics as a full-length stop-motion feature, but due to budget constraints, made it as a live-action short in 1984. A winning animated film nicely backed by Danny Elfman's moody musical score, this is highly recommended. (S. Granger)

The Giant Mechanical Man

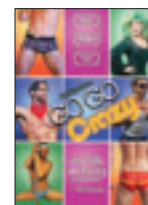
New Video, 96 min., PG-13, DVD: \$26.95



The Giant Mechanical Man loosely combines the softly sarcastic attitude of contemporary cosmopolitan dramedies with the *Friends*-style parallel universe of attractive underachievers living beyond their means in the big city. Jenna Fischer plays Janice, a thirtysomething Chicago temp worker whose lack of direction makes her a magnet for bad luck: at one point she loses her job as a museum assistant because of complaints that she looks depressed. Unable to make rent, Janice moves in with her obnoxious sister and her goody-goody dentist brother-in-law—a couple who immediately sets her up with a repulsive self-help guru (Topher Grace). While sleepwalking through a crappy job at the zoo, Janice hits it off with recently jilted maintenance man Tim (Chris Messina), who moonlights as a silver-faced on-stilts street performer. Like Janice, Tim is adrift in occupational purgatory, and the two bond over their confusion and indirection in life. A quirky rom-com in which weak-willed Janice and wishy-washy bohemian Tim passively retreat into their own escapist love bubble without giving the outside world much of a fight, this is recommended, overall. (M. Sandlin)

Go Go Crazy

Breaking Glass, 84 min., not rated, DVD: \$21.99



Fred M. Caruso directed this very funny mockumentary centering on a shoddy dance contest in a gay nightclub. The story focuses on five ludicrous finalists—who each have to creatively strip to his briefs in an artistic fashion—as well as the contest's three bizarre judges and snarky hostess Hedda Lettuce (cross-dressing actor Steven Polito). A very sharp group of actors with strong improvisational skills anchors this delightful satire, including Nick Kenkel as Vinnie, a Jersey boy obsessed with his abdomen; Ken (Eric Spear), whose dream is to produce a non-Equity stage performance in New York; and Chase (Paul Cereghino), given to such tough-love insights as "grieving is only sexy when you're thin." Most of the film takes place on the night of the titular contest, where competing dancers try to impress the judges with such erotic choreography as pretending to drive a car while removing one's pants. Much of the comedy concerns the judges, including a professional impressionist (Christina Bianco) who gets drunk and breaks into her Bernadette Peters voice. Meanwhile, Hedda spends a lot of time getting defensive about how much prep is involved in putting on women's clothing and how she's simply cut out for better things

than presiding over dance contests. An entertaining *Magic Mike*-with-a-wink farce, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

Hello I Must Be Going

★★★1/2

Oscilloscope, 95 min., R, DVD: \$29.99, Jan. 29

Actor-turned-director Todd Louiso's third film—nominated for the Grand Jury prize at Sundance—plays a bit like *The Graduate* for a new era, just as funny and every bit as poignant. Melanie Lynskey plays Amy Minsky, moving back to Cheever Country—upper-class Connecticut—after a divorce. Just as Dustin Hoffman's Benjamin Braddock didn't know what to do with his life, former photography student Amy is also at a loss. When her parents, Ruth and Stan (Blythe Danner and John Rubinstein), hold a dinner party, Amy meets 19-year-old Jeremy (Christopher Abbott), son of a therapist who is a potential client for Stan. If Stan can win over Jeremy's father, he plans to retire and go on a long-awaited cruise with his restless and hyper-judgmental wife. Jeremy, a former child star, has become a theater actor, but internally he's just as lost as Amy. In a moment of privacy, Jeremy steals a kiss with Amy, which isn't unwelcome. Not suspecting a thing, Jeremy's parents encourage Amy to show him around Westport, which leads to a surreptitious affair (Jeremy's mother thinks he's gay), while Amy worries about their 16-year age difference. Benefiting from a perceptive, humorously profane script by Louiso's wife, Sarah Koskoff, this is highly recommended. (K. Fennessy)



Hermano ★★★

Music Box, 97 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95

Set in the slums of Caracas, Marcel Rasquin's soccer tale *Hermano* begins when Graciela (Marcela Girón) and her young son Julio discover an abandoned baby, who is then raised as Julio's brother. Fifteen years later the boys are the stars of their neighborhood football team—Julio (Eliú Armas) the rough enforcer and Daniel (Fernando Moreno) a speedy scorer—leading their mates into the championship game. Their coach has invited a professional scout to look them over, but tragedy intervenes when one of Julio's pals targets several rival gang members but accidentally kills Graciela. Daniel witnesses the shooting but claims not to have, fearing that telling his heartbroken, hot-tempered brother the truth will lead him to seek revenge. The funeral falls on the very day of the boys' scheduled tryout for the majors, and although they can make both, Julio's belief that Daniel knows more than he's saying threatens to



tear them apart. *Hermano* features intense performances from its two young stars, while the on-field action boasts real punch, and the gritty visual style lends the film an authentic feel. An occasionally melodramatic tale that still powerfully captures the desperation of the Venezuelan capital's teeming underclass, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Hollywood to Dollywood

★★★

Breaking Glass, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

John Lavin's documentary about the quest for acceptance and the lure of star power focuses on identical twins Larry and Gary Lane. Fans of Dolly Parton's brand of open-heartedness, the Lanes have spent five years writing a script for her, and decide to document their trip from California to Tennessee to deliver it to the entertainer on the occasion of her 25th anniversary. Raised by devout southern Baptists in North Carolina, Larry and Gary came out as gay in their mid-20s, and their relationship with their mother—who shares their love of Parton's music—has never been the same. Before the siblings leave, they seek advice and support from actors Chad Allen, Beth Grant, and Leslie Jordan, who all have connections to the South. They also meet with *Milk* screenwriter Dustin Lance Black, who suggests that they shorten their 160-page draft. Along with Gary's boyfriend, producer Mike Bowen, the brothers hit the road in an RV named Jolene, visiting friends and famous roadside attractions (like Graceland and the Cadillac Ranch) during their 2,200-mile trip. The travelers also pass through Nashville in the wake of a devastating flood, but they manage to get to Dollywood in time, where they attend several Parton performances, looking for the opportune moment to approach her, which proves easier said than done—although the 15 Dolly songs on the soundtrack indicate that she gave this project her blessing. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)



Hotel Transylvania ★★★

Sony, 91 min., PG, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$40.99, Jan. 29

Back in 1895, Count Dracula (voiced by Adam Sandler) welcomed a beloved baby girl. Skip forward 118 years and now-teenage vampire Mavis (Selena Gomez) yearns to escape from her overprotective father's cavernous castle, which is inhabited by a motley variety of misunderstood Eastern European monsters, including Frankenstein (Kevin James), Quasimodo (Jon Lovitz), the Invisible Man (David Spade), the Mummy (CeeLo Green), and a rowdy werewolf family, headed by Wayne (Steve Buscemi) and Wanda (Molly



Shannon). On the eve of Mavis's birthday, along comes Jonathan (Andy Samberg), a grubby, iPod-toting American backpacker in search of adventurous lodging. While the romantic attraction is immediate and predictable, so is the problem: Mavis is a vampire and Jonathan is human. Does this sound familiar? Energetically directed by TV 'toon helmer Genndy Tartakovsky (*Dexter's Laboratory*, *The Powerpuff Girls*), this animated family film that stakes its claim on the very young is only fitfully funny. An optional purchase. (S. Granger)

House at the End of the Street ★

Fox, 101 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 8

Made back in the summer of 2010, before star Jennifer Lawrence achieved widespread acclaim for *Winter's Bone* or *The Hunger Games*, this banal, low-budget horror thriller finds the actress playing a feisty high school girl in jeopardy. Seeking a fresh start, divorced hospital worker Sarah (Elisabeth Shue) and her 17-year-old daughter Elissa (Lawrence) rent a beautiful house in a small, upscale rural town. Mom can only afford such luxurious accommodations because a double murder took place next door several years earlier: young Carrie Anne killed her parents and mysteriously disappeared into the woods, where she presumably drowned, although her body was never found. But Carrie Anne's older teen brother, Ryan (Max Thieriot), still lives in the house as a virtual recluse, shunned by neighbors who repeat rumors that Carrie Anne is still alive, roaming around at night. Against her mother's wishes, Elissa befriends Ryan, voicing her curiosity about the tragedy that changed his life with the blunt inquiry, "Why do you still live in the house your parents got killed in?" Directed by Mark Tonderai, *House at the End of the Street* is mostly a teen melodrama that shifts into an implausible horror tale only during the final act. Not recommended. (S. Granger)



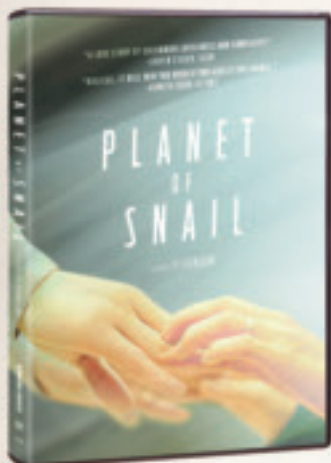
I Wish ★★★

Magnolia, 128 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, PG, DVD: \$26.98

Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda's memorable family-friendly film focuses on a pair of brothers who want to be reunited following their parents' divorce. Twelve-year-old Koichi (Koki Maeda) lives with his mother and grandparents in southern Japan, while younger brother Ryunosuke (Koki's real-life brother, Ohshirō Maeda) stays with their father in the north. Koichi embraces an old superstition about wishes coming true if the wish is made at a spot where two trains pass each other;



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fortunately, new bullet trains are traveling at extraordinary speeds between the towns where Koichi and Ryunosuke live. Ryunosuke, although younger than Koichi, is the more practical of the pair, ultimately sneaking away to visit his older brother. The lives of the separated brothers are presented with wry humor—a large and loving family surrounds Koichi, while his brother enjoys a seemingly independent existence thanks to a less-than-reliable father. While the concept might sound a bit precious, *I Wish* is actually a wise film about perceptions, reality, and family relations. Recommended. (P. Hall)

The Imposter ★★★

Indomina, 99 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Jan. 22

Playing like a psychological thriller, this compelling documentary interweaves interviews and dramatizations as it tells the almost unbelievable-but-true story of a 23-year-old French Algerian man who assumed the identity of a Texas teenager. In 1994, 13-year-old Nicholas Barclay disappeared near San Antonio. Although the Barclay family assumed that Nicholas was abducted by a stranger and killed, they lived with uncertainty until hearing—three and a half years later—that a boy had been found in Spain who claimed to be Nicholas. After clever con-man Frédéric Bourdin—who contacted U.S. police stations inquiring about missing children—learned about Nicholas, he dyed his hair blond, gave himself the same tiny tattoos described on the missing child report, and concocted a credible kidnapping story, describing how he'd been sold into an international child sex ring, where he was tortured and not allowed to speak English. The fact that he was a brown-eyed French-Algerian impersonating a blue-eyed American didn't seem to deter the Barclay family, Child Protective Services, the U.S. Embassy staff in Madrid, the news media, or the FBI. Why were family members so easily fooled? Were they perhaps responsible for Nicholas's disappearance, or worse? These are questions that intrigue grizzled Texas private detective Charlie Parker in filmmaker Bart Layton's suspenseful documentary, based on a 2008 *New Yorker* article by David Grann. Recommended. (S. Granger)



Iron Sky ★★★

eOne, 93 min., in English & German w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98

Talk about a great trashy premise for a cool satire: *Iron Sky* features a bunch of Nazis who escaped from Germany in 1945 and somehow made their way to the dark side of the moon, where they have ever since been preparing for an invasion of Earth. After an American astronaut stumbles



on their swastika-shaped compound in 2018, the Nazis launch their assault, leading to *Independence Day*-style resistance that also reveals the manipulative character of the planet's political leadership. While the special effects in Timo Vuorensola's film are both pretty decent (aside from some toppling walls obviously made of styrofoam) and sometimes cheekily amusing (like Nazi space cruisers modeled on dirigibles), the humor here is flatfooted. Having the U.S. president be a Sarah Palin lookalike would still be a stale idea even if she had zipper lines and were better played by Stephanie Paul. But the Nazis deliver no stellar thespian examples either: Udo Kier is a perfect choice for the Moon Führer (as he's called), but is given almost nothing to do but scowl, while as his ambitious heir-apparent, Götz Otto chews the scenery mercilessly, but to little comic effect. Failing in its bid for camp classic status, this is optional, at best. (F. Swietek)

Keep the Lights On ★★★

Music Box, 106 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$38.95, Jan. 22

An acutely observed, painfully detailed account of the deterioration of a passionate relationship, Ira Sachs' semi-autobiographical film traces the meeting, troubled long-term cohabitation, and ultimate separation of two gay men, Danish expatriate Erik (Thure Lindhardt), a documentary filmmaker, and Paul (Zachary Booth), a handsome corporate lawyer. The focus is on attractively scruffy thirtysomething Erik—Sachs' surrogate—who first encounters Paul after a round of phone sex one night in 1998. Finding themselves drawn to one another, the pair move in together and initially prove to be a loving, mutually supportive couple. But by 2000 the honeymoon is definitely over. Paul has developed a drug problem, disappearing for long stretches without explanation, and Erik's attempts to intervene are failing. Although nearly a decade later the two are back together again, they reluctantly conclude that the arrangement cannot last. While the thrust is basically linear, the structure of *Keep the Lights On* is loose, interweaving digressive sequences involving friends, family, Erik's filmmaking, and the AIDS epidemic, which add mood and texture. The result is a multi-layered tale told with subtlety and a sense of insight that comes from personal experience. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Kid with a Bike ★★★1/2

Criterion, 87 min., in French w/English subtitles, PG-13, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95, Feb. 12

Noted Belgian sibling filmmakers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *The Kid with a Bike* is a remarkable contemporary neo-realist drama, a quietly devastating but gently

hopeful portrait of a boy abandoned by his father but given a second chance for a family by an unassuming but innately decent young woman. Cyril (an intense, vulnerable performance by 'tween Thomas Doret) has been placed in an orphanage outside a working-class Belgian town by his father, Guy (Jérémy Renier). Although assured that his stay would be a short one, Cyril nevertheless will break any rule and take any risk to escape and reunite with his dad. But on one of his treks outside he discovers that his father has simply moved. Before he's taken back, Cyril literally bumps into Samantha (Cécile de France), a hairdresser. As he clings to her while counselors try to pull him away, Samantha reacts not with fear but rather straightforward concern, which leads her to become his foster guardian, mounting a supportive, determined effort to help Cyril face reality and control his anger. The film's unaffected naturalism brings genuine emotional force to this tale of a boy traumatized by a damaged childhood, while also underscoring the fact of how strong a simple act of kindness can be. Without preaching, the Dardennes have once again delivered a social message both poignant and intensely relevant. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



Killer Joe ★

Lionsgate, 101 min., R/unrated, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Released theatrically with an NC-17 rating (edited to receive an "R" for DVD, but also featuring an "unrated director's cut" on Blu-ray), *Killer Joe* is all about hardcore human depravity, featuring disturbing content involving violence, sexuality, and brutality. When 22-year-old gambling, drug addict/dealer Chris Smith's (Emile Hirsch) slovenly mother steals his stash, he's left with a choice of coming up with money quickly or turning up dead. So Chris hatches a plan with his dimwitted father, Ansel (Thomas Haden Church)—who is now married to trashy Sharla (Gina Gershon)—to hire a hit man to whack mom and then collect the life-insurance money to cover the debt. That's where sinister, smooth-stalking Dallas cop "Killer" Joe Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) swaggers in. The Smiths don't have cash for a down-payment, so Joe demands a retainer: the Smiths' virginal teenage daughter, Dottie (Juno Temple). After that, everything that can go wrong does. Before winning a Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award for *August: Osage County*, playwright Tracy Letts wrote this Southern Gothic black comedy, which he also adapted for the screen. Shamefully self-indulgent director William Friedkin relishes the overtly misogynistic, lewd scenes in which women are sadistically



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THE EYE *of the* STORM

In a Sydney suburb, two nurses, a housekeeper and a solicitor attend to Elizabeth Hunter (Charlotte Rampling) as her expatriate son and daughter convene at her deathbed. In dying, as in living, Mrs. Hunter remains a disruptive force on those around her. Estranged from a mother who was never capable of loving them Sir Basil (Oscar Winner Geoffrey Rush), a famous but struggling actor in London, and Dorothy (Emmy Winner Judy Davis), a penniless French princess, attempt to reconcile with her.

In doing so they are reduced from states of worldly sophistication to floundering adolescence. Directed by Fred Schepisi (Roxanne, Six Degrees of Separation) *The Eye of the Storm* is a witty, yet savage, exploration of family relationships and the sharp undercurrents of love, comedy and tragedy, which define them.

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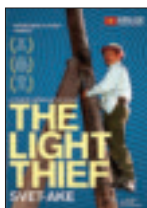
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and violently degraded, with McConaughey delivering a laconic, snake-like performance that is truly repellent. Not recommended. (S. Granger)

The Light Thief ★★★

Global Film Initiative, 80 min., in Kyrgyz w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



The obscure Eurasian country of Kyrgyzstan is the site for this microcosmic look at how suddenly Western-style modernization can bulldoze its way over the tranquil traditions of rural village life. In a poverty-ridden valley with very few resources, Svet-Ake (Arym Kubat)—also known as “Mr. Light”—is an altruistic electrician whose grand ambition is to one day supply his entire village with wind-generated electricity (essentially expanding on his crude but effective attempts to generate power for his own family and neighbors). But the film soon introduces some silver-tongued suit-and-tied outsiders with no connection to the land, who have an eye on redeveloping the valley and running the humble peasant residents out. The evil developer kingpin, Bekzat (Askat Sulaimanov), takes the easily coerced Mr. Light under his wing: the naïve electrician views collaboration as a golden opportunity to fulfill his village-wide wind-powered electric dreams. Although the film doesn’t say anything original about the sad inevitability of the slick, morally suspect forces of gentrification and the onslaught of global cultural homogeneity, it does offer an intermittently fascinating look at a little-known indigenous culture in the process of going extinct. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Looper ★★★

Sony, 119 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99



An exciting, engrossing, action-packed futuristic thriller, *Looper* revolves around the challenging consequences of time-travel. By 2044, time-travel has been achieved but also outlawed, meaning the good guys can’t do it but the bad guys can—and do. So, if a crime syndicate wants to get rid of someone, they zap him 30 years into the past, where a “looper” (hired killer) armed with a blunderbuss (sawed-off shotgun) essentially takes out the gangland garbage. Zipping around a decaying, derelict-littered metropolis in a shiny red Miata, Joe (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is a hotshot hit man who makes a mistake when he hides a desperate colleague (Paul Dano) in his apartment. All too soon, Joe realizes that his own loop is going to be closed, and his future self (embodied by Bruce Willis) is targeted for assassination by their mobster boss (Jeff Daniels). As the plot unfolds, older Joe escapes and embarks on his own mission to

identify and kill the youngster who will grow up to be a mysteriously omnipotent villain known as the Rainmaker, thereby irrevocably altering the future. Meanwhile, younger Joe befriends tough, enigmatic Sara (Emily Blunt) who lives in an isolated farmhouse where she is fiercely protective of her son (Pierce Gagnon), an angry 10-year-old with terrifying telekinetic powers. Writer-director Rian Johnson makes the tantalizingly twisting and confusing timeline as clear as possible, serving up multidimensional characters whose motivations propel the plot, while using only a modicum of digital technology. Recommended. (S. Granger)

My Worst Nightmare

★★★★1/2

Strand, 100 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Feb. 5



Just when you thought the modern rom-com was dead, veteran French writer-director Anne Fontaine resuscitates the genre with help from two of the most expressive and versatile actors in contemporary French film: Isabelle Huppert and Benoît Poelvoorde. Huppert’s character Agathe, an acid-tongued, prudish Parisian art dealer unhappily married to a wealthy stick-in-the-mud publisher, manages to cross paths with her exact opposite, Patrick (the perpetually animated Poelvoorde). Patrick is a louse of a father whose adolescent son is best friends with Agathe’s son at school. He’s also a boozing working-class womanizer who strikes up a friendship with her husband, and before you know it, Patrick’s hired to do a remodeling job on their stodgy apartment. Chaos naturally ensues, with Agathe and Patrick at odds every step of the way. But when Agathe’s husband meets a younger woman and subsequently leaves, Agathe changes in completely unexpected ways. *My Worst Nightmare* is a bawdy, riotous, risqué comedy that also features bittersweet and tender romantic moments. Both a scathingly funny twist on the classic mismatched couple comedy trope and a sophisticated comedy of manners (with a dash of class consciousness to boot), this is highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Natural Selection ★★★

Cinema Guild, 90 min., R, DVD: \$24.95



A multiple award-winner at the SXSW Film Festival, filmmaker Robbie Pickering’s *Natural Selection* is an enjoyable comedy about a devout Christian woman named Linda (Rachael Harris), who has endured a chaste marriage for 25 years. When her husband, Abe (John Diehl), is suddenly incapacitated by a mild stroke, Linda discovers a secret: Abe has been a sperm donor for many years, and

likely has children all over the U.S. Believing that Abe has asked her to travel to Florida to retrieve adult son Raymond (Matt O’Leary), Linda does just that—finding Raymond to be a drug-addled reprobate with a hilarious streak of creative vulgarity and a slight possibility of being redeemed. Most of the narrative concerns their long road trip: the slow building of trust; Linda’s maternal instincts being matched by Raymond’s willingness to be nurtured; and the complications of a sexually desperate woman in close company with her husband’s strapping young son. O’Leary is raw and funny, while Harris finally gets a well-deserved opportunity in a leading role. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Nobody Else But You

★★★

First Run, 102 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.95



This sexy, sardonic French whodunit begs obvious comparisons to *Fargo* due to its winter setting and quirky characters, but director G rard Hustache-Mathieu has his own arch style and agenda. Famous mystery novelist David Rousseau (Jean-Paul R uve) goes to Mouthe, a blizzardy boondocks on the Franco-Swiss border, in order to claim an inheritance, but finds himself snowbound with an obsession. A regional celebrity, sensuous blonde TV weather-girl and commercial pitchwoman Candice Lecouer (Sophie Quinton), was found dead by a skier on land that is outside any legal jurisdiction. Suspecting foul play rather than the default suicide verdict, Rousseau turns sleuth and delves into the rise and demise of Candice, whose life mirrors that of American icon Marilyn Monroe, complete with dyed-blond hair, sexpot wardrobe malfunctions, private torments, infertility, marriage to an abusive jock, and affairs with unsuitable men, culminating in a dangerous dalliance with a married eminence whose initials rhyme with J-F-K. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)

North Sea Texas ★★

Strand, 94 min., in Dutch w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Feb. 19



Although this Belgian film handles its weighty theme of adolescent homosexuality with ample sensitivity, the storyline here features some of the same quotidian coming-of-age clich s found in heterosexual teen romance movies. Living in the colorless seaside town of Ostend in Belgium (the title is taken from a local bar-restaurant), Pim (Jelle Floorizone) is a typical introverted ‘tween who enjoys solitary activities—including dressing up in his mother’s clothing—until he meets good-looking neighborhood kid Gino (Mathias

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Vergels). Gino seems to be the typical manipulator/user—obviously in a phase of bisexual experimentation—while Pim is deadly earnest in his commitment to a homosexual relationship with Gino. Pim has “victim” written all over his face: the next thing you know, Gino has taken off with some anonymous girl, much to Pim’s confused adolescent consternation. While Pim’s inward-turning, inarticulate rage is skillfully expressed by Floorizone, director Bavo Defurne’s minimalist aesthetic focuses too much attention on formal detail and not enough on character. Optional. (M. Sandlin)

The Other Dream Team

★★★

Lionsgate, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Jan. 15



Filmmaker Marius A. Markevicius’s inspiring documentary *The Other Dream Team* looks at Lithuania’s love for basketball (from the 1930s up to the present day), connecting that near-obsession to the Baltic country’s post-World War II absorption into the Soviet Union, which was most definitely a shotgun marriage. While most of the populace suffered severely under Soviet domination, one group of young Lithuanian men—who excelled on the court—earned special privileges. In fact, the Soviet basketball team that defeated the USA at the 1988 Seoul Olympics featured four starters from Lithuania. Cut to 1990, when the Lithuanian separatist movement became the elected government and declared independence—one of the first stages in the disintegration of the USSR. Lithuanian players living abroad formed a team to represent their newly-liberated homeland at the upcoming 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, and the Grateful Dead—no less—became team sponsors. The Lithuanians faced the possibility of having to take on America’s so-called Dream Team, which they eventually did. *The Other Dream Team* bounces easily between sports and politics, juggling newly-shot footage (including interviews with players and politicians) with archival material to excellent effect. A rare documentary likely to appeal to both sports fans and history junkies—truly a win-win—this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Pact ★★1/2

MPI, 89 min., R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98



In debut writer-director Nicholas McCarthy’s *The Pact*, Annie (Caity Lotz) returns to her family house in San Pedro after being convinced by her sister to attend their abusive mother’s funeral, despite bad blood. When Annie gets there, however, she finds her sister

has mysteriously vanished, leaving her young niece behind. Before long, the house begins to emit strange noises as doors and shelves open and close inexplicably, and after the manifestations increase and become more threatening, Annie enlists a medium with a ouija board—as well as a sympathetic cop (Casper Van Dien)—to help her uncover the reasons behind the ghostly activities, which include a dark family secret and a series of unsolved killings. Although McCarthy exhibits an affinity for using old-fashioned genre conventions to generate simmering tension and sudden shocks, the narrative of this low-budget film is both cliché-ridden and underdeveloped, with a denouement that is disappointingly mundane and silly. Still, *The Pact* does suggest that McCarthy has a knack for the tricks of the chiller trade, which bodes well for future efforts. Optional. (F. Swietek)

Painted Skin: The Resurrection ★★★

Well Go USA, 132 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98



A sequel to 2008’s *Painted Skin*, this epic fantasy follow-up shattered Chinese box-office records with its fast-paced swordplay, magical martial arts, exquisite costumes, and gloriously stylized CGI, combined with a star-studded cast. Unfortunately, the meandering plot and dizzying array of supernatural characters make this a somewhat frustrating—if eye-popping—watch. The action begins 500 years after the original film, as ancient fox demon Xiao Wei (Zhou Xun) is freed from centuries of icy captivity in a frozen lake, where she was imprisoned for violating demon law and protecting a human. She transforms into a manipulative seductress who must consume people’s hearts to become fully human. A supernatural love triangle is formed when Xiao Wei encounters Princess Jing (Zhao Wei), who wears a golden mask to hide facial scars from a bear attack, and also pines for the bodyguard (Chen Kun) who failed to protect her from the bear. While it might appeal to the genre’s most ardent followers, *Painted Skin: The Resurrection* is too much of a convoluted narrative mess to recommend to anyone else. Not a necessary purchase. (J. Shannon)

The Paperboy ★1/2

Millennium, 107 min., R, DVD: \$28.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99, Jan. 22



Southern Gothic to its core, this tacky, tawdry melodrama follows crusading *Miami Times* reporter Ward Jansen (Matthew McConaughey), who returns with an assistant (David Oyelowo) to his swampy hometown of Lately, FL, joining

his younger brother Jack (Zac Efron) while trying to uncover the truth about a death-row killer—alligator hunter Hillary Van Wetter (John Cusack), who might have been wrongly convicted of killing a seedy sheriff. During the course of the investigation, Jack is seduced by the racist convict’s salacious pen-pal fiancée, an aging floozy named Charlotte Bless (Nicole Kidman—in a peroxide blond wig). Based on Pete Dexter’s pulpy novel, director Lee Daniels introduces the lurid plot with an interview of the family’s maid (singer Macy Gray), who not only delivers a retrospective of what happened but also contributes a husky voiceover commentary throughout the indulgently episodic narrative. While the scene in which Kidman’s character urinates on Efron’s briefly ignited some sensationalist tabloid fever, it’s actually an appropriate treatment for jellyfish stings and not as shocking as one might think, given the circumstances. That cannot be said for Cusack’s character’s autoeroticism, S&M gang rape, and animal mutilation. Ultimately, this is scummy, sexploitation sleaze. Not recommended. (S. Granger)

The Perks of Being a Wallflower ★★★

Summit, 99 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.99, Feb. 12



When Stephen Chbosky’s young-adult novel was published in 1999, some book critics compared it with J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* for the way it sensitively captured teenage confusion and angst. Beginning his freshman year in high school in suburban Pittsburgh, troubled Charlie (Logan Lerman) is recovering from the emotional aftermath caused by his best friend’s suicide and the death of his aunt. Confiding only in an anonymous pen pal, Charlie fervently hopes that this will be the beginning of a new chapter in his life. While his first few days are wretched and lonely, he’s soon befriended at a football game by Patrick (Ezra Miller), an audaciously gay senior, and his inseparable stepsister, Sam (Emma Watson). Welcomed into their eccentric group of rebellious, self-proclaimed “wallflowers,” introverted Charlie earnestly confronts issues related to sexuality (straight and gay), experiments with mind-altering drugs, and becomes the reluctant crush of a self-described Buddhist/punk rocker (Mae Whitman). As the year progresses, Charlie slowly but surely struggles toward conquering his demons while also discovering his own identity. Helping out along the way are his concerned parents (Kate Walsh, Dylan McDermott) and sister (Nina Dobrev), as well as an encouraging English teacher (Paul Rudd). Directed by Chbosky, this is a compassionate teen film that rises above many other coming-of-age dramas. Recommended. (S. Granger)

Pitch Perfect ★★★

Universal, 112 min., PG-13,
DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98

With the success of *Glee*, it was inevitable that college competitive singing would make its way to the screen. Director Jason Moore's *Pitch Perfect*



Perfect centers on a saucy, snarky, spirited female a cappella group known as the Barden Bellas of Barden University, who are determined to break through the "glass ceiling" and triumph over Barden's Treblemakers, the male national champions, who are fronted by obnoxious Bumper (Adam DeVine). The Bellas' authoritarian blond leader, Aubrey (Anna Camp), and her redheaded BFF, Chloe (Brittany Snow), forcibly recruit reluctant freshman Beca (Anna Kendrick), who is determined to be a music producer and is only attending Barden because her father is a professor at the college. Eventually, Beca is joined by Aussie quipster Fat Amy (Rebel Wilson), soft-spoken Lilly (Hana Mae Lee), and butch Cynthia Rose (Ester Dean). At the campus radio station, Beca also hooks up with wannabe film-score composer Jesse (Skyler Astin), a geeky Treblemaker. Adapted from Mickey Rapkin's 2009 non-fiction book *Pitch: Perfect: The Quest for Collegiate A Cappella Glory*, this is an admittedly formulaic story with a conventional conclusion, but it's also infectious fun. Recommended. (S. Granger)

The Possession ★1/2

Lionsgate, 103 min., PG-13,
DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.99,
Jan. 15

Why should Catholicism be the only faith to deal with possession? Reaching for equal opportunity horror, Danish filmmaker Ole Bornedal turns to Jewish folklore—specifically, a dibbuk, which is a malicious spirit that can capture and ultimately devour the soul of an innocent person. At a yard sale in upstate New York, 10-year-old Emily Brenek (Natasha Calis) finds an old wooden box with carved Hebrew letters, and begs her father, Clyde (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), to buy it. Clyde is a basketball coach, recently divorced from Emily's mom, Stephanie (Kyra Sedgwick), a jewelry designer. Like many an indulgent weekend father, Clyde complies with Emily's wishes. Pretty soon, however, she's growling, gobbling food with a voracious appetite, and spitting out giant moths. His ex-wife blames Emily's ominous, antisocial behavior on Clyde, as does his sassy, often-hysterical elder daughter, Hannah (Madison Davenport). But Clyde's colleague, Professor McMannis (Jay Brazeau), and a hip Judaic exorcist, Rabbi Tzakok (Hasidic rap/reggae fusion artist Matisyahu), believe that the box contained a dibbuk that has now gained demonic possession of Emily. Loosely based on a 2004



Los Angeles Times article by Leslie Gornstein about the eBay auction of a "dybbuk box," this is a superficially scripted and formulaically directed chiller that adds little to the genre, regardless of the change in religion. Not a necessary purchase. (S. Granger)

Prairie Love ★★★

Film Movement, 81 min., not
rated, DVD: \$24.95

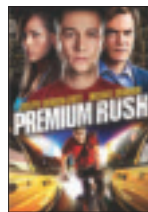
While comparisons to the Coen brothers' *Fargo* are inevitable, filmmaker Dusty Bias's tragicomedy actually seems far more akin to the terse, deadpan narratives of Finland's Aki Kaurismäki. The off-off Hollywood setting here is the desolate, snow-covered prairies of North Dakota in deep winter, where a character known only as "Vagrant" (Jeremy Clark)—who is so lonesome that he listens to self-improvement cassette tapes in his car—comes across a half-frozen stranded motorist called "NoDak" (Garth Blomberg), who was en route to a women's penitentiary where he planned to rendezvous with a prisoner (Holly Lynn Ellis) he's been carrying on a steamy "affair" with via pen-pal letters. NoDak easily falls victim to the Vagrant, who proceeds on to the prison and masquerades as the would-be suitor for the sweetly oblivious inmate, just being released. For a short time the strange couple enjoy an idyll in the motels and abandoned farmsteads that dot the white landscape. But it cannot last, and doesn't. A sardonic look at characters who very much grow out of an absurdly minimalist environment and hardscrabble culture, this interestingly offbeat indie is recommended. (C. Cassady)



Premium Rush ★★★

Sony, 91 min., PG-13, DVD:
\$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99

This race-against-time thriller finds bicycle messenger Wilee (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) entrusted with a mysterious envelope from Columbia University in uptown Manhattan that he must deliver downtown to Chinatown. Wilee is having problems with his girlfriend, Vanessa (Dania Ramirez)—also a bike courier—who is being pursued by his rival (Wolé Parks). And his lightweight bike only sports one gear and no brakes. But that's nothing compared to menacing Bobby Monday (Michael Shannon), a sneering New York detective with a gambling problem, who really wants that envelope. Director David Koepp wins points for the terrific action visuals (96% of the speeding chase sequences are reportedly real, with no CGI trickery; among the peddling daredevils is Scottish street cyclist Danny MacAskill, whose YouTube videos attract millions of views). Unfortunately, *Premium Rush* loses

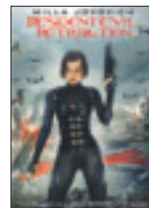


momentum during expositional flashbacks to reveal the contents of that envelope and why it is valuable to so many people, and Jamie Chung's portrayal of Nima—a desperate Chinese exchange student who barely speaks English and has a history with Vanessa—is cartoonish, while his character is an unrealistic plot device. A triumph of stunt work over storytelling, this is an optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Resident Evil: Retribution ★

Screen Gems, 96 min., R, DVD:
\$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99

The fifth entry in writer-director Paul W.S. Anderson's sci-fi/horror franchise based on the popular Capcom video game series once again drops viewers into a mad world created by the Umbrella Corporation, a vicious bio-engineering pharmaceutical company that concocted the T-virus, which triggered a zombie apocalypse. As the human race's last-and-only hope, intrepid Alice (Milla Jovovich), a former security operative for Umbrella, leads the opposition. As *Retribution* begins, Alice awakens in the heart of Umbrella's clandestine underwater compound, revealing more of her mysterious past as she delves further into the complex. Utilizing a cloning plot ruse, now-dead characters—played by Michelle Rodriguez, Sienna Guillory, Oded Fehr, Ali Larter, and others—once again surface as Alice fights her way through a series of holograms designed to simulate various cities (Tokyo, Moscow, Berlin, etc.), including Alice's hometown, Suburbia, located outside Raccoon City. Except when Alice maternally bonds with Becky (Aryana Engineer)—a hearing-impaired girl who may or may not be her daughter—*Retribution* serves up loud, über-violent, and repetitive action. Not recommended. (S. Granger)



Robot & Frank ★★★

Sony, 89 min., PG-13, DVD:
\$30.99, Feb. 12

Set in the near future, this sly, fanciful story revolves around Frank Weld (Frank Langella), an irascible retired jewel thief, divorced and living alone in rural Cold Spring, NY. Frank's house is a slovenly mess and his memory is obviously failing, which greatly concerns his grown children: exasperated Hunter (James Marsden) and peripatetic Madison (Liv Tyler), with whom he communicates via Skype. Since Frank is adamant about not moving to a "memory facility," Hunter arrives one day with an electronic caregiver. This expensive robot (voiced pitch-perfectly by Peter Sarsgaard) is programmed to monitor Frank's daily activities in order to stimulate his mind and body, while also making and



serving him healthy, nourishing meals. Frank initially balks, but soon the cheerful robot is accompanying him everywhere, even to his favorite haunt: the local library. Here, kindly librarian Jennifer (Susan Sarandon) regretfully informs him that all books are being removed to make way for the “digital experience.” But locked in a safe, she’s stashed a rare, valuable copy of *Don Quixote*. Making plans to steal the book, Frank discovers—to his surprise and delight—that given proper instruction the robot learns how to pick locks quickly and, best of all, has no conscience. For the first time in his life, Frank has an accomplice, as one successful heist leads to another. Director Jake Schreier establishes a lighthearted, believable bond between man and machine, while Langella delivers a tour de force performance (his character not only has real memory lapses but can also feign them). Combining pathos with humor, *Robot & Frank* leaves a bittersweet afterglow. Recommended. (S. Granger)

The Salt of Life ★★

Zeitgeist, 90 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99

Comically examining the invisibility of the middle-aged male, filmmaker Gianni Di Gregorio stars as Gianni, a married man with an adult daughter (played by the director’s real-life daughter, Teresa), and a controlling mother, Valeria (96-year-old Valeria De Franciscis Bondoni). Everywhere he goes, Gianni runs into attractive younger women (his employer forced him to retire at age 50), but they either don’t notice him or see him more as someone to walk their dog or pick up their groceries (although older women treat him much the same). In an American movie, Gianni might buy a sports car or try a spray-on tan, but Di Gregorio’s approach plays more like Fellini by way of Nanni Moretti, if lighter in tone. *The Salt of Life* also sports a subtext about the idle rich, since Valeria—who has a refrigerator full of champagne—expects Gianni to keep providing for her in high style. Gianni tries to make himself more visible, while encouraging his mother to go easy on the spending. Unfortunately, his lingering glances towards women make him come across as a little creepy, especially since he isn’t single (he also experiences a misadventure with a little blue pill). Still, an unexpectedly surrealistic ending, after Gianni accidentally ingests a hallucinogen, is delightful. While not quite as charming as the director’s wonderful debut *Mid-August Lunch*, this is recommended, overall. (K. Fennesy)

Searching for Sugar Man ★★½

Sony, 86 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99, Jan. 22

An obsession to uncover the truth about an

obscure singer-songwriter brings surprising and affecting revelations in Malik Bendjelloul’s hugely entertaining, Sundance award-winning documentary *Searching for Sugar Man*. Sixto Rodriguez was discovered in a small Detroit bar by Motown music executives who produced his first album in 1970. Although critically acclaimed, the record commercially bombed, and Rodriguez quickly faded into obscurity. Eventually, a rumor circulated that Rodriguez had committed suicide onstage, either by shooting himself or by self-immolation. Meanwhile a copy of his album found its way to South Africa, and as the protest movement against the apartheid regime began to gain steam among disaffected whites, several of Rodriguez’s songs were adopted as anthems, with the singer becoming the voice of opposition despite official efforts of suppression. Apartheid ultimately died in South Africa, but Rodriguez’s popularity lived on. A man named Stephen Segerman spearheaded a search for genuine biographical data on the singer, setting up a website that led to contact from one of Rodriguez’s daughters, who informed him that the singer was still alive in Detroit. Rodriguez came to South Africa to perform before astonishingly large crowds who came out to hear this man who had been living a simple life for decades—unaware of the popularity his songs had achieved on another continent. Bendjelloul’s absorbing film tells this fascinating tale through interviews, archival material, new footage, and lots of great music. A joyous surprise, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



Secret of the Wings

★★★

Walt Disney, 75 min., G, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Not all Disney spin-offs shine, but the candy-colored CGI-animated *Tinker Bell* franchise starring the beloved fairy from *Peter Pan* has been a consistent winner, popular with viewers young and old. In this fourth trip to Pixie Hollow, Tinker Bell (voiced by Mae Whitman) longs to cross the border into the Winter Woods, home of the winter fairies. Although she is warned not to, headstrong Tink nevertheless makes the trek—only to wind up damaging her wings from the bitter cold. After recuperating, Tink makes a second trip and with the help of a kindly “keeper”—a librarian-type named Dewey (wink, wink)—meets her sister (born from the same laugh), Periwinkle (Lucy Hale). Naturally, the sisters are torn apart by the fact that due to climate issues they must remain, well, torn apart. But tinkers are resourceful, and Tink and her pals devise a wonderful solution....until everything goes terribly,



catastrophically wrong—placing Pixie Hollow in grave danger. Returning members of the stellar voice cast include Anjelica Huston, Lucy Liu, and Raven-Symone, while Timothy Dalton makes a first appearance here as the Winter Woods leader Lord Milori. Directed by Peggy Holmes and featuring the catchy tune “The Great Divide” by the McClain Sisters, this solid entry in the series is recommended. (R. Pitman)

The Skinny ★½

Breaking Glass, 100 min., not rated, DVD: \$21.99

This barely competent dramedy concerns a group of African-American friends—four gay men and one lesbian—who meet up in New York City a year after graduating from Brown University. Relationship mayhem ensues as Magnus (Jussie Smollett) discovers that his supposedly committed lover (Dustin Ross) has not only been attending orgies but also clandestinely shot a pornographic video in Magnus’s own apartment. Meanwhile, the puppy-ish Sebastian (Blake Young-Fountain) has decided he wants to lose his virginity by sleeping with longtime friend Joey (Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman); Kyle (Anthony Burrell) is dodging romantic attention; and Langston (Shanika Warren-Markland) is summoning the courage to take up an implicit invitation to have sex with a bar waitress. Written and directed by Patrik-Ian Polk, *The Skinny* smugly lurches along with a lot of momentum-killing breaks for soft-core porn action, which only detract from the reasonably good performances here. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)



Sleepwalk With Me

★★★

MPI, 81 min., PG-13, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

Standup comedian Mike Birbiglia’s self-referential one-man show serves as the basis for his slight but agreeable film in which he stars as a comic named Matt Pandamiglio. Matt starts off as a hapless would-be performer in the open-mic club where he works as a bartender, but gradually achieves some success after becoming the client of an aged but aggressive agent (the hilarious Sondra James). Unfortunately, this has a negative impact on his relationship with long-suffering live-in girlfriend Abby (Lauren Ambrose). As Matt works on personalizing his material, the jokes come more and more at Abby’s expense, and since he’s reluctant to even consider marriage, the pair drift apart. Matt must also deal with his gruff father’s constant prodding to do something with his life, although his spacey mother is more supportive of his ambitions. Added to the mix is Matt’s struggle with a dangerous sleeping disorder that literally compels him



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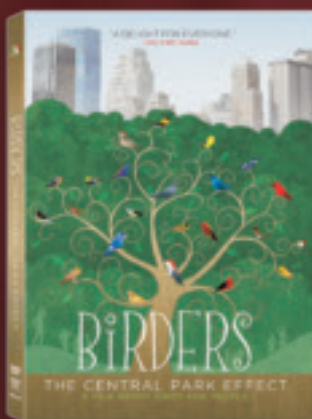
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to act out his dreams, with life-threatening results. Much of the film finds Birbiglia telling Pandamiglio's story directly to the audience as he drives from gig to gig, pleading for their understanding and sympathy (while the thread dealing with Matt and Abby is presented in conventional narrative fashion). *Sleepwalk With Me* was obviously made on a modest budget, and like its star is a mite shambling and unkempt. But Birbiglia is a likable, amusing screen presence. Recommended, overall. (F. Swietek)

Speechless ★★★

Breaking Glass, 96 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$21.99

At the beginning of *Speechless*, a European man (Pierre-Mathieu Vital) is found in a remote corner of rural China in a seeming trance-state—swimming naked, while also refusing to speak. When the local hospital decides to transfer him to a mental institution, a sympathetic orderly named Jiang (Gao Qilun) decides to liberate the stranger instead, taking him on the road. By chance Jiang discovers that the silent man is named Luke, a French national who enrolled in a foreign-exchange program that brought him to China. Luke's trauma stems from a fateful transgendered love triangle with two Chinese medical students, an idyll that wound up being poisoned by jealousy. This ultra-melodramatic turn of events might be hard to take were it not for the non-sensational, neo-realist style of director and co-writer Simon Chung, who here creates a sensitive gay drama. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)



Stolen ★★

Millennium, 96 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99, Jan. 8

Director Simon West reteams with star Nicolas Cage (the pair had a major hit 15 years ago with *Con Air*) for this cheesy New Orleans-set B-movie that features bank robberies, kidnappings, multiple car chases, and even human immolation, yet still manages to be almost unremittably dull. Cage plays this one straight—as opposed to his occasional manic performance—as Will, a supposed genius at planning elaborate heists, whose partner is volatile Vincent (Josh Lucas). After a bank job goes wrong and Vincent is apparently killed, Will is nabbed and sent to prison. When he gets out, Will discovers that Vincent is actually still alive; disfigured and angry, he's holding Will's daughter (Sami Gayle) hostage and threatening to kill her unless Will brings him the loot from that last robbery. Since he burnt the cash, Will enlists their old getaway driver—pretty bartender Riley (Malin Akerman)—to help him rob



another bank. Competently directed by West and shot during Mardi Gras for background color, *Stolen* is ultimately just too pedestrian, the sort of by-the-numbers fare that would barely pass muster as late-night premium cable fodder. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

Tai Chi Zero ★★1/2

Well Go USA, 95 min., PG-13, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98, Jan. 22

Splashy but vacuous, Stephen Fung's martial-arts epic is essentially a live-action cartoon. The hero is Yang Lu Chan (Yuan Xiaochao), a historical figure who was famous for mastering the tai chi form of kung fu invented by the Chen family. In this imaginative telling, he's a kid called The Freak because of a prominent horn on his forehead that is actually a sign of innate martial arts prowess. Yang becomes a military secret weapon capable of downing scads of warriors. But when his energy begins to wane, Yang travels to Chen Village to learn the special technique that will save him. Unfortunately, the locals are unwilling to teach outsiders, so Yang learns by imitating the moves of those he fights. After being accepted by Master Chen (Tony Leung Ka Fai) and his lovely daughter (singer Angelababy), Yang helps them rebuff a ruthless railway company that is planning to destroy the village by running their line through the mountains. *Tai Chi Zero* is goofy to extremes, half martial arts and half slapstick romp, jazzed up with all sorts of visual bells and whistles—silent movie imitations, abrupt shifts to animation, elaborate special effects, and fight scenes choreographed to look like video games. But a little of this pizzazz goes a long way, and by the halfway point viewers are likely to feel more exhausted than exhilarated. Optional. (F. Swietek)



Taken 2 ★★

Fox, 92 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 15

In the original *Taken*, Kim (Maggie Grace), daughter of former CIA operative Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson), was abducted in Paris by Albanian sex traffickers, after which Mills embarked on a bloody one-man rescue mission. As this sequel begins, Bryan and his wife Lenore (Famke Janssen) are divorced and sharing custody of teenage Kim, who is not only trying (for the third time) to obtain her driver's license but also has her first boyfriend. When Lenore confides that her new husband has cancelled their family vacation, Bryan impulsively invites his ex-wife and daughter to meet him in Istanbul to tour the exotic sites along the Bosphorus, including the Suleymaniye Mosque



and Grand Bazaar. Here, Bryan and Lenore are snatched by revenge-seeking Albanians, led by a bitter tribal chief (Rade Sherbedgia), who has vowed diabolical vengeance for the death of his gangster son. Director Olivier Megaton has young Kim escaping capture, adroitly scampering over Turkish rooftops and tossing grenades, while also following specific telephoned directions from her calm, remarkably resourceful father as he's held captive, and her blindfolded mother is tortured. Implausible? Yes. Absurd? Yes. Will there be a *Taken 3*? Most likely. Optional. (S. Granger)

Tazza: The High Rollers

★★★

CJ Entertainment, 140 min., in Korean w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99

Based on a popular Korean comic book set in the world of high-stakes gambling, Choi Dong-hoon's *Tazza* serves up an epic tale of tense card games, brutal reprisals, chicanery, and double-dealing in every sense. Seung-woo Cho stars as Goni, a callow young fellow who loses both his life's savings and his sister's alimony payments during a crooked game of "hwatu," roughly translated as the "war of flowers." Determined to seek revenge, Goni catches the eye of Pyeong (Baek Yun Sik), a retired card master who becomes his mentor. Goni must deal with dangerous foes—Agui, a sadistic thug with a grudge against Pyeong, and a slick mobster named Kwak—while also meeting the expectations of the notorious Madam Jeong (Kim Hye Soo), a sultry woman whose expertise at the card table is matched by her dexterity in manipulative self-interest (she becomes irritated when Goni finds a girlfriend his own age). *Tazza*—Korean slang for professional gamblers at the top of their game—is long, somewhat repetitive, and depends on sometimes hard-to-follow flashbacks. But Choi's direction makes this an exciting "sting" film with a visceral punch. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Undefeated ★★★

Anchor Bay, 114 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99, Feb. 19

Filmmakers Dan Lindsay and T.J. Martin's Oscar-winning sports documentary follows the fortunes of an inner-city West Memphis high school football team—the Manassas Tigers—during the 2009 season, as they reverse their reputation as sure losers and overcome incredible obstacles to become a serious challenger for a district (and maybe even state) title. *Undefeated* isn't really an accurate title: the Tigers actually lose their opening games badly before turning things around, but while their on-field performances are a significant part of the story, the film's



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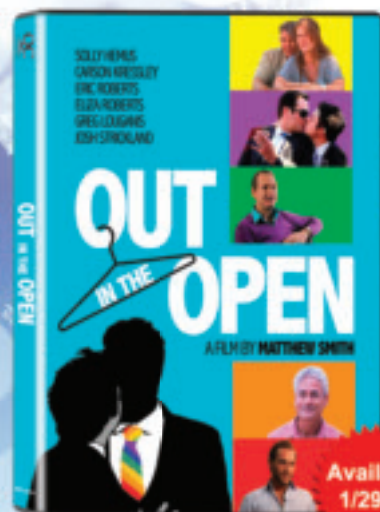
GO GO CRAZY

This outrageous mockumentary from director Fred M. Caruso follows the bone-headed but cutthroat contestants of a raunchy go go boy pageant - hosted by drag icon Hedda Lettuce.



THE SKINNY

In this sexy comedy/drama from "Noah's Arc" creator Patrik-Ian Polk, a group of college friends reunites in NYC one year after graduation for a weekend of partying, hookups and heartache.



OUT IN THE OPEN

Celebrities, politicians and straight allies unite for this funny and inspiring documentary that sets out to debunk all the myths and stereotypes attached to the LGBTQ community.



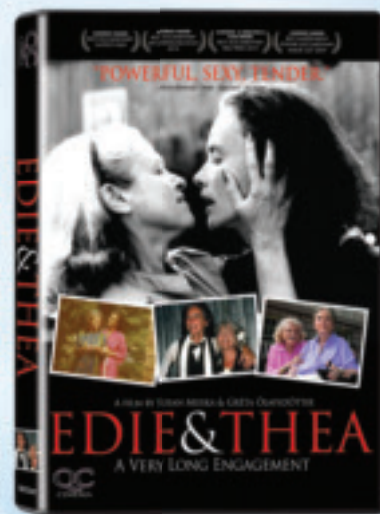
SHIFTY

London crack-cocaine dealer Shifty (Riz Ahmed) must face the destructive path he's chosen after an old friend returns home, his family threatens to shut him out for good, and a rival drug dealer sets him up for a big fall.



DUST UP

An ex-vigilante who's traded in his machine gun for a yoga mat encounters a beautiful young mother (Amber Benson, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer") in deep trouble with a cannibalistic drug lord and realizes that justice must be served.



EDIE & THEA

Lesbian couple Edith Windsor and Thea Spyer reminisce about their 40-year relationship that began in the turbulent 1960s and ended with their historic fight for marriage equality in this must-see documentary.

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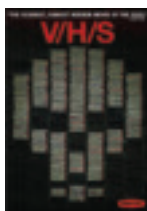
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real emphasis is on the players themselves, and remarkable coach Bill Courtney, a paunchy, gregarious lumberyard owner who volunteers to rebuild the team, hoping to revive the spirit of the school's blighted neighborhood. The spotlight falls on three particular players: O.C. Brown, who must improve his grades in order to get into college; hot-tempered Chavis Daniels, fresh from a stint in juvenile lockup; and bright, amiable Montrail "Money" Brown, whose season is threatened by a serious injury. Revealing moments occur throughout the film, which culminates in a surprising mix of uplift and reality, underscoring the fact that victory takes various forms. A compelling slice of inner-city life with an affectingly hopeful message, this award-winning documentary is recommended. (F. Swietek)

V/H/S ★★

Magnolia, 116 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

The found footage genre popularized by *The Blair Witch Project* (and copied by innumerable horror movies ever since) receives the anthology treatment in this low-budget effort, which offers five short films by different directors, with a wraparound story to loosely tie them together. The linking segment has four goons being hired to break into a house to retrieve a VHS tape; once inside, the quartet stumble on a dead body and roomfuls of videocassettes—ultimately examining five. The first shows three friends taking a girl to their motel room, only to discover that she has a strange taste for human flesh. The second concerns a young couple followed during their cross-country drive by someone or something, and the third finds a quartet of teenagers going off into the woods to visit a lake where a mass murder occurred years before (which we know is never a good idea). The fourth is a tale told entirely via video conferences between a young woman who's suffering from odd physical problems—while also harboring suspicions about an intruder—and her best friend, a med student. In the closer, four young guys attend a Halloween party where the action isn't all in fun. *V/H/S* suffers from tired tropes—including extreme shaky-cam and fuzzy blackouts—while the payoffs generally fall flat. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Well-Digger's Daughter ★★★

Kino Lorber, 105 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

A French period drama remake of 1940's *La Fille du Puisatier*, made by revered filmmaker



Marcel Pagnol, *The Well-Digger's Daughter* is directed by Daniel Auteuil (who gained world recognition in the 1986 prestige-scale *Jean de Florette*, based on a novel by Pagnol). Auteuil also stars as Pascal, a well-digger and salt-of-the-earth type in Provence in the early 1900s. Of his six daughters, the widowed Pascal is proudest of Patricia (As-trid Bergès-Frisbey), who was briefly Paris-educated and is the rustic clan's brightest prospect. When Patricia is seduced and impregnated by an admiring Jacques (Nicolas Duvauchelle)—a dashing aviator son of a prosperous village merchant—Pascal's aged partner, Félipe (Kad Merad), offers to wed Patricia to avoid scandal, but the well-digger will settle for nothing less than rightful marriage with the high-born culprit...or be forced to exile and disown Patricia. A modern dramatist might cast the well-digger as a mean, small-minded bumpkin, but such is the unapologetic old-school Pagnol magic that the unyielding father seems as much the offended victim as the daughter (Pascal is seen as heroically adhering to a moral code). Sex, profanity, and edgy histrionics are eschewed here in favor of pastoral scenes of amber-colored fields of grain. Whether intentionally post-ironic or a sincere revisit to a more conservative and sentimental brand of drama, this tranquil tale is a winner. Recommended. (C. Cassady)

Won't Back Down ★★

Fox, 121 min., PG, DVD: \$22.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99, Jan. 15

As a single mom whose child attends Adams Elementary in the poverty-stricken, downtown Hill district in Pittsburgh, PA, Jamie Fitzpatrick (Maggie Gyllenhaal) runs into a wall after she realizes that her daughter, Malia (Emily Alyn Lind), is dyslexic. Although Jamie asks for help, Malia's teacher (Nancy Bach) ignores her pleas, as does the smarmy principal (Bill Nunn). Jamie's frustration leads her to befriend Nona Alberts (Viola Davis), a conscientious teacher whose son (Dante Brown) has math problems. Together, they discover a "parent-trigger law" allowing concerned parents who wish to rescue a failing school to take control and re-design it to foster effective learning. Obviously, their educational reform campaign is opposed not only by the stubbornly entrenched administration but also by a representative (Holly Hunter) of the powerful teacher's union. Based on a 2010 incident that occurred in Los Angeles, *Won't Back Down* is unfortunately burdened with a contrived, exposition-heavy script and heavy-handed direction by Daniel Barnz. Distorting or simplifying complex issues into banal generalities, this



is a preachy film that clearly tries to appeal to desperate and often rightfully outraged parents who are deeply concerned about some obvious failures in the American public school system. A disappointing misfire, this is an optional purchase, at best. (S. Granger)

The Words ★

Sony, 97 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99

Buried somewhere in this jumbled mess of a movie is the kernel of a provocative idea about ethics and plagiarism and the difference between fiction and reality. The title refers to a new book written by Clay Hammond (Dennis Quaid), who is reading excerpts (which are dramatized) to an assembled group of rapt aficionados in Manhattan, including a predatory Columbia University grad student (Olivia Wilde). Hammond begins by describing ambitious Rory Jansen (Bradley Cooper), who yearns to be a great writer, like Ernest Hemingway. Struggling Rory is married to an adoring wife, Dora (Zoe Saldana), who—on their honeymoon in Paris—buys him a battered briefcase. When the couple return home to Brooklyn, Rory discovers that the briefcase contains a yellowed, typewritten manuscript. Enraptured by the tragic, post-World War II love story of a U.S. soldier in Paris, Rory copies it onto his laptop, prints it out, and shows it to an agent at the talent agency where he works in the mailroom. Almost overnight, Rory becomes a literary sensation. One day, while sitting in Central Park, basking in his fame and fortune, Rory is engaged in conversation by a mysterious old man (Jeremy Irons), the manuscript's real author, who tells him: "We all make choices in life. The hard thing is living with them." Co-written and co-directed by Brian Klugman and Lee Sternthal, *The Words* is a tiresome tale featuring a platitude-filled story-within-a-story structure that defies all logic and reason. Not recommended. (S. Granger)



Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) during January and February for DVD/Blu-ray-specific comments added to the video movies reviewed here, as well as new reviews, including *Celeste and Jesse Forever*, *Farewell My Queen*, *Hit & Run*, *Holy Motors*, *Liberal Arts*, *Little Birds*, *Seven Psychopaths*, *Trouble with the Curve*, and much more!

Abraham Lincoln ★★1/2

Kino, 93 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$34.95



Timed to coincide with the release of Steven Spielberg's feature film *Lincoln*, this is the Blu-ray debut of a 1930 biographical effort by D.W. Griffith, the first of the two sound films made by the legendary director before his career collapsed. While a few crowd sequences are well composed (although the battle scenes are sloppy), *Abraham Lincoln*—which suffers from historical inaccuracies that are only exceeded by their dramatic flatness—mostly consists of stilted, stagy tableaux, beginning with Lincoln's birth and ending with his assassination. Walter Huston plays Abe solemnly, with huge, theatrical gestures more suited to silent film than a talkie, and while the rest of the cast—including twittering Una Merkel as Lincoln's first love—aren't nearly as stiff, the acting here is generally old-fashioned. Still, this is an interesting curio, presented with a fine high-def transfer made from a 35mm print remastered by the Museum of Modern Art, complete with excised scenes that have been recovered over the years (many lack the audio track, so are accompanied by title cards). Extras include a two-part conversation between Huston and Griffith in which the director restates both his disdain for Reconstruction and his positive attitude toward the Ku Klux Klan that made his *The Birth of a Nation* so controversial. For its historical value alone, this should still be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Alfred Hitchcock: The Masterpiece Collection

★★★1/2

Universal, 15 discs, 1,762 min., not rated/PG/PG-13/R, Blu-ray: \$299.98



Not all of the 15 films in this Blu-ray boxed set are masterpieces, but because they hail from the Master of Suspense, all have their merits (and 13 are making their high-def debuts here). Along with the previously available *North by Northwest* and *Psycho*, these are some of Hitchcock's greatest films: *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), Hitch's personal favorite, with Joseph Cotten as the charming "Merry Widow" killer; *Rope* (1948), Hitch's bold long-take experiment, starring James Stewart; *Rear Window* (1954), starring Stewart and Grace Kelly; *Vertigo* (1958), recently anointed by the *Sight and Sound* poll as the Greatest Film Ever Made, pairing Stewart with Kim Novak; *The Birds* (1963), his memorable contribution to the "animal attack" genre, starring Tippi Hedren; *Marnie* (1964), featuring Hedren and Sean Connery in a chilly vision of psychosis and domination; and *Frenzy* (1972), his first and only film featuring nudity, with a largely British cast that includes Alec McCowen.

The remaining entries are *Saboteur* (1942), *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *Torn Curtain* (1966), *Topaz* (1969), and Hitchcock's amusing final work, *Family Plot* (1976). This set has been criticized for mastering problems on some of the entries (notably *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Marnie*, *Frenzy*, and *Family Plot*), but the worst offer better images than the previous DVD releases, and the best (such as *Vertigo*) are superb. The generous extras (with a new featurette on the legacy of *The Birds*) include audio commentaries, retrospective and archival behind-the-scenes documentaries and featurettes, interviews, storyboards, stills galleries, a 58-page booklet, and more. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

American Horror Story: The Complete First Season ★★★

Fox, 532 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.99



From *Glee* creators Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk, this dark, disturbing FX channel original is a creepy (at times gruesome) and increasingly compelling horror story told over the course of a season. Set in a gloomy haunted house in Los Angeles, the series stars Dylan McDermott and Connie Britton as Ben and Vivien Harmon, a married couple trying to start again in the wake of infidelity and a miscarriage, with Taissa Farmiga as their angry teenage daughter, Violet. Jessica Lange, who won Emmy and Golden Globe awards for her flamboyant performance, is Sister Jude, the displaced Southern belle next door. Most of the other "neighbors," however, turn up in the Harmons' home—trapped in an afterlife that forces them to replay their terrible stories for every new living resident. The show is filled with voyeuristic and ominous shots (watching from on high, behind doors, down the stairs), a kinky sexual aura, and a hyper-weird atmosphere. The first half of the season seems like all perverse spectacle, but eventually a story (of sorts) emerges. Benefiting from a superb cast that also includes Frances Conroy, Evan Peters, Denis O'Hare, and Mena Suvari, *American Horror Story* is a mature series with large dollops of sex, violence, brutality, betrayal, and sadism. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2011, extras include an audio commentary on the pilot episode, and behind-the-scenes featurettes. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Black Like Me ★★★

MVD, 2 discs, 105 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98

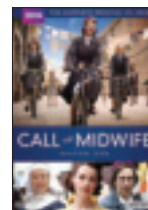


Originally screened in Manhattan the year of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, *Black Like Me* is a fictional adaptation of the

true-life tale of progressive white journalist John Howard Griffin, who darkens his skin through a medically induced tanning treatment and then travels the American South in the late 1950s to write about what life's like for the average southern African American. Griffin is played by a seemingly under-confident James Whitmore, who looks undeniably ridiculous in his blackface disguise here. And short of a lynching, he is treated just as badly as you would expect. Whitmore as Griffin never seems comfortable in his new dark skin, and he's too awkward to comfortably settle into African-American culture; but, of course, he's black enough for bigoted Southerners to threaten and belittle him. Picked up as a hitchhiker by white motorists, Griffin has to field creepy questions about things like his presumed burning desire for white women. Not surprisingly, his experiences turn him into an angry, broken man ready to lash out at any perceived slight. Whitmore's performance leaves a lot to be desired, but *Black Like Me* boldly confronts powder-keg racial issues like few films—then or now. Bonus features include the hour-long documentary profile *Uncommon Vision: The Life and Times of John Howard Griffin*, and an excerpt from Robert Bonazzi's authorized biography *Reluctant Activist*. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Call the Midwife: Season One ★★★1/2

BBC, 2 discs, 360 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.98, Blu-ray: \$39.98



Drawing from the memoirs of Jennifer Worth, the BBC's *Call the Midwife* stars Jessica Raine as Jenny Lee, a middle-class 22-year-old nurse who takes a job as a midwife at an Anglican convent in 1957, working alongside experienced nuns, including calm Sister Julianne (Jenny Agutter), stern Sister Evangelina (Pam Ferris), and spacey, cake-addicted Sister Monica Joan (Judy Parfitt). Jenny is hardly judgmental, but she finds the poverty permeating London's East End to be challenging (suffice to say that gynecological care has come a long way since the 1950s). To be effective, however, she must learn to put her preconceptions aside regarding unwed mothers, squalid living conditions, and seemingly inappropriate relationships. Jenny's upper-class colleague, Chummy (Miranda Hart), would appear likely to be even more out of her depth, but looks can be deceiving—even if Chummy finds it harder to handle the bikes the nurses use to cycle between appointments. Written by Heidi Thomas and narrated by Vanessa Redgrave as the older Jenny, the series has proven to be as much of a favorite among PBS viewers as *Downton Abbey*. The post-war setting also brings the films of Terence Davies and Mike Leigh to mind, particularly Leigh's *Vera Drake*, in which Imelda Staunton provided off-the-

books care to desperate mothers. Although Worth was involved with the series, she sadly died two weeks before filming began. Compiling all six episodes from the 2012 first season, extras include a cast featurette. Highly recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Cinderella ★★½

Walt Disney, 75 min., G, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Walt Disney's 1950 animated classic softens and sweetens the classic fairy tale with music, comic asides, and a supporting cast of colorful animals. In this brightly-designed version, the pretty and plucky Cinderella endures the abuse of her wicked stepmother and snotty stepsisters, who have turned the bright, sunny young woman into their servant. Cinderella has the mice on her side, of course, a squeaky army of scurrying do-gooders, and she has a fairy godmother who swoops down to give her a magic transformation into the belle of the ball, where she wins the heart of the bachelor prince. This bright, lively musical delight hails from the second half of Disney's classic animation period, and while it doesn't boast the rich character of classics such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Bambi*, its clean style, vivid imagery, and strong storytelling have made it a beloved perennial. Disney's new "Diamond Edition" Blu-ray features a high-definition remaster, along with a slew of extras, including an alternate opening sequence, the new animated short "Tangled Ever After" (with the characters of *Tangled*), a featurette on the real woman who inspired the fairy godmother, a segment on the new Disney Princess Fantasyland attraction, and a French animated short on glass slippers. Also included is a bonus DVD edition with previously-available supplements, including the "making-of" documentary "From Rags to Riches," a tribute to Disney's "Nine Old Men," deleted scenes, and more. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Coma ★★

Sony, 160 min., not rated, DVD: \$38.99

A remake of the 1978 film by Michael Crichton—based on Robin Cook's bestselling novel—this 2012 A&E miniseries was made by producers Ridley and Tony Scott and director Mikael Salomon, the same team behind the 2008 remake of *The Andromeda Strain*. *Coma* updates the original story, bringing a 21st-century perspective to the subjects of medical experimentation and corporate ethics. Patients at respected hospitals are still slipping into comas during routine operations at an alarming rate, but here they are shuttled to a high-tech care facility that secretly uses the comatose individuals for



invasive medical trials. Lauren Ambrose plays plucky intern Susan Wheeler, who digs into the cover-up and is subsequently targeted by the cabal of doctors and researchers behind this enormous conspiracy. Steven Pasquale is Mark Bellows, a young physician and romantic interest who joins Susan's investigation. Handsomely made, *Coma* displays a high-tech color scheme of hospital-gown green and operating-room off-white, and the climax in a factory-like laboratory filled with hundreds of bodies is an impressive set piece. But the characters are poorly developed, the action and suspense sequences contrived and familiar, and the storytelling falls into the predictable rhythms of TV drama, with obvious commercial breaks. And then there are the potholes in the script, which fails to explain how a conspiracy of this scope has managed to remain hidden. Despite the impressive costar roster—including Geena Davis, Richard Dreyfuss, James Woods, and Ellen Burstyn—this fairly tepid remake is optional, at best. (S. Axmaker)

Copper: Season One

★★★

BBC, 440 min., not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$59.98

The first original drama created for BBC America combines the historical crime show template that is so successful in Britain with the provocative period dramas proliferating on American cable. Tom Weston-Jones is Det. Kevin Corcoran, the one good cop in Civil War-era New York City, who along with his loyal partners fights crime both in the slums and in the halls of power, while grappling with rampant corruption in the police department. Ato Essandoh is Dr. Matthew Freeman, secretly working with Corcoran as the city's first forensic pathologist, and Franka Potente is Eva Heissen, a brothel manager with a personal interest in the lawman. Created by Tom Fontana (*Homicide*, *Oz*) and Will Rokos (*Southland*), this American crime show convincingly re-creates 1860s-era urban blight, with brief peeks at the enclaves of the rich and powerful. Played against a culture of rampant crime and deceit—where the well-to-do can simply buy their way out of trouble—the first season is historically entwined with the re-election of President Abraham Lincoln and a burgeoning Confederate conspiracy in New York. For all the lurid details (the first episode features a pederast politician), the mud and blood of street violence, and the cozy ties between money and power, *Copper* still feels like a contemporary crime drama in period clothing. Compiling all 10 episodes aired in 2012, extras include audio commentary, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and character profiles. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



The Crimson Petal and the White ★★★

Acorn, 2 discs, 244 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99

Based on Michel Faber's excellent 2002 novel—a Dickensian-like tale with very naughty bits set in 1870s London—this four-part 2011 BAFTA-winning BBC-aired miniseries adapted by Lucinda Coxon and directed by Marc Munden stars Romola Garai as a young prostitute named Sugar, whose reputed willingness to do "anything" entices perfumery heir (and would-be literary fop) William Rackham (Chris O'Dowd) into a longstanding relationship. Besotted and obsessed with Sugar, William ends up buying her outright from the bawdy-house of Mrs. Castaway (an almost unrecognizable Gillian Anderson), installing her in a nice flat where she continues work on a vengeful novel ("I am a fallen woman, but I assure you I did not fall. I was pushed."), scenes of which are sometimes played out as fantasized attacks on William. Eventually, Sugar finds herself drawn into the affairs of the Rackham household, where William's wife, Agnes (Amanda Hale), suffers from a nervous mental condition—which is not improved by the lascivious attentions of her doctor (Richard E. Grant)—and the Rackhams' young daughter, Sophie (Isla Watt), is kept entirely sequestered from her mother. Also on hand is William's clergyman brother, Henry (Mark Gatiss), who guiltily longs for the flesh of a consumptive Rescue Society matron (committed to saving prostitutes) named Mrs. Fox (Shirley Henderson). Although it fails to match the psychological richness of the book—and the filmmaking is sometimes too strongly influenced by David Lynch—this is an often powerful Victorian drama that benefits from a haunting soundtrack by Cristobal Tapia De Veer. And make no mistake, even though it deals with class differences, this is not *Upstairs Downstairs*, which—as I recall—did not sport full-frontal male nudity, or simulated oral sex on dirty, pox-ridden streets. DVD extras include deleted scenes, and cast and crew interviews. Recommended. (R. Pitman)

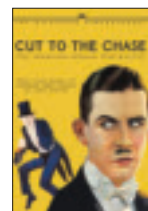


Cut to the Chase: The Charley Chase Collection

★★★

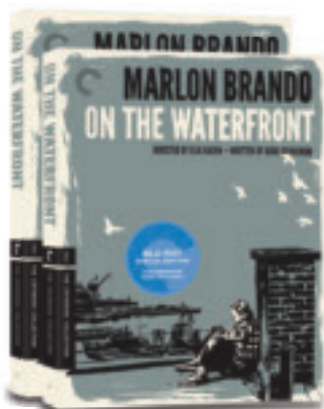
Oscilloscope, 2 discs, 303 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95

This two-disc set presents 16 comedy shorts from a great silent-movie actor and slapstick comedian who emerged from the Keystone Cops to become a major star of the 1920s. Charley Chase hit his stride playing the dapper urban everyman in a series of smartly made two-reelers, and this collection features some of the best from his prime years





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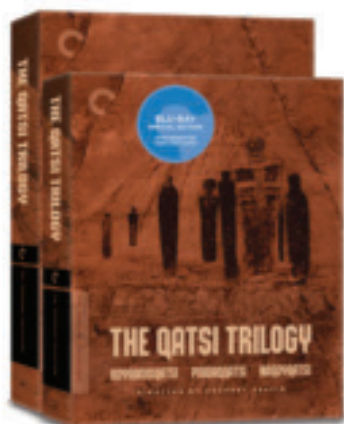
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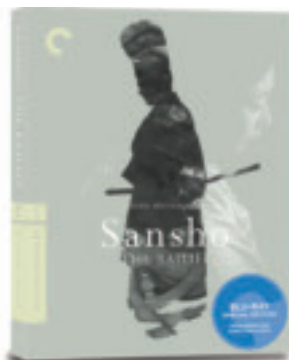
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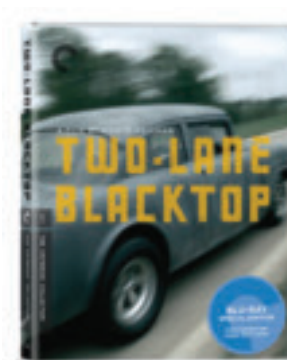
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of 1924–1926, most directed by the great Leo McCarey. The highlight is *Mighty Like a Moose* (1926), in which Chase's character, Mr. Moose, and his wife, Mrs. Moose (Vivien Oakland), transform themselves with cosmetic surgery and then no longer recognize each other. Considered not only Chase's best motion picture but also one of the greatest comedy shorts from the era (added to the National Film Registry in 2007), this mistaken-identity farce epitomizes Chase's charismatic screen persona while also underscoring the creative energy of his collaboration with McCarey. Another notable offering presented here is *Isn't Life Terrible* (1925), which includes a brief, uncredited appearance by Fay Wray. All of the films have been remastered from archival prints, including two shorts exclusive to this collection: *The Uneasy Three* (1925) and *Charley My Boy* (1926), both directed by McCarey. And all are silent with original scores by various composers performed by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra. A fine addition to any collection of classic cinema and a worthy companion piece to the works of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Dial M for Murder

★★★1/2

Warner, 105 min., PG, Blu-ray: \$35.99



Set next to the great cinematic accomplishments in Alfred Hitchcock's oeuvre, 1955's *Dial M for Murder* (based on Frederick Knott's hit play) doesn't quite measure up—either for suspense or drama—but it does feature a glamorous cast, and was the only 3D movie the director ever made. Grace Kelly (one of Hitch's favorite actresses) stars as Margot Mary Wendice, a blonde beauty targeted for death by her ne'er-do-well husband, Tony (Ray Milland), and then framed for murder when she turns the tables and dispatches her attacker. The murder scene—shot in tight, discomfiting close-up—is the film's highlight, and Hitchcock used the then-new 3D process to explore space rather than exploit it with gimmicky effects. Otherwise, the movie—which costars Robert Cummings and John Williams—suffers from a musty staginess that is only partially overcome by Hitch's trademark sense of humor and playful approach to character. The 3D boom had passed by the time *Dial M for Murder* was released, so it was ultimately also issued in a standard 2D format—both of which are included here in handsomely remastered versions. Blu-ray extras include a retrospective featurette. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Die Nibelungen ★★★1/2

Kino, 2 discs, 280 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95

Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen*—originally released in 1924 in two separate, feature-length

parts—is a magnificent silent spectacle, a blood-and-thunder myth of warriors, dragons, brotherhood, and betrayal, based on the epic 12th-century German poem that inspired Wagner's *Ring* cycle. In Part One, *Siegfried*, the titular warrior prince (Paul Richter) sets out on a journey, intent on winning the hand of Princess Kriemhild of Burgundy. Embodying the mythic Aryan ideal, Siegfried faces death-defying physical challenges before finally reaching Burgundy and marrying Kriemhild. But a series of betrayals leads to his death, which becomes the springboard for Part Two: *Kriemhild's Revenge*, an enormous and devastating epic in which two kingdoms are nearly destroyed in a literal conflagration. The production boasts mythic landscapes of ancient forests, fairy-tale waterfalls, lakes of fire, and caves and crevices hewn out of earth and rock—all entirely built in Germany's Ufa Studios. While *Die Nibelungen* was edited for re-release over the years and some of the original footage was lost, this restoration from the Murnau Institute is the closest that viewers will come to seeing the film as Lang intended. Not only a wonderful cinematic landmark, *Die Nibelungen* is also a foundational work in a genre that would later include *Excalibur*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Game of Thrones* (not to mention Lang's own *Metropolis*). Kino presents the complete two-part version with a new recording of the original orchestral score by Gottfried Huppertz. Extras include a retrospective documentary, and newsreel footage of Lang on the movie set. Awesome in every sense, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Doctor Who: Series Seven, Part One ★★★

BBC, 2 discs, 222 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

The 21st-century BBC revival of *Doctor Who* has become one of the network's most popular exports. Bowing to demand, this set features the opening half of the seventh season—a mere five episodes—while the sci-fi favorite lies in hiatus before the second half starts in 2013. These are the final segments featuring the time-traveling Doctor (Matt Smith) with his only married team of companions, Amy and Rory Pond (Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill). After some very colorful adventures—featuring the mad extraterrestrials, the Daleks; a western town under threat from an alien gunman; and an attack on Manhattan by the creepy “Weeping Angel”—the Ponds make a poignant and profound exit. *Doctor Who* remains as inventive as ever, and the farewell to the Ponds, along with a return visit by River Song (Alex Kingston), will make this of great interest to



fans. Extras include the documentary “The Science of *Doctor Who*,” the five-part web series *Pond Life* (essentially a series of cheeky promotional spots), episode prequels, and the featurette “*Doctor Who* at Comic Con.” Although the complete season will eventually be issued in a single set, interest is likely to be high when the new episodes are broadcast. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Fear and Desire ★★★

Kino, 60 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95



In Stanley Kubrick's 1953 debut feature, four soldiers crash-land behind enemy lines in an unidentified country where they lose their moral and physical bearings while trying to get back. “There is a war in this forest,” explains a narrator. “Not a war that has been fought, or one that will be, but any war.” Kubrick shoots much of *Fear and Desire* in tight close-up, enhancing the sense of dislocation and isolation, while also reaching for aesthetic effects that suggest the men's increasing anxiety and eventual spiral into paranoia and madness. This independently made platoon drama is quite accomplished, but the young filmmaker, a former photographer for *Life* magazine who apprenticed on short documentaries, is not yet a director of actors, and his cast (which includes Frank Silvera as Sgt. Mac, Paul Mazursky as Pvt. Sidney, Kenneth Harp as Lt. Corby, and Stephen Coit as Pvt. Fletcher) is not strong enough to fill in the blanks. Think of this arch, imperfect, ambitious work as a first draft (Kubrick would return to the same themes in *Paths of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket*) from a man who would become one of cinema's great perfectionists. Largely unseen since its release—Kubrick was dissatisfied with the film and discouraged screenings—and newly restored by the Library of Congress, *Fear and Desire* arrives on DVD and Blu-ray with extras including Kubrick's *The Seafarers*, a 1953 documentary short (and his first color production), made for the Seafarers International Union. Recommended, overall. (S. Axmaker)

Grey's Anatomy: Complete Eighth Season ★★★

Buena Vista, 6 discs, 1,032 min., TV-14, DVD: \$45.99



While *Grey's Anatomy* began as a look at a group of young doctors, they've since grown up. Now in the fifth year of their residency, the core physicians spend the 2011-12 eighth season gearing up for their boards. As Karev (Justin Chambers) puts it, “George is dead and Izzie is gone, and we're all different.” Now, two of the couples have children, but if Torres (Sara

Ramirez) and Arizona (Jessica Capshaw) are going strong, Meredith (Ellen Pompeo) and Derek (Patrick Dempsey) hit a rough patch due to her involvement with his clinical trial, which affects their adoption, even if she was just trying to help Chief Webber (James Pickens, Jr.). Cristina (Sandra Oh) and Owen (Kevin McKidd) also struggle with an abortion and an indiscretion, but she supports his promotion to chief after Webber steps down. Unfortunately, Lexie (Chyler Leigh) and Avery (Jesse Williams) break up, because she isn't over Sloan (Eric Dane), Avery's plastic surgery mentor. And Teddy (Kim Raver) and her husband, Henry (Scott Foley), a former patient, also face a variety of medical and career complications. If Karev remains a gloomy gus, he gains an opportunity for redemption here as he helps with Meredith's adoption—even going behind her back to pull a few strings. Each season features at least one special episode, and this year's finds Meredith imagining what life would be like if Webber had married her mother (Kate Burton), among other alternative scenarios. Other guest stars include Alfre Woodard as a bestselling novelist, and Debbie Allen as Avery's mother, a superstar surgeon. Compiling all 24 episodes, DVD extras include an extended episode, a featurette on McKidd, deleted scenes, and outtakes. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Happy Endings: The Complete Second Season ★★

Sony, 3 discs, 450 min., not rated, DVD: \$45.99

The 2011-12 second season of ABC's *Happy Endings* builds on the show's abbreviated mid-season debut, as six Chicago friends grapple with career and relationship issues, including the unresolved egg donor mystery from the first season. Childhood friends Alex (Elisha Cuthbert) and Dave (Zachary Knighton)—who were once engaged—form the nucleus of the ongoing storyline. Penny (Casey Wilson), also single, kicks things off by buying a condominium, after which Alex moves in. Penny's ex-boyfriend, Max (Adam Pally), who has since come out of the closet, lands a boyfriend (James Wolk), and a paying job as a limo driver. While it's not especially believable that Max secured the funds to buy the vehicle by selling his Beanie Baby collection, *Happy Endings* tends to prioritize humor over realism, otherwise Dave wouldn't have named his food truck Steak Me Home Tonight. As the only married couple, Alex's sister, Jane (Eliza Coupe), and her husband, Brad (Damon Wayans, Jr.), continue to keep their relationship lively. Guest stars include Megan Mullally as Penny's New Age mother, Michael McKean as Dave's sportscaster father, and Fred Savage as himself (Ed Begley, Jr. and Colin Hanks also drop by as particularly



obnoxious versions of themselves). The 21 episodes compiled here touch on issues ranging from parental dating and divorce, to marriage-like workplace friendships (and V-neck shirt addiction). DVD extras include deleted scenes and outtakes. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Hart of Dixie: The Complete First Season ★★ 1/2

Warner, 5 discs, 928 min., not rated, DVD: \$59.98

Rachel Bilson stars as Dr. Zoe Hart, an ambitious, abrasive (in a cute way) Manhattan medical resident who leaves the Big Apple to take a position as a general practitioner in the kind of quaint, quirky, aggressively Southern small town that exists only on TV. *Hart of Dixie* comes across like *Northern Exposure* south of the Mason-Dixon line, with Zoe as the obligatory urban fish-out-of-water who clashes with socialite Lemon Breeland (Jaime King) and Lemon's country-doctor father, Brick Breeland (Tim Matheson), who also happens to own the other half of the medical practice. Zoe finds herself instantly attracted to golden-boy lawyer George Tucker (Scott Porter), who is Lemon's fiancé (of course), while a rough-around-the-edges charmer named Wade (Wilson Bethel) hides his attraction to Zoe under a barrage of insults. This is a show where the laidback mayor (Cress Williams) is a former NFL star, Zoe's fondness for short shorts is a favorite topic of the gossip mill, and the local mascot is an alligator named Burt Reynolds. Zoe is befuddled by her new acquaintances' folksiness and obscure aphorisms (they roll their eyes at her big-city ways), but in the end they all kind of fall in love with one another. Compiling all 22 debut season episodes from 2011-12, DVD extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Utterly unsubstantial and completely harmless (southern) comfort TV, this is an optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



Hawaii Five-0: The Second Season ★★★

Paramount, 985 min., not rated, DVD: 6 discs, \$55.98; Blu-ray: 5 discs, \$72.99

The second season of CBS's revived Hawaii-set police procedural features beautiful locations and handsome young stars but relatively routine plots revolving around a special unit of the Honolulu squad created to deal with high-profile cases. After resolving last season's cliffhanger by clearing hunky, rule-bending, ex-Navy SEAL Steve McGarrett (Alex O'Loughlin) of a trumped-up murder charge, the show offers up another spate of stories that will hardly test a viewer's deductive powers but do feature plenty of



action, reams of cheesy dialogue, and lots of old-fashioned beefcake to go along with the lovely scenery. In addition to McGarrett and his crew—Danno (Scott Caan), Chin (Daniel Dae Kim), and Kono (Grace Park)—the series has some stalwart recurring characters, including Terry O'Quinn as McGarrett's mentor, and Mark Dacascos as evil nemesis Wo Fat. Notable guest stars (Ed Asner, James Caan, and Robert Englund among them) also make appearances in this 23-episode set from 2011-12, which wraps with another nail-biting finale meant to whet the audience's appetite for next year. Extras include audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, a featurette on the training of Navy SEALs, an interactive guide to locations, deleted scenes, a gag reel, and a crossover episode of *NCIS: Los Angeles*. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Hazel: The Complete Fourth Season ★★ 1/2

Shout! Factory, 4 discs, 608 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99

At one point during *Hazel*'s penultimate 1964-65 season, "Mr. B." (Don DeFore) refers to the beloved character created by cartoonist Ted Key as "some housekeeper named Hazel." He of all people should know better. As brought to brassy life by Shirley Booth (in a two-time Emmy-winning performance), salt-of-the-earth Hazel is an indomitable force of nature who generally ignores her boss Mr. B's demands that she mind her own business. What's a woman with a font of "sensational ideas" to do? *Hazel* is quintessential comfort, if not classic, television. Oscar-winner Booth is the show, although DeFore as corporate lawyer George Baxter makes a capable straight man. *Hazel* is light on stunt casting, as befits a show about a live-in maid, but one episode features professional golfer Tony Lema, whose golf clubs Hazel unwittingly loses (Lema tragically died a year later in a plane crash). The rest of the season is vintage Hazel, as she takes the starch out of ill-tempered stuffed shirts, mends relationships, plays matchmaker, and cannily manipulates George to do her bidding, like remodel the kitchen. Compiling all 26 season four episodes, DVD extras include a promo used to sell the show to potential sponsors. A strong optional purchase. (D. Liebenson)



Heaven's Gate ★★★ 1/2

Criterion, 216 min., R, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.95; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.95

When Michael Cimino's \$40 million Western epic premiered in New York in 1980, the savage response from critics created a chain reaction that killed United Artists and wrecked the Oscar-winning director's career. Harvard-educated



federal marshal James Averill (Kris Kristofferson) is at the center of an 1890 imbalance between a massive wave of Eastern European immigrants and old-money cattle barons who consider them to be a threat to their power—and who view Averill as a class traitor. The result is a sprawling and provocative cinematic tapestry of 19th-century socio-economics played out against Wyoming's majestic plains. Writer-director Cimino fashioned a deep, multi-textured screenplay populated with fully dimensional characters, and the solid ensemble cast—including Isabelle Huppert (in a rare Hollywood appearance), Christopher Walken, Sam Waterston, John Hurt, Jeff Bridges, Brad Dourif, and then-unknowns Mickey Rourke and Willem Dafoe—offer strong performances. Vilmos Zsigmond's luscious cinematography and David Mansfield's subtle score are beautiful enhancements. While some aspects of the critical carping are justified—the film is much too long, and the rambling 25-minute opening sequence at Averill's 1870 university graduation should have either been severely cut or jettisoned—*Heaven's Gate* is still a highly impressive and deeply original work that does not deserve its negative reputation. Presented in a beautifully restored edition on DVD and Blu-ray, extras include interviews (with Cimino, Kristofferson, producer Joann Carelli, and others), a featurette on the restoration, and a booklet. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Holliston: The Complete First Season ★★★

Image, 223 min., not rated, DVD: 2 discs, \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

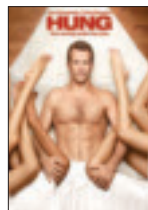


FEARnet's *Holliston* gives the sitcom genre a jolt with lashings of metal and horror. *Hatchet* director Adam Green's semi-autobiographical creation centers on Adam (Green) and Joe (Joe Lynch), who direct commercials and introduce horror movies for a Massachusetts cable access station (in the bonus cast audio commentaries, Green says he started out the same way, and that *Holliston* was originally created for UPN—with the exteriors shot in his Holliston hometown, and the interiors in Hollywood). Dee Snider, in full Twisted Sister drag, plays station boss Lance Rockett, who also fronts a Van Halen tribute outfit. Stranger yet, GWAR's Dave Brockie, in his Oderus Urungus persona, plays an imaginary friend who gives Adam advice. When Adam and Joe aren't working at the station, the pair are toiling away on their own low-budget horror movie. On the social front, Joe is seeing Laura (Laura Ortiz), who likes to paint creepy babies, while Adam pines for ex-girlfriend Corri (Corri English), a nurse who has recently returned to town with her doctor boyfriend. Just as Adam can only see Oderus, he can also only see the

creatures, like Kane Hodder's axe-wielding maniac, and special effects, like exploding heads and disintegrating faces. Other fun touches include his animatronic cat and the tweaking of various sitcom conventions, although the laugh track and puke effects grow annoying. Featuring guest stars including Ray Wise and Tony Todd, storylines in the eight debut season episodes compiled here revolve around attempts to rent the station camera, a misadventure with a skunk, and a visit to a horror convention. Extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and bloopers. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Hung: The Complete Third Season ★★★

HBO, 2 discs, 261 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$39.98, Blu-ray: \$49.99



During *Hung's* 2010-11 third and final season, friends and business partners Ray (Thomas Jane) and Tanya (Jane Adams) are at the bottom of the ladder, with Ray working as a substitute teacher and Tanya as a barista until she gets the bright idea to take out a loan. Her Wellness Center for Women looks like a clinic, and offers courses in "orgasmic living," but it's mostly a front for her gig as a "happiness consultant," i.e., Ray's pimp. Things get off to a swell start until nemesis Lenore (Rebecca Creskoff) finds a stud of her own, Jason (Stephen Amell), and hones in on their business. But little does Lenore realize that Jason's fiancée, Sandee (Analeigh Tipton), has a mind of her own; although she's willing to let him sleep with other women, she also won't allow anyone to take advantage of him. Lennie James also returns as Charlie, a veteran pimp who threatens to destroy Tanya's business. Over the 10 episodes compiled here, other complications arrive in the form of a police officer with a violent side (Ana Ortiz), and a former student (Kaitlin Doubleday) with the hots for her high school history teacher. Although Ray's kids get short shrift this season, his ex-wife (Anne Heche) finally gets a job and learns to stand up for herself. Extras include episode audio commentaries by co-creators Dmitry Lipkin and Colette Burson, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a music video. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

The Ice House ★★★

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



"There's a body in the old ice house." Thus begins this gripping and at times grisly 1997 BBC two-part adaptation of international best-selling British crime writer Minette Walters' murder mystery, no doubt released on DVD to coincide with a new movie featuring one of its stars: Daniel Craig, the man who would

be Bond. And he will leave viewers shaken and stirred as police sergeant McLoughlin, who is brought in on a very cold case indeed. Is the body in the ice house that of long-missing David Maybury, a man who McLoughlin's superior, Walsh (Corin Redgrave), is convinced was murdered 10 years before by Maybury's wife, Phoebe (Penny Downie)? Walsh is not the only one assured of her guilt; the very hostile villagers also believe she got away with murder and don't approve of her living arrangement with two women, Diana (Frances Barber) and Anne (Kitty Aldridge). From the decomposed body to intimations that the missing husband was something of a "total bastard," things turn rather nasty before all of the secrets are revealed. The performances by the core ensemble are uniformly excellent, although the portrayals of the homophobic townspeople are a little over the top. DVD extras include an hour-shy profile of Walters that does not shed much light on *The Ice House*, but does illuminate her creative writing process. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)

The Incredible Mel Brooks ★★★

Shout! Factory, 5 discs, 660 min., not rated, DVD: \$89.95



This five-disc collection offers a grab bag of all things Mel Brooks outside of his feature films: talk show appearances, TV specials, comedy skits, shows he wrote and others in which he appeared, commercials, animated shorts, and documentaries about the man, all spanning 60 years. Highlights include the pilot for *Get Smart*, the spy-spoof sitcom that Brooks created with Buck Henry; Brooks' favorite episode of the short-lived Robin Hood series *When Things Were Rotten*, with Sid Caesar; and the Oscar-winning animated short *The Critic* (1963), with Brooks providing improvisational narration. Just as funny are his many appearances on TV talk shows: *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, *The Dick Cavett Show*, the British *Wogan*, plus the 1984 British special *An Audience with ... Mel Brooks* and the 2010 cable special *Mel Brooks and Dick Cavett Together Again* (with a guest appearance by Carl Reiner). Brooks, a born improviser, thrives in these situations no less than when he was doing *The 2000 Year Old Man* with Reiner (some of which is here too). Also included are a 1981 profile of Brooks from the British arts series *Arena*; the 2012 PBS special *Excavating The 2000 Year Old Man*; and hours of new interviews in *Mel and His Movies*, covering his entire career (edited into five parts). A bonus audio CD features more songs, skits, and interviews, and a 60-page illustrated book provides notes and program guides. A fine survey of one of the defining comedy creators from the '60s to the present, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Kathy Griffin Collection: Red, White + Raw ★★1/2

Shout! Factory, 2 discs, 330 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98

Kathy Griffin's *Red, White + Raw* presents seven of the actress-comedienne's specials for the Bravo network (filmed in San Diego, Knoxville, Temecula, Milwaukee, Costa Mesa, Atlantic City, and Boston). Griffin speaks to the audience as if they were her best friends, lacing her comments with liberal profanity, sexual references, mentions of her mother Maggie, and catty comments about celebrity culture. Subjects include reality shows such as *Dancing with the Stars*, *Hoarders*, and Bravo's *Real Housewives of New Jersey*, but she reserves the lion's share of her spiel for tabloid staples, such as Bristol Palin, Kim Kardashian, Michael Jackson, and Whitney Houston (in comedy, timing is everything, so it's worth noting that her bits about Jackson and Houston preceded their deaths). Other routines revolve around Griffin's appearances on *The View*, *Law & Order: SVU*, and *The Teen Choice Awards*, which she attended with Palin's ex-boyfriend, Levi Johnston. A few of the bits are region-specific, such as a routine about the Waffle House, which might not make as much sense to non-Southerners. Whether Griffin goes too far is surely a matter of personal taste, although her account of an awkward encounter with Sharon Stone struck me as insensitive. While there's a little overlap between a few shows—all filmed between 2009-11—most of the material is fresh (in both senses), while the Milwaukee and Costa Mesa specials include taped and live appearances from Maggie, an endearing staple from Griffin's *Life on the D-List*. DVD extras include unaired bonus footage. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)



tured with Anne. Not surprisingly, the proceedings then turn very strange (and often violent), with the chaotic rush of emotions ultimately winding up in a justly celebrated cinematic denouement. Presented in a beautifully restored edition on both DVD and Blu-ray—highlighting the film's opulent design and inventive cinematography—extras include a 2009 documentary on the film's tumultuous production, and a booklet with an essay by noted critic Michael Atkinson. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Letter from an Unknown Woman ★★1/2

Olive, 86 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Max Ophüls is most famous for the elegant, bittersweet romantic pictures he made in France in the 1950s (notably *La Ronde* and *The Earrings of Madame de...*), but his American films of the 1940s are equally good, including 1948's *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, an exquisitely stylish melodrama that anticipates the grace and continental sensibility of those later classics. Joan Fontaine delivers one of the best performances of her career as Lisa Berndle, an awkward young Viennese woman hopelessly enthralled by dashing pianist and bon vivant Stefan Brand (Louis Jourdan), a handsome cad who briefly takes her as a lover and then forgets her in the blur of women who pass through his bedroom. Fontaine's Lisa is vulnerable without lapsing into sentimentality, and she ultimately shows a hidden strength as she risks everything for one more moment with the love of her life, while Jourdan's Stefan is genial and callow, an empty figure confronted by the meaningless of his life and shamed by self-discovery. Ophüls' endlessly moving camera circles around the characters while maintaining a measured distance, offering an intimate view that deftly captures Lisa's life-defining rapture and Stefan's fleeting engagement. A beautiful and devastating romantic drama making its long-awaited stateside debut on both DVD and Blu-ray, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)



most memorable appearances. Among the highlights of disc two are "Wabbit Twouble" (1941); the "hunting" trilogy—"Rabbit Fire," "Rabbit Seasoning," and "Duck! Rabbit! Duck!"—with Bugs, Daffy, and Elmer caught in verbal gymnastics and surreal zigzags; the complete "Bugs Bunny vs. Cecil Turtle" threesome; and five outstanding one-offs, including the celebrity-caricature-stuffed "Hollywood Steps Out." More a sampling than a focused compilation organized by character or creator, not all of the titles here are classics, but this is as interesting and entertaining a gathering of 50 Warner Bros. cartoons as you could hope for. While bowing in both DVD and Blu-ray editions, the Blu-ray release features exclusive bonus material, including audio commentary tracks, featurettes (on creators, characters, and genres), and a third disc devoted to special content and rarities from the vault, including 11 of the best cartoons Tex Avery made for MGM after leaving Warner Bros. and several Private Snafu cartoons made for the Army during World War II. The Blu-ray edition also features an illustrated booklet with brief notes by animation historian Jerry Beck. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Lucy Show: Official Sixth and Final Season ★★

Paramount, 4 discs, 612 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.98

An otherwise unremarkable vehicle for its beloved iconic star, *The Lucy Show* found its footing during its 1967-68 sixth and final season. The show's original premise—widowed mom raising two children and trying to get by with a little help from her friends—had long been jettisoned. The 24 episodes compiled here give fans what they love about Lucy: lots of physical comedy and celebrity guests. A clip episode features former costar Vivian Vance, although for this season, veteran Gale Gordon as banker Mr. Mooney takes over the role of second banana. The guest-star wattage this season is klieg-bright, with Carol Burnett costarring in a season-opening two-parter as a stewardess-in-training. Joan Crawford appears as herself, with Lucy and Viv mistakenly thinking that she is destitute. Phil Harris plays a gin-soaked lounge singer; Edie Adams heats things up as—incredibly—a romantic stalker of Mr. Mooney; and Lucy tries to get Jack Benny to open an account at the bank. Other episodes feature Milton Berle, Ken Berry, and Dick Shawn, and several conclude with musical production numbers. *The Lucy Show* went out almost on top, second in the ratings to *The Andy Griffith Show*, while Lucy won her second consecutive Emmy. DVD extras include archival clips (Ball's gracious 1968 Emmy acceptance speech, and her return-the-favor appearance on *The Carol Burnett*



Les Visiteurs du Soir ★★1/2

Criterion, 121 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95

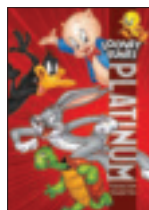
Filmed during the Nazi occupation of France, Marcel Carné's 1942 feature *Les Visiteurs du Soir* (*The Devil's Envoys*) is a fantasy set during the late 15th century, but was widely seen as a subversive commentary on the political climate at the time of its production. A pair of envoys sent by the devil—Gilles (Alain Cuny) and Dominique (Arletty)—disguise themselves as minstrels and arrive at a baron's castle before the announcement of the engagement of Anne (Marie Déa), the nobleman's daughter. Gilles seduces Anne and winds up in the dungeon, while the baron and his future son-in-law both fall in love with Dominique. But things become complicated when the devil himself (Jules Berry) shows up and becomes enrap-



Looney Tunes Platinum Collection: Volume Two ★★

Warner, 365 min., not rated, DVD: 2 discs, \$26.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$44.98

This second volume of Warner Bros. "platinum collection" cartoons is another creatively curated set that combines fan favorites, historically significant pieces, and notable one-shots. Disc one is dedicated to the Looney Tunes stars—Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Road Runner, Wile E. Coyote, Pepe Le Pew, Foghorn Leghorn, and Speedy Gonzales—showcasing some of their earliest and



Show), a blooper reel, production notes, and more. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)

Mad Men: Season Five

★★★1/2

Lionsgate, 585 min., not rated,
DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98, Blu-ray:
3 discs, \$49.99



Four-time Emmy winner for Outstanding Drama Series, AMC's *Mad Men* examines gender roles and cultural identity through the prism of advertising executives and creative types in 1960s New York. Season five takes the story up to 1966, as the stress of keeping a prestigious but struggling new Madison Avenue ad firm afloat takes its toll on founding partner Don Draper (Jon Hamm) and his colleagues. Although this is the only season the show was shut out of the Emmy awards, it's arguably the best yet, and features the most talked-about episode of the entire series: "The Other Woman," in which the partners ask Joan (Emmy nominee Christina Hendricks) to sleep with a prospective client. The segment became the water-cooler TV moment of the year, and not just because of the salacious dramatic edge. This plot element becomes a turning point for Peggy (Emmy nominee Elisabeth Moss), Don's protégé; and his amazing farewell to her (evoking complicated feelings of anger, betrayal, regret, affection, and pride) is a powerful moment. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2012, extras include audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, a pictorial timeline, and a *Newsweek* digital gallery of magazine covers. Still one of the smartest and most challenging shows on the air, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Magic City: The Complete First Season

★★★

Anchor Bay, 3 discs, 419 min.,
not rated, DVD: \$44.99, Blu-
ray: \$54.99



This Starz original drama series centering on nightclubs and gangsters in 1959 Miami plays like *Mad Men* meets *Boardwalk Empire*. Jeffrey Dean Morgan stars as Ike Evans, an independent hotelier with big dreams, and Olga Kurylenko (a former Bond girl) is his loving wife, Vera (they are a rare devoted couple in this kind of cable fare). Danny Huston goes way over the top as Ike's not-so-silent partner, Ben Diamond, a crude thug whose nickname is "The Butcher." Huston is the most entertaining element in this handsomely made but shamelessly exploitative series, where naked showgirls and torrid affairs are sprinkled amidst the big deals and gangland hits as if trying to meet a quota. The show is pure crime melodrama, with Ike trying to stay honest and independent in a corrupt world, and his sons routinely getting into trouble as a

result of unwise decisions (his oldest is having a dangerous liaison with The Butcher's beautiful mistress). Compiling all eight episodes from the 2012 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Optional, at best. (S. Axmaker)

Maidstone and Other Films by Norman Mailer

★1/2

Eclipse, 2 discs, 284 min., not
rated, DVD: \$39.95



During the late 1960s, pugnacious novelist Norman Mailer decided that he wanted to become a filmmaker, so he banged out a trio of no-budget, mostly improvised productions that blurred the lines between home movies and experimental cinema. His first effort, *Wild 90* (1967), finds three foul-mouthed gangsters (Mailer, Buzz Farbar, and Mickey Knox) hiding in an apartment from unspecified enemies. *Beyond the Law* (1968) puts Mailer in the role of an Irish cop who runs a precinct where police brutality is part of the daily routine. And in *Maidstone* (1970), Mailer plays a controversial filmmaker who decides to become a presidential candidate. All three films are disasters—albeit in unique ways. *Wild 90* features some of the worst sound recording ever in a theatrically released feature—perhaps just as well, considering the absurd abundance of scatological words and pointless name-calling. *Beyond the Law* offers a funny surprise with writer George Plimpton's acting turn in a devastating parody of then-New York mayor John Lindsay, but Mailer's direction is hopelessly muddled and his own acting is worse. *Maidstone* is infamous for the bizarre moment when Rip Torn, playing Mailer's brother, inexplicably freaked out while in character and attacked the director/star with a hammer (Mailer replied by biting Torn's ear). Aside from that strange flare-up, however, the movie is enervated and offers no meaningful insight into the political process. Missing from this anthology, sadly, is Mailer's final attempt at filmmaking: 1987's *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, which—despite its deficiencies in screenwriting and acting—at least boasted professional-level standards that were painfully absent from these ramshackle efforts. Extras on this barebones Eclipse set are limited to liner notes. Except for Mailer addicts and devotees of outrageous underground cinema, this is not a necessary purchase. (P. Hall)

Portlandia: Season Two

★★★

VSC, 2 discs, 220 min., not
rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray:
\$24.95



This offbeat Independent Film Channel sketch-comedy from singer-songwriter Carrie Brownstein (Sleater-Kinney) and *Sat-*

urday Night Live cast member Fred Armisen became IFC's biggest original hit, thanks largely to YouTube snippets and viral clips. The satire takes comedic shots at the Pacific Northwest culture of Portland, OR, where the population seems to consist largely of aging hippies, slackers, and New-Agers (all of whom are played by Brownstein and Armisen). The sophomore season boasts a great lineup of guest stars: Jeff Goldblum, Kristen Wiig, Tim Robbins, an animated tattoo of Eddie Vedder, and Edward James Olmos and James Callis (the latter pair at a table-read of a fake *Battlestar Galactica* script), among others. While most episodes feature unrelated short skits built around one longer piece running through the show, the finale draws the regular characters (including a return visit from Kyle MacLachlan as the mayor) into a single story, a humorous little epic called "Brunch Village." Compiling all 10 second season episodes from 2012, extras include episode commentaries, a director's cut of the finale, a behind-the-scenes featurette, a deleted scene, and a book excerpt from *Portlandia: A Guide for Visitors*. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Ramrod ★★★1/2

Olive, 95 min., not rated, DVD:
\$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95



This tough, lean, mercenary 1947 Western stars Joel McCrea as Dave Nash, a principled cowhand in the middle of a brutal range war, and Veronica Lake as Connie Dickason, the daughter of a small ranch owner who goes to war with the area's tyrannical cattle baron, Frank Ivey (Preston Foster), a man quick to resort to arson and bloodshed when intimidation no longer works. Based on a story by Luke Short, director Andre De Toth's *Ramrod* takes an unexpected approach to a familiar situation as the opening scenes play out in an atmosphere of anticipation and tension; no gunshots are fired but the threat of violence hangs over the town, giving it the feeling of an occupation. Nash is all principle and sense of justice, trying to follow the law while his opponents resort to violence and murder, as the conflict escalates into surprising brutality (in an era in which screen gunfights tended to be bloodless and clean, De Toth makes it a point to draw blood when there's fighting or shooting). Donald Crisp costars as a fatherly sheriff and Don DeFore is memorable as a likable scoundrel willing to fight dirty. One of the most underrated Westerns of its time, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Three Wicked Melodramas from Gainsborough Pictures ★★★

Eclipse, 3 discs, 330 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.95

While the rest of the film industry was cranking out patriotic paeans to sacrifice and endurance during World War II, Gainsborough Pictures in Britain had a blockbuster

hit with the potboiler costume drama *The Man in Grey* (1943)—a success that spawned similar melodramas about plucky heroines, wicked villainesses, and darkly seductive antiheroes, all defined by superficial elegance on a budget and gleeful plunges into bad behavior. This Eclipse line set compiles three of the most famous, including *The Man in Grey*, which was directed by Leslie Arliss and adapted from a novel by Eleanor Smith. Margaret Lockwood stars as Hesther Shaw, a calculating social-climber who betrays her best friend, Clarissa (Phyllis Calvert). The film made stars of James Mason, as callous Lord Rohan, who marries sweet, sunny Clarissa simply to secure an heir, and Stewart Granger, who plays Peter, a handsome actor who woos Clarissa. *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1945), helmed by Arthur Crabtree and based on a novel by Margery Lawrence, is a lurid tale of repressed memories and flamboyant gypsy criminals, with Calvert playing Maddalena, a married Italian woman with a split personality, stemming from an earlier trauma, and Granger as Nino, a petty thief who is her lover when she's her "other" self. *The Wicked Lady* (1945) reunited Lockwood and Mason with director Arliss in the studio's most successful film, based on a novel by Magdalen King-Hall. Lockwood plays Barbara Worth, a bored rich woman who turns to robbery for fun and profit, and Mason is Capt. Jerry Jackson, her secret lover and partner in crime. Filled with silly twists and overwrought emotion, these films are not the least bit credible, but all are disreputable good fun. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Touch: The Complete First Season ★★½

Fox, 3 discs, 533 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.98

In this new series created by Tim Kring (*Heroes*), Kiefer Sutherland stars as Martin Bohm, a former investigative reporter who now works blue-collar jobs following the death of his wife in the September 11 attacks, dedicating himself to caring for his possibly autistic son. Young Jake (David Mazouz) doesn't speak (although he does narrate the show in voiceover) or like to be touched, but he sees complex patterns in the world and communicates through numbers that connect seemingly unconnected events and people in a web of relationships and meanings. The scripts combine Martin's efforts to reach Jake through the trail of numbers and stories that spread around the globe, all coming together by the end of each episode in unexpected and sometimes contrived (but usually heartwarming) ways. Sort of like *Lost* meets *Crash*, the series makes a genuine attempt at emotional sincerity while serving



up a mix of metaphysics, secular mysticism, corporate conspiracy, and feel-good family drama (with a dash of Kabala tossed in toward the end of the season). Gugu Mbatha-Raw costars as Clea Hopkins, the social worker who joins forces with Martin to follow the clues, and Maria Bello guest stars in the two-part season finale. Compiling all 13 episodes from the 2012 debut run, extras include an extended pilot episode, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and deleted scenes. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Twilight's Last Gleaming

★★★

Olive, 144 min., R, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Robert Aldrich's 1977 military drama combines the men-on-a-mission-against-long odds adventure genre the director mastered in *The Dirty Dozen* with the conspiracy thriller craze of the 1970s, creating a high-concept heist film with a political edge. Burt Lancaster stars as Gen. Lawrence Dell, a patriotic career soldier who leads a volatile group of misfits to take command of a military silo in Montana and ultimately hold the nation hostage. Dell wants to reveal the buried truth behind the Vietnam War, a secret that America's military brass will stop at nothing to keep hidden. By 1977, the aging Aldrich wasn't as sharp a filmmaker, and the film suffers from some sloppiness in both the action and the storytelling; but Aldrich's use of split screens during negotiations and attack scenes remains very effective. Lancaster and Charles Durning (as the President) keep the story grounded by virtue of their characters' moral foundations (both are dedicated, honest men trying to do right by their country), while the political stakes carry a prescient punch. A solid supporting cast surround Durning as cabinet members, including screen legends Melvyn Douglas, Joseph Cotten, and Paul Winfield, as well as cult actors Charles McGraw and William Marshall. Although a flop during its theatrical release, the film's reputation has since grown as a startlingly hard-edged political drama as well as one of the most interesting (and plausible) conspiracy movies of the era. Restored for DVD and Blu-ray, extras include a feature-length "making-of" documentary. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Universal Classic Monsters: The Essential Collection ★★½

Universal, 8 discs, 710 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$159.98

This impressive set presents the Blu-ray debuts of eight of the most iconic Universal monster movies from the 1930s through the '50s in gorgeous high-def. Most are unassailable



classics: Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), starring Bela Lugosi; *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Mummy* (1932), and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), all featuring Boris Karloff, with James Whale directing the *Frankenstein* duo and Karl Freund helming *The Mummy*; *The Invisible Man* (1933), with Claude Rains getting top billing and Whale at the helm; and *The Wolf Man* (1941), with Chaney in the title role under director George Waggnner. These were defining works for the first great age of horror flicks and are still beloved for their vivid characters and striking black-and-white gothic style. The remaining two entries—the Technicolor *Phantom of the Opera* (1943), with Rains directed by Arthur Lubin; and Jack Arnold's *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), starring Richard Carlson—are not in the same top echelon, but are significant nonetheless. The package also includes two bonus films—the 1931 Spanish-language *Dracula* (which was shot on the same sets as the Lugosi version) and the 3D version of *Creature from the Black Lagoon*—as well as the excellent 1998 documentary *Universal Horror*, narrated by Kenneth Branagh. Extras include audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes and archival featurettes, short films, photo galleries, and more. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Upstairs Downstairs: Season Two ★★★

BBC, 2 discs, 348 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.98

One can't help but wonder if the creators of the rebooted *Upstairs Downstairs* were a tad piqued at all the adulation thrown *Downton Abbey*'s way. Lavishly produced and meticulously mounted, this updated series apparently wasn't able to compete and was cancelled after this 2012 second season of six episodes. Surely not helping matters was the absence of Jean Marsh, the lone holdover from the original series, who sadly suffered a stroke and only appears in just a couple of scenes. Also missing in action is venerable Eileen Atkins, whose popular character Maud was killed off after Atkins complained publicly about creative differences. Joining the cast is Alex Kingston as Maud's outspoken scene-stealing half-sister. Series two begins in 1938 as "this house prepares for war." Diplomat Sir Hallam (Ed Stoppard) is a lone voice against appeasement of Hitler, while Lady Agnes (Keeley Hawes) returns home after a difficult childbirth, and—during her husband's numerous absences—becomes friendly with an American Jewish businessman. Agnes's willful sister is in Germany still enthralled to the Nazis. Among the servants downstairs, there are the usual couplings and uncouplings, with Laura Haddock making a solid impression as the new maid, who attracts the chauffeur. *Upstairs Downstairs* looms large



on the cultural landscape, and many will want to return to 165 Eaton Place—even for a short while. DVD extras include cast and crew interviews. Recommended, overall. (D. Liebenson)

We Can't Go Home Again

★★★

Oscilloscope, 97 min., not rated, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.99; Blu-ray: \$34.99



Legendary director Nicholas Ray (*Rebel Without a Cause*) never officially completed his final feature, *We Can't Go Home Again*—an experimental work begun in 1971 as a collaboration with students of Binghamton University's Harpur College, where he was a visiting professor. Ray here narrates and stars as a fictionalized version of himself, a director who comes to the liberal arts institution to teach filmmaking and gets to know his students (overcoming their initial sense of distrust) as they embark on creating a motion picture inspired by their own ideas and experiences. What began as a narrative evolved into a freewheeling experiment that was shot in multiple formats, edited into a dreamlike, stream-of-consciousness form, and screened via multiple projectors and overlapping images. Ray continued shooting and editing long after leaving Harpur, working on the project until his death in 1979. His widow, Susan, spent years finishing it, using digital tools, ultimately presenting her reconstruction in 2011. While the fractured mosaic never really coheres, it stands as the last expression of creativity from Ray, which taps into the experimental freedom of the early 1970s. Bowing on DVD and Blu-ray, extras include Susan Ray's 2011 documentary about her husband's final years, *Don't Expect Too Much* (of interest in its own right), as well as Ray's 1974 short "The Janitor," a 1977 TV profile of Ray, interviews and other archival supplements, and a booklet with essays. Sure to appeal to both history buffs and fans of avant-garde cinema, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? ★★★1/2

Warner, 133 min., not rated, DVD: 2 discs, \$14.98; Blu-ray: \$34.99



Old Hollywood divas and bitter rivals Bette Davis and Joan Crawford delightfully go head-to-head in Robert Aldrich's 1962 baroque thriller, adapted from Henry Farrell's novel. Davis is the demented Jane, a grotesque caricature who snarls her every line as she torments her bedridden sister, Blanche (Crawford), a former star who's now a helpless victim of sibling rivalry. The actresses do their damndest to upstage one another and in the process elevate this gothic shocker to

freak-show cult classic level, thanks largely to Davis's willingness to look like a gargoyle as Jane, who tries to recapture her childhood glory under blonde curls and a frilly babydoll dress. Victor Buono costars as Edwin Flagg, a hack accompanist hired by Jane to rehearse her comeback in a scene of self-delusion almost as horrific as the meals she serves Blanche. But for all the camp value of this bizarre melodrama, the film is also a real psychological horror story as Jane's demented cruelty becomes more vicious and Blanche's helplessness more dire. Davis earned her 10th Academy Award nomination for her fearless performance—which only added fuel to the real-life feud—and the film spawned a whole subgenre featuring old Hollywood stars as demented senior citizens. Presented in a remastered anniversary edition for DVD and a Blu-ray debut, extras include an audio commentary, a behind-the-scenes featurette, vintage TV documentaries on Davis and Crawford, and a 1962 appearance by Davis on *The Andy Williams Show*. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Wolf Lake: The Complete Series ★★★

eOne, 3 discs, 465 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.98



This 2001-02 series, a supernatural melodrama about a werewolf pack living as humans in rural Washington state, arrived on TV between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the current revival in fantasy/horror TV. Lou Diamond Phillips stars as Seattle cop John Kanin, who tracks his missing girlfriend, Ruby (Mia Kirshner), to a small town where cagey sheriff Matthew Donner (Tim Matheson) hires him as a deputy during a volatile time: local werewolf leader Willard (Bruce McGill) is dying of cancer, and young thug Tyler (Scott Bairstow) is vying for the alpha dog spot. *Wolf Lake* features early appearances by Paul Wesley (now on *The Vampire Diaries*) and Mary Elizabeth Winstead, and costars Graham Greene (*Twilight: New Moon*) as a village elder with a droll sense of humor and Sharon Lawrence as a den mother with a ferocious streak. Transformation here becomes a metaphor for sex, especially among the high school characters, with the kids divided according to those who "do" and those who "don't." Although only nine episodes were produced before the series was canceled, this is a well-made production ahead of the contemporary zeitgeist about controlling the animal within. Extras include a behind-the-scenes documentary, and the unaired original pilot (which is very interesting in that it presents a radically different approach that was entirely reworked before the series went into full production). Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

More Boxed Sets

Buster Keaton Collection (Kino, Blu-ray: 14 discs, \$299.95). Compiling all of the Kino Classics' Ultimate Edition versions of Buster Keaton's comedy classics in one high-definition boxed set, this 14-disc collection includes: *Short Films Collection: 1920-1923*, *The Saphead* (1920), *Our Hospitality* (1923), *Sherlock Jr./Three Ages* (1923/1924), *The Navigator* (1924), *Seven Chances* (1925), *Go West/Battling Butler* (1925/1926), *The General* (1926), *College* (1927), *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), and *Lost Keaton* (1934-1937). The extensive extras include alternate versions, production featurettes, visual essays, and more.



Film Noir Collection, Volume One (Olive, Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$89.95). This first volume of film noir classics includes *Union Station* (1950; with William Holden), *Appointment with Danger* (1951; starring Alan Ladd), *Dark City* (1950, featuring Charlton Heston) and *Rope of Sand* (1949, starring Burt Lancaster). Also newly available is **The Otto Preminger Collection** (Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$69.95), featuring *Hurry Sundown*, *Skidoo*, and *Such Good Friends*.



Francis Ford Coppola: 5-Film Collection (Lionsgate, Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$39.99). Sharing a combined total of 12 Academy Award nominations and two wins, this set of films from iconic filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola features *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Apocalypse Now Redux* (the 2000 updated and extended version of the film), *The Conversation* (1974), *One From the Heart* (1982, making its Blu-ray debut), and *Tetro* (2009). Bonus features spread across the discs include audio commentaries, production featurettes, deleted scenes, and more.



Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during January and February, including: *The Adventures of Mark Twain: Collector's Edition*, *Alcatraz: The Complete Series*, *Duck Dynasty: Season One*, *Eating Raoul*, *The Firm: The Complete Series*, *Lost Girl: Season One*, *The Penalty*, *Schizo*, *The Sterile Cuckoo*, *Whitney: Season One*, *Zorro*, 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 2012. Unless otherwise noted, titles are available from most distributors.

65_RedRoses (Virgil, 74 min., DVD: \$19.99 [\$295 w/PPR from Ro*co Films Educational, www.rocoeducational.com]). Aired on the Oprah Winfrey Network, this heartbreaking documentary from filmmakers Philip Lyall and Nimisha Mukerji focuses on twentysomething British Columbia cystic fibrosis patient Eva Markvoort's awe-inspiring struggles to live life to the fullest. (VL-3/12)



Better This World (Passion River, 89 min., DVD: \$24.95 [\$295 w/PPR from Bullfrog Films, www.bullfrogfilms.com]). Directors Katie Galloway and Kelly Duane de la Vega's documentary tells the story of two unfortunate young political activists—twentysomething Texans David McKay and Bradley Crowder—who were caught up in a plot to allegedly fire-bomb the Republican National Convention in 2008. (VL-5/12)



Bobby Fischer Against the World (Docurama, 93 min., DVD: \$29.95). Mercurial chess master Bobby Fischer (1943-2008)—who, at the age of 29, represented the USA in the World Chess Championship Match—is the subject of documentarian Liz Garbus's absorbing biographical portrait, which includes observations from Henry Kissinger and Dick Cavett, among others. (VL-3/12)



The City Dark (Wicked Delicate [www.amazon.com], 83 min., DVD: \$20 [\$295 w/PPR from Bullfrog Films, www.bullfrogfilms.com]). Aired on PBS's acclaimed

POV series, filmmaker and New York-based photographer Ian Cheney's poetic documentary explores the history of urban nighttime illumination, while also raising questions about the possible consequences to spiritual and physical health. (VL-7/12)



Crime After Crime (Virgil, 93 min., DVD: \$19.99 [\$295 w/PPR from Ro*co Films Educational, www.rocoeducational.com]). Alternately enraging and inspiring, director Yoav Potash's documentary tells the story of Deborah Peagler—a battered woman and 25-plus-year California prison inmate—who is championed by a pair of attorneys working for her on a pro bono basis. (VL-5/12)



The Dust Bowl (PBS, 227 min., DVD: 2 discs, \$24.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$29.99 [\$54.95 w/PPR from PBS, www.teacher.shop.pbs.org]). Interweaving incredible archival photos and footage, excellent interviews of survivors, and insightful comments from authors and historians, documentary filmmaker Ken Burns' latest visual opus examines the causes and effects of the greatest manmade environmental disaster in American history. (VL-11/12)



Girl Model (First Run, 77 min., DVD: \$27.95, avail. Feb. 12 [\$250 w/PPR from Carnavalesque Films, www.carnavalesquefilms.com]). An American modeling scout travels to Siberia to secure models for the Japanese market in this revealing PBS-aided POV documentary from filmmakers David Redmon and Ashley Sabin that focuses on Nadya, a wide-eyed 13-year-old model from Russia. (VL-9/12)



Hood to Coast (Film for Thought [www.hoodtocoastmovie.com], 102 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$18.95; Blu-ray: \$18.95). Christoph Baaden's inspiring and entertaining documentary relates the stories of participants in the Hood to Coast competition, a 24-hour team-relay marathon in which some 12,000 runners travel nearly 200 miles from Oregon's Mount Hood to the beach in the town of Seaside. (VL Online-1/12)



Hot Coffee (Docurama, 86 min., DVD: \$29.95). Director Susan Saladoff's documentary uses the much-ballyhooed 1990s civil litigation case brought by a coffee-spilling grandma against fast-food giant McDonald's as a lead-in to examine the ways in which America's judicial system is becoming more anti-people and pro-big business. (VL-1/12)



How to Die in Oregon (Docurama, 107 min., DVD: \$29.95). Winner of a Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, director Peter D. Richardson's HBO-aided documentary tells the heartbreaking but also inspiring stories of terminally-ill individuals who take advantage of Oregon's status as the first state to legalize physician-assisted suicide. (VL-3/12)



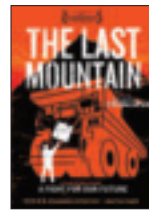
The Invisible War (Docurama, 97 min., DVD: \$29.95 [\$295 w/PPR from Ro*co Films Educational, www.rocoeducational.com]). Filmmaker Kirby Dick shines a light on the disgraceful and often-hidden epidemic of rape within the U.S. military in this documentary that focuses on proud, brave, once-idealistic servicewomen who were betrayed by their comrades. (VL-11/12)



Jiro Dreams of Sushi (Magnolia, 82 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98). Director David Gelb's documentary offers an artistic portrait of world renowned 85-year-old sushi chef Jiro Ono—a culinary master who owns a small Michelin-rated Tokyo sushi bar—and his relationship with his middle-aged apprentice son. (VL Online-7/12)



The Last Mountain (Docurama, 95 min., DVD: \$29.95 [\$250 w/PPR from Uncommon Productions, www.uncommonproductions.com]). Combining striking images and sobering facts, Bill Haney's documentary aims to bring attention to the issue of mountaintop removal in America's Appalachian heartland, focusing on a scrappy community fighting to protect an untainted mountain in West Virginia's Coal River Valley. (VL-1/12)



The Learning (Women Make Movies [www.wmm.com], 98 min., in English & Filipino w/English subtitles, DVD: \$29.95: individuals; \$89: public libraries; \$295: colleges & universities). Filmed over the course of a school year, Ramona Diaz's PBS-aired *POV* documentary offers an eye-opening portrait of four women from the Philippines who face major challenges when they are recruited to teach in Baltimore's public school system. (VL-7/12)



The Other F Word (Oscilloscope, 99 min., DVD: \$29.99). Filmmaker Andrea Blaugrund Nevins' documentary looks at what happens to rock musicians when they become parents in this "coming of middle age story" that features *Punk Rock Dad* author Jim Lindberg of Pennywise, Brett Gurewitz of Bad Religion, Black Flag's Ron Reyes, and others. (VL-3/12)



Pink Ribbons, Inc. (First Run, 98 min., DVD: \$27.95 [\$295 w/PPR from First Run Features, www.firstrunfeatures.com]).

Canadian filmmaker Léa Pool questions the corporate culture surrounding breast cancer research in this enlightening documentary inspired by Dr. Samantha King's 2006 book, which takes a close critical look at the "pink ribbon industry." (VL-11/12)



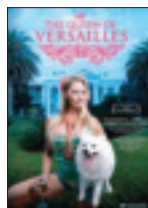
Project Nim (Lionsgate, 93 min., DVD: \$19.98). Based on Elizabeth Hess's 2008 book subtitled "The Chimp Who Would Be Human," filmmaker James Marsh's documentary tells the fascinating and heart-breaking story of simian Nim Chimpsky, which began in 1973 when Columbia University psychologist Herbert Terrace and student Stephanie LaFarge embarked on a project to teach American Sign Language to two-week-old Nim. (VL-1/12)



The Pruitt-Igoe Myth (First Run, 83 min., DVD: \$27.95 [\$295 w/PPR from First Run Features, www.firstrunfeatures.com]). Chad Freidrichs' haunting documentary raises broad issues about U.S. public housing policy by focusing on the compelling history of St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe project, which was hailed as a sterling model in 1956 but less than two decades later had devolved into an eyesore plagued by crime and poverty. (VL-7/12)



The Queen of Versailles (Magnolia, 100 min., DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98). Directed by Lauren Greenfield, this documentary follows 73-year-old billionaire David A. Siegel—who made money selling subprime timeshare mortgages—and his 43-year-old blonde trophy wife, Jackie, along with their children, as the family faces financial challenges and foreclosure in the wake of the economic crisis. (VL-11/12)



Racing Dreams (PBS, 96 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99 [\$54.95 w/PPR from PBS, www.teacher.shop.pbs.org]). Originally aired on PBS, filmmaker Marshall Curry's Tribeca Film Festival Jury Prize winning documentary presents a snapshot of a year in the life of three young drivers on the go-kart racing circuit. (VL-9/12)



Raw Faith (Kino Lorber, 92 min., DVD: \$24.95 [\$189 w/PPR from Kino Lorber Edu, www.kinolorberedu.com]). Illustrated with family stills and home movie footage, director Peter Wiedensmith's touching portrait explores the life and work of Marilyn Sewell—chief minister at a Portland, OR, Unitarian church—as she interacts with appreciative congregants and struggles with personal doubts. (VL-1/12)



Ready, Set, Bag! (Passion River, 80 min., DVD: \$24.95). Filmmakers Justine Jacob and Alex D. da Silva's infectious engaging documentary concentrates on several contestants—ranging from high school and college students to middle-aged men and women—participating in a national annual grocery bagging competition for the title of "Best Bagger" in America. (VL-3/12)



Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap (Indomina, 111 min., DVD: \$19.98). Grammy-nominated rapper and actor Ice-T directs this engaging tribute documentary that explores the roots and evolution of rap and hip-hop music through interviews with a veritable who's who of subjects, including Lord Jamar, Melle Mel, Big Daddy Kane, Afrika Bambaataa, Doug E. Fresh, Nas, and Eminem. (VL-11/12)



We Were Here (Docurama, 90 min., DVD: \$29.95). Filmmakers David Weismann and Bill Weber's powerful documentary centering on the emergence of the AIDS crisis is told from the heartrending vantage point of five individuals who witnessed the devastating onslaught of the "gay disease" in San Francisco's homosexual mecca of Castro Street. (VL-7/12)



The Weight of the Nation (HBO, 3 discs, 276 min., DVD: \$19.98). Made in conjunction with the Institute of Medicine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institutes of Health, this four-part HBO-aided series—combining interviews with experts and ordinary citizens—takes a powerful and timely look at the growing problem of obesity among Americans. (VL-11/12)



Hawaii: A Voice For Sovereignty ★★1/2 (2012) 83 min. DVD: \$25.00 (\$150 w/PPR). Othila Media Productions. Available at www.hawaiiavoiceforsovereignty.com

"Beautiful Hawaiian scenery provides a lush backdrop to this informative, thought-provoking film. Highly recommended"
Nov/Dec 2012
~Video Librarian



"Catherine Bauknight has beautifully captured a timeless moment in the unending struggle of the Hawaiian people. Hawaii: A Voice for Sovereignty is a thought-provoking documentary that respectfully canvasses their journey, hopes and dreams."
- Kris Kristofferson

"Imua Hawaii Imua. We the people of the 'host culture' are still here"
- Actor Al Harrington and Aloha Ambassador of Hawaii
This is a seven-time award winning film.

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

Monster High: Ghouls Rule ★★★

(2012) 72 min. DVD: \$19.98. Universal Studios Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Based on the Mattel doll line, this animated series follows the escapades of a crew of cool but creepy high school students. Think hipster crossed with horror: main character Frankie Stein—daughter of the famous monster—is an adorable green-faced teen with cute clothes, great makeup, and requisite stitches. In class one day, Frankie and her peers watch a propaganda film about how "Normies" have historically chased monsters with pitchforks during Halloween...which is just around the corner. Most of the kids don't take these tales seriously, but after some masked jerks from nearby New Salem toilet paper prank Monster High, the students decide to take action. Frankie and pals dig through the school catacombs and uncover the real history of the holiday—which once served as a celebration of friendship between Normies and freaky folks—in the hopes of making peace, but Queen Bee Cleo de Nile (a daughter of Ramses who hilariously exclaims "Oh my Ra!") has other ideas about dealing with the suburbanites. Also featuring three exclusive animated shorts, this neat tongue-in-cheek spin on classic monsters (including a son of Medusa named Deuce Gorgon who rocks sunglasses and a living "snake-hawk" hairstyle) is easily recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Pound Puppies: Super Secret Pup Club ★★★

(2012) 120 min. DVD: \$12.99. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors).

Five intrepid dogs, aided by their squirrel assistants and a couple of ambitious puppies, help lonely canines find owners in this animated show based on the popular toy line. The pups—Lucky, Squirt, Cookie, Strudel, and Niblet—operate from an elaborate bunker underneath Shelter 17, the pound they call home. Other series regulars include hapless manager Leonard; his wealthy mother, Agatha (enthusiastically voiced by Betty White); her pampered puppy, Rebound; and patient caretaker Olaf. The five episodes in this set include the team's run-in with a doggy jewel thief out to snatch Agatha's treasures, Cookie's maternal attachment to a young candidate for adoption, and Rebound's initiation into a secret society of rogue pooches. Simple, hand-drawn animation and a pastel color scheme give the show a cheerful, retro look. The cuteness factor is somewhat offset with irreverent jokes (some more likely to appeal to adult viewers) and a set-up reminiscent of *Hogan's Heroes* and *The Great Escape*. Recommended. Aud: P. (K. Cruver)

The Red Hen ★★★

(2012) 7 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-545-44755-0.

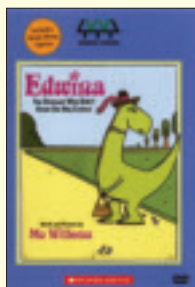
Similar to their take on *Chicken Little* (VL-5/11), author Rebecca Emberley and her father illustrator Ed Emberley are back in this animated adaptation of their 2010 picture book based on the traditional folktale about effort and reward. Presented in a bold shade of red, the titular capon asks cat, rat, and frog bystanders for their assistance in making a cake, but finds they have no intention of helping to gather ingredients, mix, bake, or ice the "golden and sweet" dessert ("Not me..." is their piddling mantra). By the time

the exasperated chick begins work on decorating the cake, "she pretty much knew what was coming" as far as the lazy lollygaggers were concerned...who unsurprisingly perk up when it's time to eat. Narrated by Walter Mayes, with a jaunty guitar soundtrack from Caleb Miles, this lesson on cooperation includes a read-along option and a recipe segment for "Simply Splendid Cake." Recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Sesame Street: Old School 1979-1984, Volume 3 ★★★

(2012) 2 discs. 398 min. DVD: \$29.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

The third in Warner Bros. and Sesame Workshop's release of classic volumes from the popular children's educational series, *Sesame Street: Old School 1979-1984* features five episodes from seasons 11-15. The set kicks off with the location-footage-laden travelogue episode number "1316," which finds Maria (Sonia Manzano) and Olivia (Alaina Reed) journeying by plane and bus to Puerto Rico in honor of Maria's 21st birthday. While Maria's Spanish-speaking family is excited about the preparations, no one is more enthused than Big Bird, who travels along with other Sesame residents—including garbage can-dweller Oscar the Grouch (who I've personally never seen walk before)—to the "Isle of Enchantment" for a big surprise party that will knock Maria's socks off (much of the gags revolve around her thinking—correctly—that she sees one of the gang when they should all be at home). For this episode, the day's letter is "A," the number is "2," and Bert and Ernie are featured, as well as Lily Tomlin in-character as little girl Edith Ann. Also including episodes with guest stars such as Itzhak Perlman, Madeline Kahn, Cab Calloway, and Harry Belafonte, as well as one centering on the 1983 New York City Marathon, this compilation features extensive extras: behind-the-scenes featurettes, an



Edwina: The Dinosaur Who Didn't Know She Was Extinct ★★★ 1/2

(2012) 7 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-545-37414-6.

Adapted from the 2006 picture book by prolific children's author and illustrator Mo Willems—famed for his *Knuffle Bunny* and *Pigeon* stories—this animated short is narrated by Willems' wife, Cher. Although the titular dino heroine shakes the ground when she walks, Edwina is not feared by the townspeople, perhaps because she is so nice: playing with children, using her height to do various favors, helping old ladies cross the street, and baking

her famous chocolate chip cookies to share. But crotchety young student Reginald Von Hoobie-Doobie doesn't feel the love: he's irritated that Edwina doesn't seem to realize that her species is extinct and he goes to great lengths—with fliers and a one-man band—to inform others of the "facts," ultimately presenting his arguments to poor Edwina...who is shocked, but reacts in an endearing way. Also featuring an interview with Willems, a read-along option, and a recipe for Edwina's cookies, this is highly recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

interview with Carol Spinney (who plays Big Bird and Oscar), and the tearjarking segment "Goodbye, Mr. Hooper," which was selected as a top 10 influential moment by the Daytime Emmys. An entertaining time capsule of childhood Americana, this is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Steps4Kids to Draw ★★

(2012) 90 min. DVD: \$24.99. Steps4Kids. PPR.

Young artists will learn to draw a wide range of objects—from simple shapes to more complex figures—in this straightforward instructional program. Accompanied by cheerful music, a narrator shares detailed

directions while the images are created on a plain white background with a black marker. Beginners can start with the section on shapes, which focuses on squares, circles, and other basic building blocks. Drawing people is slightly more detailed, with five different faces and two profiles, each with remarkably expressive features given the simplicity of the designs. More advanced artists can attempt animals, choosing among categories for zoo, farm, house, and water creatures. A "things" segment shows viewers how to draw common items such as flowers, trees, and a house. The narrator describes each step clearly, while also offering tips for achieving the best results and making modifications. A solid guide to the basics for emerging artists that will teach them how to create their own designs, this is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (K. Cruver)



Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 2 ★★

(2012) 75 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Pixar, the animation studio that created *Toy Story*, *The Incredibles*, *Up!*, and other contemporary classics, has long used the short film format to nurture young talent within the company ranks. Compiling 12 titles, this second collection includes both original theatrical shorts that played before Pixar features and feature film spin-off shorts originally produced as DVD/Blu-ray extras. Among the latter are "BURN•E," the story of a repair robot set in the world of *WALL•E*, as well as shorts featuring the characters of *Toy Story*, *Up!*, and *Cars*. Although fun, these are minor larks compared to the best of the theatrical shorts here, including three Oscar nominees: "Presto" (2008), focusing on a wild battle of wits and magic between a stage magician and a rabbit who decides not to come out of the hat; "Day & Night" (2010), a retro-styled meeting of opposites who become friends; and the fable-like "La Luna" (2011), a lovely little fantasy about the moon, the stars, and a family of celestial sweepers. While all of these have been available previously—spread over many releases—this collection includes some fine bonus features: audio commentaries by the filmmakers, and student shorts from Pixar directors John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton, and Pete Docter. Recommended. Aud: P. (S. Axmaker)

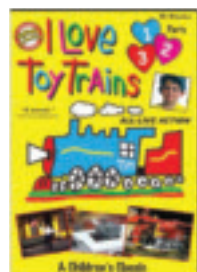
PSYCHOLOGY & SELF-HELP

Delete: The Art of Forgetting ★★

(2011) 52 min. DVD: \$169.95. Films Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62102-944-1

Although we normally consider memories a positive phenomenon—shaping our identities and helping us to learn from the past—some cause more harm than

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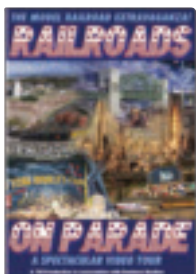
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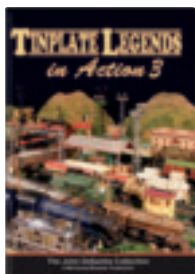
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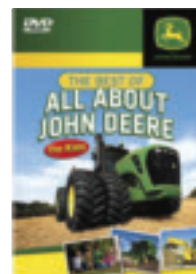
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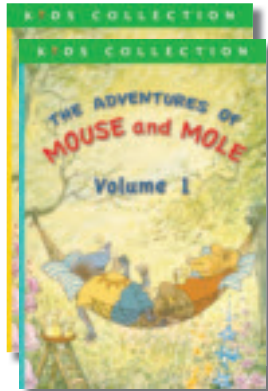
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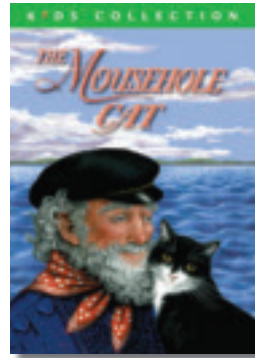
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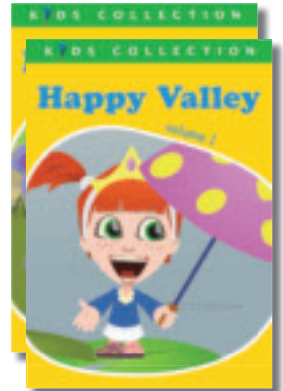
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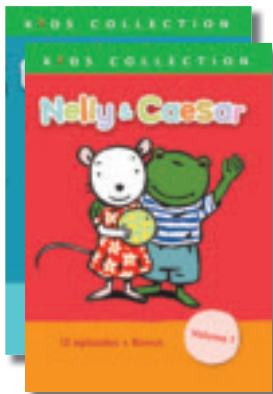
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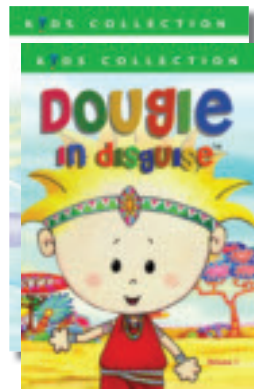
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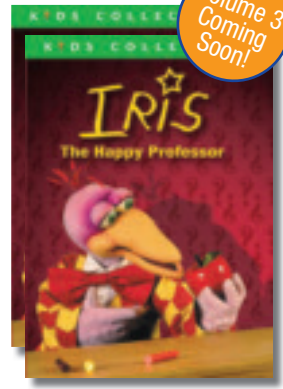
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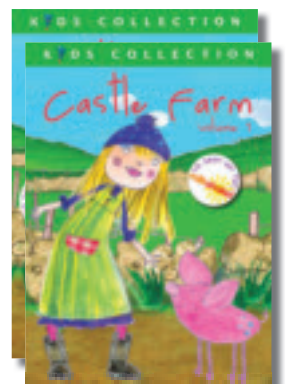
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good. Memories of violence, death, and other traumatic events can play through a victim's mind repeatedly, complicating recovery and impeding ability to function. The subjects profiled in this documentary include Robert, who fought in Afghanistan; Sonja, who lost her father to chronic illness; and Joelle, who was the victim of a violent robbery. Collectively, they suffer from anxiety and panic attacks. For years, scientists have been working on ways to eliminate these kinds of harmful memories. Neurologist Karim Nader explains that memories occupy different parts of the brain, mainly the hippocampus and the amygdala. Neurological researcher André Fischer concentrates on long-term memory, where we store our feelings of fear (although fear contributes to survival, it can also lead to irrational thoughts and over-cautious behavior). On the treatment side, psychotherapist Dr. Almut Ningel has been working on eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), while clinical psychologist Alain Brunet has been prescribing the beta blocker Propranolol, which reduces the adrenalin associated with stress, but only if administered immediately after the event (in an effort to alleviate the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, the U.S. Department of Defense has contributed substantially to his research). An informative look at an interesting subject, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Femmessy)

Grief & Loss: A Child's Perspective

★★★

(2012) 22 min. DVD: \$24.95. Listen 2 Kids Productions. PPR. ISBN: 978-0-9982270-2-6.

Children from ages 4 to 12 who have experienced the death of a loved one share their feelings in this coping guide aimed at caregivers. The interviews are grouped into various grief-related topics, each of which is introduced by a narrator who provides background information and strategies for assisting young people in processing their emotions. Exploring the subjects of death, funerals, and grieving, *Grief & Loss* offers specific techniques for comforting infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary-age children. The interviewees here share their feelings about death and talk about how they and their families are coping. The children's reactions are diverse: from an overcome middle-school-aged boy struggling to hold back tears, to a younger girl who calmly talks about her family's surprise that she is content to play as usual and not visibly shaken by the change in their lives. Although brief, the program covers many different situations and reactions, which should prove valuable to adults struggling to comfort a grieving child. Recommended. [Note: the companion title *Illness in the Family: Children Confronting Uncertainty* is also newly available.] Aud: P. (K. Cruver)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Legacy of Peace ★★

(2012) 120 min. DVD: \$19.95. Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies. ISBN: 978-0-615-68276-1.

Demonization of Islam as an anti-Western religion has been a cottage industry in some circles since 9/11, but effective Muslim responses have been few, including this documentary produced by the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies of Palmdale, CA. Written by the organization's director, Faysal Burhan, *Legacy of Peace* is, unfortunately, too historically simplistic to come across as anything but propaganda. The four half-hour segments fall into two parts, with the first presenting a biography of Muhammad—based largely on the hagiographic literature about the Prophet and illustrated with artwork—emphasizing his peaceful methods, which extended even to his treatment of those who persecuted him and his followers. The tenets of Muhammad's teachings are also sketched, with particular focus on the prophet's reverent attitude towards Jews and Christians. The second part zeroes in on the cultural impact of Islam, arguing that rationality was the basis of medieval Muslim learning, while also underscoring the numerous Islamic contributions to the world. Many of the points made here have merit but tend to be overstated, as when one featured commentator argues that Islam cannot be at odds with the West because it effectively created Western civilization. Nor does the film address any of the serious issues between the West and Muslims or the divisions that developed within Islam itself, which often lead to hostility and violence. In sum, this is a laudable but disappointing project. Not a necessary purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Minarets in Temecula: Islam and the Right to Religious Freedom ★★1/2

(2010) 28 min. DVD: \$24.95. Choices, Inc. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-933724-39-3.

Produced by Alternate Focus, a nonprofit that promotes "an alternative view of Middle East issues," this short documentary focuses on a 2010 controversy involving an effort by the Muslim residents of Temecula, CA, to build a mosque—which was opposed by a Tea Party-inspired wave of anti-Muslim protestors. The incident serves as a foundation for a wider discussion of U.S. and European backlash against Islam, including an interview with Swiss parliamentarian Andreas Gross about his country's 2009 referendum to ban the construction of minarets on any Islamic house of worship, as well as considerable input from Rami El-Amine, editor of *Left Turn* magazine, on the roots of Islamophobia. The film lambasts obvious right-wing media targets, including Glenn Beck (whose name is misspelled in the production) and Bill O'Reilly, while also serving up repetitive reminders that U.S. law guarantees freedom of religion without exceptions to particular faiths. Even though director John Odam includes no firsthand interviews with any of the mosque's opponents, this film should still spark conversation. Extras include additional scenes and a digital guidebook. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Must the Sun Set on the West? ★★1/2

(2011) 3 discs. 600 min. DVD: \$49.99. BOM International (dist. by Vision Video).

The answer to the titular apocalyptic question is "no," at least according to Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi in this series of 10 lectures delivered at the University of Minnesota. Of course, there's an "if": the Indian-born Mangalwadi argues that the West can survive and prosper provided it returns to foundational



Letters to an Unknown Daughter ★★★

(2012) 40 min. DVD: \$14.99. JoyShop Ministries (dist. by Vision Video).

Showing a parallel between a personal struggle and the challenges of faith, filmmaker Anita Keagy, founder of JoyShop Ministries, looks at how her relationship with a daughter she gave up for adoption is much like the relationship God wants with believers (as described in the Bible). Shot in a style suggesting that Keagy is giving her testimony to a small group of people in a house, the filmmaker recalls when she unexpectedly became pregnant as a teenager in the mid-1970s and, with the support of her loving parents, decided to give up her baby for adoption.

As was common at the time, she was told to keep her eyes closed during the birth and did not hold her newborn infant. Over the years, Keagy contributed letters and photos to a file at the adoption agency in hopes that her child, Twila, might someday want to know about her biological mother (eventually, mother and daughter were reunited). The message Keagy wants to convey is that the Bible is much like that folder she created for Twila—messages from a loving God who cares about people and wants them to know the thoughts and feelings of their creator. Told with conviction, this true story will speak to Christians looking for inspiration or renewed passion in their own biblical devotions. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

principles it has tossed aside. Westerners must embrace the reverence for human dignity that has been replaced by nihilism, regain the confidence in reason and science that has given way to mysticism and obscurantism (often of Eastern origin), and—most important—recover the religious underpinnings that once grounded Western beliefs and practices. Mangalwadi, a decidedly conservative Christian convert, casts these and similar nostrums in the form of questionable contrasts between past greatness and contemporary embarrassment (Bach/Kurt Cobain, Da Vinci/Dan Brown, Martin Luther/Hugh Hefner, the Apostle Paul/Paris Hilton), while also identifying the usual suspects in the intellectual degeneration that could doom the West—Darwin, Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx. But while Mangalwadi is a very personable lecturer, his historical evidence tends to selectively arrange facts to buttress his preordained conclusions. DVD extras include a bonus lecture. While likely to appeal to those who already agree with Mangalwadi, this is unlikely to persuade others. Optional. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Rescued ★★★

(2012) 62 min. DVD: \$19.99. Vision Video.

Subtitled "The Heart of Adoption and Caring for Orphans," this documentary looks at adoption from a Christian perspective, challenging the church to consider whether it's doing all it can to care for the millions of children worldwide who have no parents. Among the views expressed are that "souls are at stake" in a society that is "making the family increasingly irrelevant," so Christians "need to be proactive." In addition to interviews with theologian R.C. Sproul Jr., Christian radio host Kevin Swanson, and others, the program features five families, some having adopted as many as 12 children. The parents express a clear sense of destiny—even in cases where medical conditions played a role. As one woman puts it, "The Lord closed my womb to prepare me for [my foster son]." The circumstances vary: in some cases, children were simply abandoned, as in China, which has a "one child" law; but all of the subjects exemplify the teaching of the apostle James, who defined "pure and undefiled religion" in terms of those who reach out to widows and orphans. DVD extras include practical insights on adoption, an interview with author and public speaker Stacy McDonald, and a featurette with adoptive mother Beall Phillips. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES

2016: Obama's America ★1/2

(2012) 90 min. DVD: \$19.98. Lionsgate (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Co-directed (along with John Sullivan) by

conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza—and adapted from his book *The Roots of Obama's Rage*—this election-year propaganda documentary was a surprise theatrical hit, and could still appeal to those displeased with President Obama's re-election. But while technically well made, this is an essentially tawdry film in which D'Souza, who recently resigned his position as president of New York's King's College over a marital scandal, argues that Obama's worldview flows from the anti-colonial attitudes of the Kenyan father he barely knew and past associations with political and religious radicals. According to D'Souza, the president was able to conceal his beliefs in order to win election, but in the next four years can be expected to propose policies that would undermine the U.S. economy, endanger national security, and allow the rise of a unified zone of Islamic fundamentalism stretching across North Africa and the Middle East into South Asia. D'Souza bases much of his argument on tendentious interpretations of Obama's own autobiography, which he connects to his own immigrant experience, while also securing apparent agreement from a handful of "expert" interviewees (although his questions are clearly phrased to lead them to agree with his own conclusions). D'Souza even plays the victim, offering a montage of television clips criticizing his book, but gives

himself away in one scene when he describes his anti-colonial psychobabble as another "card to play" when accusations that Obama is a Muslim or wasn't born in the United States haven't worked. Not recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

An African Election ★★★

(2011) 89 min. DVD: \$99.95: public libraries; \$295: colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. ISBN: 0-7815-1378-2.

The vibrancy of the democratic spirit on a continent notable for being a hotbed of discord and dictatorship is demonstrated in Jarreth Merz's documentary about the 2008 presidential election in Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African nation to achieve independence—in 1957—but one that has suffered from political turmoil ever since. Merz follows the two major candidates—Nana Akufo-Addo of the ruling New Patriotic Party and John Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress—as they make their pitches to journalists and crowds of supporters, while interspersing candid commentary from the candidates, party insiders, and outside observers. Most notable among the array of colorful figures here is Jerry John Rawlings, who seized control of the government in a military coup in 1979 and remained in office through the 1990s as founder and head of the NDC,

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Booker's Place: A Mississippi Story ★★★

(2012) 91 min. DVD: \$26.95. New Video Group (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned. ISBN: 1-4229-2192-1.

Filmmaker Raymond De Felitta follows in the footsteps of his father, NBC-TV documentarian Frank De Felitta, who, in 1966, gave American TV viewers a nonfiction portrait of segregated Greenwood, MS, in the citizens' own words. A standout scene featured an unexpected soliloquy by Booker Wright, a charismatic waiter in a whites-only restaurant. Remarkably at ease before the camera, Wright spoke of his keep-smiling facade while suffering racial slurs from customers, and his hopes for a better life for his children. After the piece was aired, Wright was fired, ambushed, and beaten. Now in his 90s, Frank De Felitta remains guilt-ridden. Raymond establishes contact with Booker's granddaughter Yvette Johnson (who co-produced this film) for a bittersweet revisit. While the allegation here that Booker's fatal 1973 shooting by a (black) town drunk was a (white) assassination/coverup—a charge that endures to this day—sometimes feels like conspiracy-mongering, *Booker's Place* does successfully evoke the not so long ago plantation-culture of Mississippi, a proud Klan stronghold where any black (or white undercover FBI agent) who got out of line could expect violence or death at the hands of racist vigilantes who were the community's "respectable" businessmen and police, not stereotypical poor southern whites. Employing striking black-and-white cinematography to artistically link new material with the 16mm archival imagery, *Booker's Place* is a powerful documentary that tells a deeply personal story about the scars of racial conflict. DVD extras include an interview with the director, additional scenes, and a short film about Greenwood in the Jim Crow era. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

until the opposition NPP swept to victory in 2000. During the 2008 campaign Rawlings remained an influential powerbroker, raising questions about whether the democratic process could still work peacefully in a country that had just suffered from terrible floods but saw hope for a more prosperous future due to the discovery of substantial oil reserves off the coast—a boon that could also become an invitation to official corruption. *An African Election* doesn't take sides in the race, but its vivid coverage of both the campaign and the behind-the-scenes partisan machinations offers a salutary glimpse of the promise and pitfalls of democracy in action in the developing world. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Alaska Gold ★★★

(2012) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-141-8.

Alaska's Bristol Bay remains one of the most pristine salmon fishing grounds on earth, capable of infinite renewal to feed and support future generations of the native population. But a massive mining proposal to extract gold and copper deposits near the streams and lakes which form the salmon spawning grounds has sparked an epic environmental battle. This PBS-aided *Frontline* documentary looks at the open pit mine proposed by an international consortium known as the "Pebble Partnership," a venture that would create a deep and long gouge, require new roads and a port, and could lead to the spread of toxins and pollution in a region known for its many

earthquake faults. Environmentalist and commercial fishermen call it the "wrong place and the wrong mine," while developers and other proponents cite the need for jobs and economic expansion. *Alaska Gold* interviews scientists, state and local officials, industry representatives, and concerned local residents, who differ sharply on the proposed mine's impact. Meanwhile, the permit process continues—evaluating the elaborate and sensitive underground water network, the impact of outsiders who could potentially overwhelm the wildlife and local culture, and the question of how climate change, tons of toxic waste, and mine drainage could affect the fish habitat. Alaska is known for its friendly attitude toward mining interests, although environmentalists plan to go beyond the state's borders, all the way to Washington D.C. to try to save the spawning and fishing grounds. Written and produced by Kenneth Levis, this provocative documentary offers a thoughtful examination of an environmental dilemma. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

Code of the West ★★★

(2012) 71 min. DVD: \$150: high schools & public libraries; \$349: colleges & universities. Racing Horse Productions (dist. by New Day Films). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-57448-121-1.

The issue of medical marijuana is one of the thornier controversies in contemporary American law. Witness the increasing number of states with laws enabling the creation and operation of a licensed and regulated medical marijuana system (and Colorado and Washington state just passed legislation

supporting recreational use), even though it is illegal under federal law. Rebecca Richman Cohen's documentary takes a look at the 2011 social and political debate in Montana, as the state legislature began to consider legalizing medical marijuana. Although a law approving medical marijuana succeeded with bipartisan support, an aggressive repeal movement quickly formed to have the law overturned. The arguments from both sides grew emotional and strident as the controversy raged, with terminally ill patients and anti-pot lobbyists making their respective cases. *Code of the West* focuses more on the political process than on the medical aspects of the controversy, serving up an intriguing and often invigorating behind-the-scenes examination of a hot topic. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Endgame: AIDS in Black America

★★★

(2012) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-760-1.

Although many Americans believe that AIDS—first clinically recognized over 30 years ago—is now under control, this PBS-aided *Frontline* documentary from writer-director Renata Simone notes that AIDS remains a "hidden epidemic" within the African-American community, too often met with silence and stigma. Initially, many blacks felt that AIDS was a plague affecting mostly white gay men. One woman who tested positive for the virus ruefully admits, "HIV and normal didn't go together, so I thought." Many within the black community adhered to the adage "don't put your business on the streets," which led gay black men into double lives, secretly frequenting clubs and engaging in risky behavior (historically, the black church also frowned on gay sexuality). Other factors also made their mark, including the explosion of drug use and sharing of needles in the 1980s, the high incarceration rate for young black males (who would eventually return to the community with the virus), and the lack of committed civil rights leaders during the AIDS years. The documentary looks at how basketball star Magic Johnson's AIDS diagnosis put a human face on the problem, but the national lack of political engagement prevented progress. Various figures are interviewed here, including straight teens, a middle-aged woman who married and contracted the virus from an "in the closet" church deacon, and "bornies"—i.e., black teenagers who acquired the virus from their drug-addicted mothers. Misguided government initiatives—essentially reducing needle exchanges and condom distribution—haven't helped, but improved medications and increased community activism provide glimmers of hope. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Not a Feather, But a Dot ★★★

(2012) 60 min. DVD: \$20; individuals; \$80; public libraries; \$175; colleges & universities. Not a Feather (avail. from www.notafeather.com). PPR.

Teju Prasad's documentary traces the history of Indian-Americans in the United States, while also challenging popular perceptions and advocating for authentic Hindu culture. Combining interviews with archival and contemporary footage and stills, *Not a Feather, But a Dot* looks at the origins of the terms "Indian" and "Hindu," while a humorous skit examines words with spiritual origins—such as "guru" and "karma"—that have been co-opted in everyday life. Actor Anjul Nigam discusses playing Indian characters and relates how he calmly negotiates cultural details when asked to portray stereotypes. Topics explored include Indian-American politics and activism, biased or mistaken views of Hindus, how meaning has been leached from Hindu practices (such as yoga) as they are absorbed into popular culture, and the shortage of higher-level educators who understand Hinduism from a faith-based, rather than an anthropological, perspective. In an awkward segue, Prasad feigns shock at one scholar's assertion that not all Indians are good at math before he speaks with Hindu adult entertainers, an ESPN anchor, and a swimsuit model. Some of the humor falls flat—as in a sketch about a child whose parents are horrified that she wants to be a doctor, or when Prasad quizzes Indian-Americans in a "person on the street" sequence in Edison, NJ, to show that they aren't innately expert spellers. Yet, despite the intermittent silliness, this is a solid documentary about a thriving ethnic American subculture. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

Priceless ★★★1/2

(2011) 58 min. DVD: \$295. Habitat Media (dist. by Bullfrog Films). PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 1-59458-909-7.

Steve Cowan's *Priceless* (aka *Priceless\$*) takes a hard look at corporate lobbyists and influence-peddling in Washington D.C., where powerful monied interests (often through bogus political-action groups used as fronts) routinely pour millions of dollars into politicians' coffers (money that is necessary these days to finance any successful election campaign). Drawing on two examples—why healthier organic farming hasn't been widely adopted; and why fossil fuels and Big Oil maintain a stranglehold on America, when even the military branches are begging for energy independence—this damning exposé reveals the hows and whys of bought-off legislators who invariably support the business aims of their mega-industrial donors (cue Rep. Don Young of Alaska, looking quite buffoonish in a montage of global-warming deniers). Although the DVD cover copy calls this "nonpartisan," viewers will surely

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notice that Democrats (who are traditionally the recipients of generous labor-union contributions) are shown as the mavericks or penitents deploring this system, while Republicans come across as smug, bloated hogs at the Big Money troughs. And Barack Obama is still presented in this 2011 production as "hope" personified. Despite that bias, however, nobody—maybe aside from Young and some others in Congress—would deny that a problem exists, one that makes a travesty out of the concept of democratic government. Instead of just venting, the film also points to potential solutions in Arizona and Maine, where local campaign-finance reforms were effectively tested—at least until the lobbyists and PACs stepped in. Also featuring a 25-minute condensed version on the disc, this disturbing documentary is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Up Heartbreak Hill ★★½
 (2011) 82 min. DVD: \$19.99 (\$39.95 w/PPR).
 PBS Video. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-735-9.

Life can be difficult on the massive Navajo reservation located in a remote area along the Arizona-New Mexico border. Per capita income is low (just over \$6,000 annually), unemployment is high, and numerous social problems exist, including alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and health issues such as diabetes. Many students drop out of high school, few go

to college, and even fewer earn a college degree. Filmmaker Erica Scharf's *Up Heartbreak Hill* follows three Native American students in their senior year of high school in the village of Navajo, NM. Thomas sports a pink mohawk, comes from a broken home, and is a promising state championship level runner. Tamara also runs, does well in school, feels "caged up" on the "rez," and wants to go away to college. Gabby likes photography, isn't sure of her goals, and is a bit scared to leave home. Scharf explores conflicting aims—a desire to explore the wider world vs. clinging to the security of the reservation—while also examining the role of running in Navajo culture. In addition to the students, viewers meet parents (often struggling with their own issues), school teachers and administrators, and town officials, who all hope that the young people will excel in higher education and then return to help in renewing Navajo culture and the local economy. Interwoven throughout are scenes of Thomas and Tamara's training for the all-important Heartbreak Classic running competition at the end of the school year. Scharf manages to cover a lot of ground in this powerful documentary that culminates in a realistic but hopeful conclusion at graduation. DVD extras include updates, deleted scenes, and an interview with the director. A fine film on Native American adolescent culture, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



We Are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists ★★★
 (2012) 95 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99. Luminant Media (avail. from www.wearelegionthedocumentary.com).

Brian Knappenberger's documentary focuses on 21st-century computer hackers who channel their savvy and talents for creative chaos into political protest, defying the stereotype of modem-linked nerdy shut-ins. The narrative has some of the gee-whiz aspect of the early-1990s "cyberpunk" era, as viewers are told how uncensored website-forums such as 4chan and /b/ nurtured a large following of anything-goes anonymous posters. Under the collective default-name "Anonymous," members first banded together to systematically harass a racist podcaster, followed—in February 2008—by a mission to humiliate and defy the Church of Scientology worldwide (this was when the Guy Fawkes face worn by Occupy Wall Street types appeared in force). Some of the Anonymous community preferred being apolitical pranksters instead of purposeful do-gooders, but the collective still reacted en masse to help homegrown revolutionaries in Tunisia and Egypt, also launching a campaign to cripple PayPal after the latter shut down contributions to assist Julian Assange during his WikiLeaks persecution. Featuring interviewees including popular tech-culture author Steven Levy, *We Are Legion* discusses a wide range of high-tech attacks—from the site-smashing "Low Orbit Ion Cannon" to erasing an iPad by remote, to having tons of pizzas delivered to a victim's door. Government responses to Anonymous members may or may not seem heavy-handed, depending on one's opinion of the hacktivists (clearly the filmmakers are sympathetic). Ironically, the idea that Anonymous wants a society in which government fears the citizenry comes close to echoing the Tea Party credo. An interesting look at radical techno-activism, this is recommended. [Note: this is also available on DVD for \$95 w/PPR for public libraries, and \$295 w/PPR for colleges and universities from Ro*co Films Educational (www.rocoeducational.com).] Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

TEEN ISSUES

Emerging Drugs of Abuse ★★★

(2013) 20 min. DVD: \$149.95 (teacher's guide included). Human Relations Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-55548-794-2.

A drug-awareness program, *Emerging Drugs of Abuse* addresses a wide array of recent illicit narcotics arrivals, including K2 and spice (powerful forms of synthetic marijuana); amphetamine-style concoctions known collectively as "bath salts"; a heroin substitute in pill form; a pernicious and toxic cocaine substitute called oxidado; and a drug called "krokodile" that is rampant in Eastern Europe and Russia. Except for the opioid

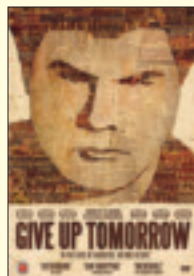
kratom and salvia weed (both plant-based), a commonality among these emerging narcotics is their synthetic nature—almost always brewed using commercially-available, legal chemicals. The formulas feature hazardous additives such as battery acid, gasoline, and paint thinner, while dire side effects noted include cardiac arrest, hallucinations, paranoia, and necrotic flesh (although even with a slightly classroom-scare MTV-shock-cut approach here, the tabloid-media version of bath salts literally turning users into flesh-eating zombies is couched in euphemism). In addition to doctors and counselors, young former addicts are interviewed, who tell emotional stories. Extras include a study guide. Recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (C. Cassidy)

LAW & CRIME

Give Up Tomorrow ★★★1/2

(2012) 95 min. In English, Spanish & Tagalog w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

A riveting nonfiction exposé, filmmaker Michael Collins' *Give Up Tomorrow* focuses on a notorious murder trial in the Philippines that has kept seven men—most likely innocent—imprisoned for 15 years. In 1997, a group of students from well-to-do families were arrested for the rape/murder of the young Chiong sisters. A trash-media frenzy whipped up sentiment against the young males, especially 19-year-old Paco Larrañaga, scion of a politically-connected farm family, who had an airtight alibi of being hundreds of miles away (on Manila, a whole separate island) during the crime. A corruption-ridden fiasco of a trial—during which it was revealed that the dead bodies found weren't even the victimized girls, who remain missing—convicted all of the accused, and only a series of international legal/human rights maneuvers have kept Paco from execution. A great drama often calls for a great villain, and serving that role here is bereaved mother Thelma Chiong, finessing her tragic celebrity into a "victims' rights" career as a Filipino political power broker (in a DVD extra, the director claims that Mrs. Chiong's grief is real and that she deserves sympathy too, however self-serving and misplaced her lust for revenge). Other extras include deleted scenes and film festival highlights. Although the documentary ultimately reveals that the filmmakers are related to the Larrañaga family—making the advocacy slant here perfectly clear—this remains a powerful and moving tale of a likely travesty of justice. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

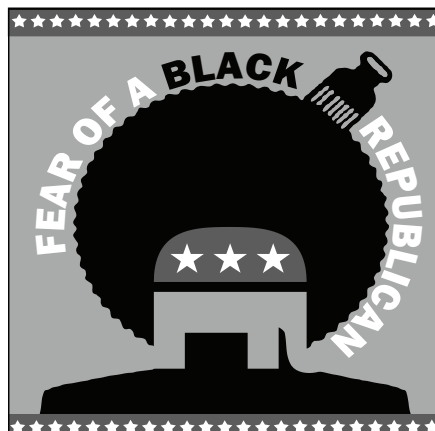


Prosecutor ★★★

(2011) 94 min. DVD: \$398. Icarus Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

The International Criminal Court, created in 2002 to address cases involving crimes against humanity, and its first chief prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, are the subjects of Barry Stevens' documentary, which outlines the rationale behind the ICC's establishment, tying the project directly to the principles that underlay the Nuremberg Trials of Nazis accused of war crimes following World War II. But the film also emphasizes the refusal of powerful nations—including the United States—to join the Court for fear of losing sovereignty if their own citizens are indicted. That fact, along with the reality that the tools

at Moreno-Ocampo's disposal are those of persuasion rather than compulsion, limits the ability of the prosecutor's office even to bring formal charges, let alone achieve convictions. Yet the Argentine lawyer—who was elected to a nine-year term in 2003 after he prosecuted military officers accused of abuses in his own country—has built a committed staff and dexterously worked to gain favorable international opinion in order to launch investigations and secure indictments. Viewers witness the process largely through behind-the-scenes filming following Moreno-Ocampo across eight countries, mostly focusing on two cases: the trial of Congolese militia leader Thomas Lubanga, and Moreno-Ocampo's controversial deci-



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sion to indict a sitting head of state—Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir—on a charge of genocide. Featuring both the full-length version and a 52-minute abridged cut, *Prosecutor* succeeds both as an introduction to the ICC and as a profile of the energetic, principled man who oversaw its early efforts. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Wiebo's War ★★★

(2011) 52 min. DVD: \$225. National Film Board of Canada. PPR.

Suspected of bombings and homicide, Wiebo Ludwig, the leader of an insular Christian commune in rural Canada, is not your standard documentary hero. But against his enemy—the oil and gas industries—Ludwig comes across as a Moses-type, right down to the Old Testament beard. Sequestering his family and followers away from society at Trickle Creek, Alberta, to live under religious strictures, Ludwig was—he claims—about to interact more with the external world in the early 1990s when the energy giants invaded, pocking the region with hellish gas wells and pipelines. Ludwig's commune suffered both livestock and human miscarriages due to clouds of toxins, leading the Ludwigs to participate in monkey-wrench sabotage and threats (after fruitless letters to officials in government). But did they actually bomb facilities and shoot a teenager? With the power companies now the region's monolithic employer—and the USA a customer—charges levied here that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and corporate thugs conspired to smear Ludwig as a cult fanatic killer are indeed disturbing. Filmmaker David York restricts the point of view here to input from the charismatic Ludwig patriarch and his disciples, but sympathetic as they are, viewers are likely to question whether the embattled fundamentalists are actually complicit in more than they admit. A gripping eco-drama, despite the fact that it offers no final answers (Ludwig died of esophageal cancer in 2012), this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Orangutan Diaries ★★★1/2

(2009) 2 discs. 205 min. DVD: \$29.99 (\$59.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-725-0.

At one time, the island of Borneo was thickly forested, making it an ideal habitat for the reclusive orangutan. Unfortunately, the world's need for timber and palm oil has led to massive destruction of Borneo's forests, resulting in the death of many orangutans (or capture to be sold as pets). This BBC series follows the dramatic, urgent mission of the Borneo Orangutan Foundation, comprised of workers and volunteers



Alien Deep with Bob Ballard ★★★1/2

(2012) 2 discs. 240 min. DVD: \$27.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Vivendi Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-4263-4427-5 (Blu-ray)

As National Geographic's explorer-in-residence, Dr. Robert "Bob" Ballard has earned his bragging rights. In the opening credits of this five-part series, Ballard (now 70 and showing no signs of slowing down) reminds viewers of his 1985 discovery of the rusting wreck of the *Titanic*. Ballard's expertise lends depth and gravity to each episode of *Alien Deep*, which kicks off with "It's Alive," as Ballard and his team explore the deep Pacific and

North Atlantic oceans to find hydrothermal vents—those extremely hot, high-pressure "release valves" caused when water and gases are super-heated by volcanic magma far below the ocean floor. Ballard and other experts are convinced that this is how and where life on Earth began, and they explore the mid-ocean ridge, which is a crack in the Earth's crust ("like the seam of a baseball") and a prime location for hydrothermal vents in a landscape "as alien as the surface of the moon." In the fascinating episode "Wrecks of the Abyss," Ballard explores ancient trade routes on the Mediterranean Sea, searching for wreckage of deep-water fishing boats used by ancient mariners as far back as the 7th century BCE. "Oceans Fury" focuses on the elusive phenomenon of rogue waves that continue to destroy ships at a startling rate of one sinking per day. "Inner vs. Outer Space" examines the comparative value of deep-sea "inner space" journeys and outer space exploration, while "Fires of Creation" takes a closer look at the hydrothermal activity of deep-sea volcanoes. Extras include the bonus episode "Deep Secrets: Ballard's Gallipoli Expedition," in which Ballard and his team search the seas near Turkey for submarine wreckage from the tragic deadly World War I battle of Gallipoli. A visual and factual feast for armchair adventurers—plunging viewers into otherworldly environments (both real and digitally simulated)—this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (J. Shannon)

Planet Dinosaur ★★★1/2

(2012) 174 min. DVD: \$19.98. BBC Worldwide Ltd. (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-7806-8447-8.

Dinosaurs roamed and ruled the Earth before suddenly and mysteriously disappearing some 65 million years ago, leaving an intriguing fossil record in the rocks. Narrated by John Hurt, this BBC documentary series notes that we are living in a "golden age" of dinosaur discoveries. In remote regions of China, Africa, and South America, the remains of exotic dinosaurs have been uncovered, ranging from animals not much bigger than a chicken, to huge, ferocious predators like the Spinosaurus (immortalized in the movie *Jurassic Park III*). Combining up-to-date scientific insights with CGI graphics, the six-episode *Planet Dinosaur* illustrates how these creatures moved, hunted, fought, and protected their territories. A dinosaur's life could be nasty, brutish, and short, and each species had different ways of defending themselves, including a more powerful bite, poisonous venom, pack hunting, or an acute sense of smell. Some dinosaurs were "feathered dragons" that hunted or hid in trees, while others were nest raiders, carrion eaters, or even—in the case of the fearsome T.rex—cannibals. Recent research has shed light on skillful night hunters, such as the Troodon, as well as a massive killer that ruled the seas, originally classified simply as "Predator X" (named Pliosaurus in October 2012).

who rescue or confiscate young orphans, with the goal of rehabilitating and returning them to safe areas of the wild. Hosts Steve Leonard and Michaela Strachan follow this story, beginning with the collection of injured or traumatized orphans, who require treatment and love from doctors and "babysitters." Orangutans can live up to 50 years, remain in trees for two years without touching ground, and usually stay with their mothers for the first eight years. Widely dispersed sources of food and fruit require the apes to be solitary creatures, coming together only during mating season. At the foundation each one of the 600 or so animals will be assessed, nursed, and treated for injuries and common diseases like malaria. In time, they are sent to "forest school" in order to learn (or refine) climbing and other skills they will need to survive. The final step before release takes the animals to an island where they enjoy open space and independence. The program follows workers on a "confiscation" mission, where they contend with muddy roads and wary, possibly hostile villagers. Education is part of the survival foundation's mission—a very necessary component in a rapidly developing country—with hopes of achieving understanding and cooperation from people who are struggling to live and eat. Offering a beautifully filmed and insightful look at these rare and endangered apes, *Orangutan Diaries* is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Contemporary investigations have also revealed how botulism, loss of prey, and climate change doomed many dinosaurs. Offering new theories on previously obscure topics, such as determining the color of a dinosaur's skin or feathers, this is an informative and entertaining series. DVD extras include a featurette on "building" dinosaurs for a Los Angeles natural history museum exhibit. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

HEALTH & FITNESS

ADD & Loving It?! ★★★1/2

(2009) 57 min. DVD: \$39.95. Big Brain Productions (dist. by Totally ADD). ISBN: 978-0-9866240-0-1.

One in 25 adults has attention deficit disorder, or ADD, but it's "not necessarily a total disaster," according to the tongue-in-cheek host of this humorous but factual documentary. Actor and comedian Patrick McKenna is joined by wife Janis, director Rick Green, and several experts (some of whom have ADD themselves) for this look at how adult ADD can affect one's life, as well as ways to cope with it. The program stresses the importance of getting a di-

agnosis—detailing what doctors look for specifically to distinguish ADD from physical problems. Physicians also emphasize that medication can be helpful for both adults and children and urge parents to be open to drug treatment for ADD. The McKennas work through a quiz about ADD symptoms, which illustrates how well Janis understands Patrick's behavior (she laughs about outlandish things he's done due to restlessness or impatience). *ADD & Loving*

*It?! effectively presents a lot of information related to common traits (such as worrying about the future), myths (a child with ADD won't outgrow it), typical questions (what's the difference between ADD and ADHD?), and keys to success (try to stay organized and keep your life uncluttered). DVD extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and deleted scenes. Highly recommended. [Note: the companion volume, *ADD & Mastering It!*, is also newly available.] Aud: P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)*



54321 + 8: Countdown to Your Health ★★★1/2

(2012) 24 min. DVD: \$79.95 (downloadable teacher's guide available). Learning Zone Express. PPR. Closed captioned.

A concise primer (or reminder) geared towards grade 6 and up, 54321 + 8 combines solid tips for maintaining good health with commentary from experts and real teens. Host Jennifer Ceci guides viewers through a regimen of six daily steps: a rainbow of 5 fruits and veggies (described as powerhouses for nutrients that "you can't eat too much of"), 4 glasses of water for cleansing and hydration (frozen fruit ice cubes help liven this up), 3 laughs with friends (a must for mental well-being that can lower anxiety and depression and even improve the immune system), a limit of 2 hours of "screen" time (although some participants admit that it's harder to ration their phone and texting than TV or computer use), at least 1 hour of physical activity, and 8 hours of sleep. Providing excellent pointers to help achieve these daily goals, this is highly recommended. Aud: I, J, H, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Transgender TUESDAYS

"They set out to save lives, and that is what they have done."

— Cecilia Chung
transgender advocate and
San Francisco Health Commissioner.

a documentary film by
Mark Freeman & Nathaniel Walters

The story of the country's first Public Health transgender clinic – started in San Francisco's notorious Tenderloin District at the height of the AIDS Epidemic – and 12 of its pioneering patients. Their remarkably warm narratives turn the harrowing places they have been into a testament of victory and hope. This breakthrough documentary is a must-see for students, healthcare providers, and allies to transgender people from every community.

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and stayed for the healthcare.



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Aligned and Well: When You Hurt All Over ★★½

(2009) 40 min. DVD: \$14.95. *Well Balanced Media* (dist. by Janson Media). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-56839-415-2.

Biomechanics expert Katy Bowman, host of the *Aligned and Well* series—championing good health through realigning human muscles and posture for optimal functioning—here demonstrates simple exercises and advises reasonable changes to daily routines in hopes of alleviating a number of conditions, ranging from joint pain to poor circulation. As Bowman says, in our culture many of us sit all day; if we get any exercise, it is generally through jogging or intense bursts at the gym. But our bodies function better at every level when we realign our biomechanics, incorporating movement into our lives more frequently. Stipulating that there might be some initial discomfort as the body adapts, Bowman touts the simple calf stretch as the simplest and most important exercise for decreasing pain and boosting energy; it's also a good starting point to correct stooping. The double calf stretch promotes better circulation and restores function to the knees and lower back. A simple, effective, do-anywhere movement benefits the hands, while neck muscles can be relaxed by properly hanging one's head. Bowman also touts the benefits of several short walks a day and argues that some of the diseases we associate with old age are actually the result of many of the 650 muscles in our bodies going unused. DVD extras include a "Human Physics" lecture by Bowman and a printable exercise program. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Branding Illness ★★★

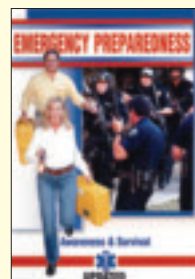
(2010) 52 min. DVD: \$390. *Icarus Films*. PPR.

Filmmaker Anne Georget's *Branding Illness* takes on large pharmaceutical companies, accusing them of creating new illnesses to fit the substances they manufacture and market. A condition is invented and labeled—for example, "premenstrual dysphoric disorder" (PMDD), featuring symptoms that include severe depression, irritability, and tension prior to menstruation. The treatment for PMDD involves a drug similar in all ways but the color of the pill to Prozac, and it was introduced just about the time the patent on Prozac was set to expire (the new product costs about four times more than Prozac). The documentary also argues that many adults are being treated for hypertension, high cholesterol, or high blood sugar not because they are sick but because the thresholds for diagnosing those conditions have been adjusted downward, thus allowing wider markets for big pharma. Unlike the 1960s and before—when most pharmaceutical

Emergency Preparedness: Awareness & Survival ★★½

(2012) 89 min. DVD: \$39.95. *Apogee Communications Group*. PPR.

The information in this densely packed program—aimed at helping people to prepare before disaster strikes—updates an earlier release (see review in VL-3/07), adding the use of new technologies such as LED lights, smartphones, and tablets in times of emergency. The first item on the survival list is the most important: water. The EPA estimates that as much as 90 percent of the world's fresh water supply is partially contaminated, so even with a crystal-clear stream nearby, chances are high that the water may not be totally safe to drink unless treated. A number of purification techniques are shown here, including simple chemical methods (such as using tiny amounts of bleach), filtration systems, and other approaches. After water comes food, with strategies presented for eating during a power outage (start with stuff in the fridge, as even an unpowered freezer preserves food for a relatively long time), and for maintaining a pantry of long-lasting and nutritionally balanced items. Safety follows, including tips related to fire detection and suppression, medical supplies, coping with electrical and other utility outages, flashlights and batteries, alternative power options (including generators, power inverters, and solar), and more. Communication is also covered, including an important note for those with old-fashioned telephone service: keep a corded phone handy, since it may remain operational when other alternatives fail. Other topics include emergency plans and kits, maintaining personal hygiene, handling pets, and responding to specific situations, including weather emergencies, terrorist attacks, and pandemics. Helpful, informative, and potentially life-saving, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)



researchers were independent—upwards of 80 percent of clinical trials today are paid for by the corporations themselves. Drawing on the opinions of physicians, historians, and medical anthropologists, not all of the arguments here are entirely persuasive (and, not surprisingly, pharmaceutical firms contacted by the filmmaker declined to comment), but Georget certainly offers much food for thought. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

Food Allergies ★★★

(2012) 26 min. DVD: \$49.95 (downloadable teacher's guide available). *Learning Zone Express*. PPR. Closed captioned.

Covering a variety of allergens, this program offers advice on coping with a food allergy (as well as being courteous to those who are especially sensitive), featuring comments both from doctors and real people with food concerns. Explaining how sufferers produce IgE antibodies against certain foods, *Food Allergies* details symptoms and reactions (such as itching, hives, difficulty breathing, and stomach issues that can affect victims for days), while also detailing common triggers, such as nuts, milk, wheat, and shellfish. Other topics covered include celiac disease and lactose intolerance; methods doctors use for testing for actual allergies vs. sensitivities; and ways to avoid reactions (including carefully reading labels, asking the right questions about food prep out of your control, and keeping a detailed food diary for your physician). Recommended. Aud: I, J, H, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Functional Fitness: Pain Free Back & Neck ★★★

(2011) 65 min. DVD: \$19.99. *BayView Entertainment* (avail. from most distributors).

Occupational therapy practitioner Suzanne Andrews is the exuberant lead instructor for this program from the public television-aired exercise series *Functional Fitness*. Flanked by two participants who spend the majority of the routine seated, Andrews goes comparatively high-energy for the segment on a healthy back—warning of the potentially painful negative effects of weak back muscles, while guiding viewers through moves including arm reaches and stretches, lunges, knee bends, shoulder rolls, flamingo, and overhead press (Andrews suggests using anything from detergent jugs to tuna cans if you don't have weights). Continuing to provide tips along the way, Andrews' stationary (primarily) routine for maintaining a healthy neck emphasizes pressure points while performing chin tucks and retraction, neck rolls, and deep breathing exercises. Also featuring techniques for pain-free approaches to sitting in a car, at a computer, or sleeping, this helpful low-impact program is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Hungry for Change ★★★

(2012) 2 discs. 89 min. DVD: \$29.95. *Docurama* (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-2232-4.

Adapted from the book of the same title, *Hungry for Change* is a follow-up to filmmaker (and authors) James Colquhoun and

Laurentine ten Bosch's *Food Matters* (VL-1/10), which has also spawned its own companion recipe book on the side. Presenting a broad menu of diet/nutrition authors and health gurus (including David Vitalis, Jon Gabriel, Dr. Christiane Northrup, David Wolfe, Kris Carr, etc.), the documentary serves up a smorgasbord of sound bytes that inform viewers why most diets don't work; why "fat free" product labeling is misleading; how corporations use additive additives of little nutritional value to get hungry people to eat (and buy) in excess; what foods are healthy and detoxifying; and how mental attitude and self-esteem affect eating habits. The corporate-conspiracy material sometimes sits awkwardly with the worthy dietary info, but more indigestible are dramatized inserts (credited to another director, Carlos Ledesma) that depict an ongoing story about a weight-obsessed cubicle girl pining for a hunky coworker. Although meant to illustrate various points being made, the intermittent mini-drama feels like, well, empty calories. Still, *Hungry for Change* is full of solid food advice and is sure to be popular. Bonus features include over 100 minutes of unedited interview segments, while an accompanying booklet describes the mom-and-pop genesis and mission of the *Food Matters* franchise. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Just Around the Corner ★★★

(2012) 96 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors).

Co-directors Steve Caniff and Jim Justice's *Just Around the Corner* serves as a concert film, biographical profile, and work of healthcare activism, with the music performed to raise funds for Parkinson's research. The project was inspired by music industry veteran Bob Benjamin, who grew

up in New Rochelle, NY, where he developed a lifelong love of softball, hockey, and rock and roll. Benjamin eventually went to college, worked at a record store, became a promoter, and started an independent label, but at the age of 38 found out he had Parkinson's disease, a chronic neurological disorder. Medical experts, along with individuals with Parkinson's, including Michael J. Fox, talk about the early-onset variant of this condition that primarily targets the elderly. Two years after being diagnosed, Benjamin began to raise funds, taking the name of his foundation, "Light of Day," from Fox's 1987 movie of the same name, for which Bruce Springsteen penned the title track. Springsteen soon joined Benjamin's other friends and associates, including Jesse Malin, Live's Ed Kowalczyk, and *The Sopranos'* Vincent Pastore in hosting and playing an annual benefit on the Jersey Shore (Pastore lost his mother to Parkinson's). The fundraiser has since spread to Niagara Falls, Rome, and Toronto. An informative documentary that inspires (and all proceeds from DVD sales will go to the Light of Day foundation) but never sugarcoats the situation faced by Benjamin, Fox, and thousands of others, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Yoga Journal: Desk Yoga Essentials

★★★★1/2

(2012) 40 min. DVD: \$14.99. BayView Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

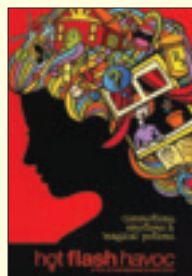
In this instructional program, yoga therapist Sienna Smith presents a series of poses intended to reduce pain and discomfort caused by working for long periods at a desk. She targets the common problem zones of hands and wrists, neck and shoulders, the lower back, and hips, while also

Hot Flash Havoc ★★★

(2010) 88 min. DVD: \$24.99. Hot Flash Havoc.

With the average age of the onset of menopause being 51 and female life expectancy clocking in at about 79 years, millions can expect to live a third or even half of their lives after going through "the change." *Hot Flash Havoc*, subtitled "A Film of Menopausal Proportions," explains how menopause works and tackles the controversial issue of hormone replacement through a combination of expert commentary, animation, and "on the street" observations—some of them fairly amusing—from ordinary men and women, all backed by a lively musical score.

A note at the beginning states that no pharmaceutical companies were involved in this film, which makes a pretty strong case for beginning or continuing hormone replacement therapy, citing emerging studies. Directed by Marc Bennett and written and narrated by investigative journalist Marnie Inskip, the documentary takes exception with previous reports from the National Institutes of Health that warned about treatment dangers—including heart attacks, breast cancer, or dementia. On the contrary, say the professionals interviewed here, who argue that appropriate hormone therapy actually helps prevent heart attacks and dementia, as well as osteoporosis and diabetes, among other conditions—the very opposite of what initial studies indicated. A compelling overview of complicated issues surrounding a universal condition, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

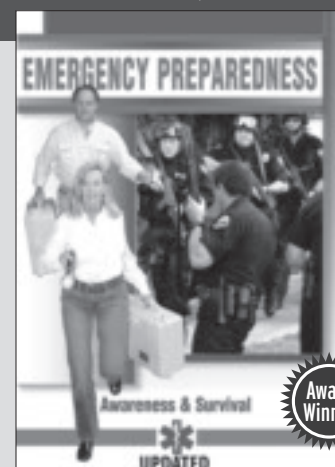


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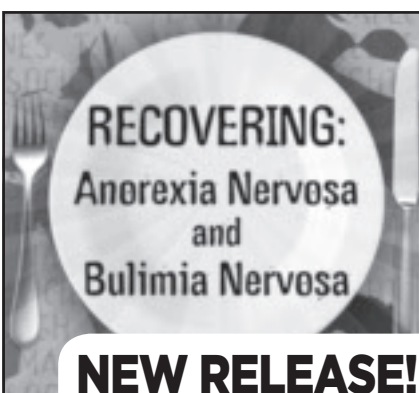
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Recommended ★★★

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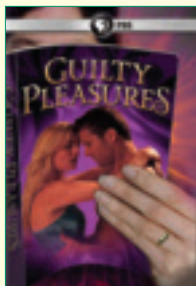
sharing tips for releasing physical tension due to slouching and sitting in one position for hours. The moves, each lasting two to three minutes, are presented with detailed instructions on breathing (which dramatically increases their effectiveness) and indication as to which areas of the body should be feeling the stretch the most. A majority of the 15 exercises can be performed at a desk (demonstrated here in a studio with a table and chair), and many—such as the chest-opening wave breath and the jaw and neck release—may be inconspicuously executed in a professional setting. Others, such as the chair warrior and the dynamic arm lift, could raise a few eyebrows around the office. But all are effective, in addition to being appropriate for beginning yoga students. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (K. Cruver)

RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY

Chely Wright: Wish Me Away ★★★

(2011) 96 min. DVD: \$27.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Chely Wright, who was born in 1970, seems a little young to have inspired her own profile, but then again she's the only prominent Nashville entertainer to come out as gay. Wright believes in God, country, and family; she's just not heterosexual, and doesn't see why these things should be mutually exclusive. In their touching, yet clear-eyed documentary, co-directors Bobbie Birleffi and Beverly Kopf track the carefully orchestrated three-year process by which Wright came out to fans and to the wider public, alternating between video-diary footage and professionally-shot material. Wright's divorced parents speak about her lifelong love of country music, while her sister believes Chely fulfilled a dream that wasn't possible for their more introverted mother (whom ex-husband Stan describes as "cold and unloving"). Wright's impoverished childhood could have been happier, but her music career thrived, and she signed to a major label in the 1990s. Although she tried to pray her orientation away, this only caused further unhappiness. In her 20s, Wright fell in love with a woman, but kept the relationship secret. Later, she dated Brad Paisley, but couldn't return his affection. An emotional collapse finally inspired her to come out to producer Rodney Crowell and select family members, after which she moved to New York to work on a biography that detailed her secrecy, thoughts of suicide, and eventual breakthrough. DVD extras include a featurette and photo gallery. A solid personal profile of a singer who is also expanding the horizons of country music, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)



Guilty Pleasures ★★★1/2

(2010) 86 min. DVD: \$19.99 (\$39.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-734-2.

Filmmaker Julie Moggan's *Guilty Pleasures*—a PBS-aided POV entry—offers a sweet and thoughtful look at romance in the lives of three women who read Harlequin (in Britain, Mills & Boon) romance novels, as well as an elderly bachelor who has written nearly 50 bodice rippers, and a male model who appears on more than 200 Mills & Boon covers. Hiroko, a Japanese housewife and mother, was inspired by the party scenes in her beloved Mills & Boons to take up ballroom dancing, and she is infatuated with her (oblivious) dancing teacher (her husband notes sadly that they had planned to have more children, but another pregnancy would take Hiroko away from the dance floor). British fan Shirley's real life is not as romantic or adventuresome as the stories—the first thing spouse Phil wanted to know when they met was whether she could properly fry an egg. In India, avid reader Shumita longs to reconcile with her husband, Sanjay, after a five-year separation. Author Roger "Gill" Sanderson discusses his creative process, the rules of romance writing (the hero can't have red hair), and how different his fictitious couples are from those he observes in real life. Buff model Stephen poses in a bathing suit, works out, and eats dinner alone; he's been single for years and is looking for his "twin flame." By film's end, Stephen is in love, Shirley and Phil have revealed the depth of their commitment, Shumita is over the estranged Sanjay...and Hiroko's husband has learned to dance. A lovely, hugely entertaining documentary, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

FOOD & SPIRITS

Business Advice for Organic Farmers

★★★

(2012) 122 min. DVD: \$24.95. Chelsea Green Publishing. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-60358-245-2.

Richard Wiswall has farmed organically at Cate Farm in Vermont since 1981—and could not have survived that long if he wasn't making a profit. Inspired by Wiswall's 2009 book *The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook*, this program is mainly a record of his workshop at the Northeast Organic Farming Association's winter conference in 2010, interspersed with comments from an interview with Wiswall at his farm. The workshop offers a thorough examination of the economics of organic agriculture, delving into planning, budgeting, producing, and marketing in ways that will ensure an enterprise turns a net profit. For example, in creating a crop budget, Wiswall notes the difference between kale and broccoli; kale, which can be harvested several times in a season, nets about 20 times as much revenue as the same acreage planted in broccoli. DVD extras include printable forms related to Wiswall's hands-on budgeting and marketing exercises. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

The Raw and the Cooked ★★★1/2

(2012) 83 min. In English & Chinese w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

It's all but guaranteed that viewers will be salivating for Taiwanese food by the time

they finish watching *The Raw and the Cooked*, which looks at the cuisine of this island nation of 23 million people, including the culinary habits of descendants of indigenous tribes, who keep their own food (and other cultural) traditions alive. Filmmaker Monika Treut begins in the north, in Taipei, where she visits world-renowned restaurant Shin Yeh for a multi-course meal including sow livers ("delicate like the ladies," the head chef says). From there, Treut discovers the secret to the perfect dumpling (18 folds, it seems), and visits a night market in the city where crowds of hungry people wander through a carnival-like atmosphere, enjoying an amazing array of organic food dishes. She also travels inland to look at a thriving network of organic farmers and buyers who believe deeply in supporting the natural cycle of food production. Treut witnesses a demonstration against a proposed petrochemical factory threatening local waters, and interviews a restaurant cook who catches his own fish by hand. This emphasis on linking the enjoyment of food with personal involvement in its harvesting carries over to Treut's visits with various aboriginal tribes, as we see tribal people preparing food that looks unbearably delicious (including the Hakka Chinese specialty seafood and pumpkin soup). The tour ends in Pulin with a visit to a popular fusion restaurant, where viewers behold such beautiful dishes as rose-petal sushi and aianthus prickly ash. DVD extras include recipes. A wonderful culinary excursion that is likely to appeal to both foodies and armchair travelers, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Disabilities at Work: Successful Job Hunting for People with Disabilities

★★★1/2

(2012) 28 min. DVD: \$99.95. Cambridge Educational (dist. by Films Media Group). PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62102-251-0.

An excellent primer for people with disabilities who are preparing for a job search and going on interviews, much of the advice here—delivered by experts, as well as men and women with a variety of handicaps—is widely applicable. The conventional wisdom still holds: namely, that an interview is an opportunity to best present one's self in a short amount of time—trying to make a good impression by accentuating the positive, drawing attention to your assets for a potential employer, and underscoring your relevant skills and education. Appropriate dress, smart answers, and punctuality all count. Of course, a disability will more than likely be a factor in the conversation, but the key is to be brief and to the point. Will the condition slow down performance of certain tasks? The main thing is to educate the interviewer on how you can do the job, and possibly even make clear how overcoming a disability has made you a *better* worker. Noting that applicants should check workplace accessibility and request any accommodations necessary beforehand (the only reason one would be obliged to disclose a disability prior to an interview), this program also covers several stipulations in the Americans with Disabilities Act. Other titles in the *Disabilities at Work* series include *Effective Job Search* and *Smart Resumes and Applications*. Informative and encouraging, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

Starting an Online Business ★★★

(2012) 21 min. DVD: \$129.95. VEA (dist. by Films Media Group). PPR. Closed captioned.

Although this Australian production features foreign ventures as examples (along with business-school input from the University of Melbourne), the terminology and general principles remain salient for North American viewers, as it covers the basics of launching a commercial enterprise centered on the World Wide Web—whether a wholly-online service or a gateway for selling physical products. The costume-shop Kigu and food vendor Supperlicious serve as the main examples in this generally non-technical presentation that looks at business plans and branding (near-universals in every business), as well as uniquely web-based concerns, such as the fact that web design must periodically change over time to address “functionality” advances (such as blogs and social-media networking). Interestingly, in a segment devoted

to the pitfalls of e-commerce, viewers are told that SEO (search engine optimization) copywriting is a costly and perhaps futile investment. While acknowledging that net-based startups suffer a high failure rate, this program offers a serviceable introduction to the basics. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Cassady)

SPORTS, GAMES & RECREATION

Swish 3: The Swish Free Throw ★★★1/2

(2012) 88 min. DVD: \$34.95. Youth Sports Club. PPR.

When shooting hoops, is there anything sweeter than the swish? In *Swish 3*, Tom Nordland teaches his unorthodox approach to creating “experts in the skill of free-throw shooting.” The technique starts with an open stance and straight legs before dipping and using leg force to drive the ball toward the net. Aligning the hand with the basket (instead of aligning the elbows) is also key, along with the grip and specific hand motions. Training starts with players examining their current style and habits, while opening their minds to learning something new—an approach that Nordland calls the “awareness method of coaching,” which establishes a solid foundation to work from before integrating specific moves and techniques into a sequence for practice. Nordland also stresses that shooting is physical and not mental, and that turning it into a brain exercise only makes it harder to have confidence in the simplicity of executing consistent free throws. Highly recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (C. Block)

The World Series: History of the Fall Classic ★★★1/2

(2011) 4 discs. 240 min. DVD: \$39.95. A&E Home Video (avail. from most distributors). PPR. ISBN: 1-4229-2231-6.

This fast-paced documentary offers a sweeping historical overview of Major League Baseball's World Series, from the championship's rocky start in 1903 through the 2011 match-up between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Texas Rangers. Narrated by Bob Costas, the chronicle features archival footage and digital images, as well as more than a hundred interviews with veteran players, managers, writers, and broadcasters. The story begins at the start of the 20th century with the creation of the American League and a subsequent agreement to face off with the more established National League in a 1903 World Series that brought together the Pittsburgh Pirates' Honus Wagner and (pre-Red Sox) Boston's pitching ace Cy Young. After a National League boycott the following year, the modern World Series was played annually until the strike of 1994, and Costas provides a year-by-year sketch of

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Running with Bulls ★★1/2

(2012) 51 min. DVD: \$19.98. FilmWorks Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

According to U.K. television journalist Jason Farrell, the annual San Fermin Festival in Pamplona, Spain, is “nine days of sustained drinking and running with bulls.” So what could possibly go wrong? Well, lots—as viewers will learn from filmmaker Farrell’s exciting documentary about the strange event with a centuries-old history. Although made world-famous and romanticized by Ernest Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*, the running typically results in a number of serious injuries every

July, as the horns of massive bulls rip human flesh and occasionally kill people. Despite inevitable tragedies, Pamplona entertains thousands of partying locals and tourists in its streets each year, folks who take their lives in their hands while chasing after (or being chased by) the huge animals. On each of the festival’s nine days, six bulls are released to charge along a downtown route leading to a stadium, where they will face bloody fates at the hands of matadors. Why do men, women, and children run with the bulls? Because, we’re told, it makes them feel alive. Farrell himself vicariously takes viewers along on his own run, employing a small camera and capturing some truly scary moments. The film also features protestors who decry the festival as animal abuse, a charge not easily dismissed. DVD extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette and a photo gallery. Offering an intriguing look at a notable annual phenomenon, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

postseason highlights. The many anecdotes cover subjects ranging from the 1919 “Black Sox” scandal to Babe Ruth’s alleged “called shot” in 1932. Other topics include the New York Yankees’ dynastic rise during the 1940s (and later decline and return to top form in contemporary times), the ascendance of the Oakland Athletics in the early 1970s, and a sustained era in the 1980s in which no team dominated the sport. DVD extras include media bloopers, ceremonial first pitches, additional interviews, team lineups, World Series MVP Award winners, and famous clinchers. A comprehensive and entertaining history of the “Fall classic” (also available in a barebones two-disc edition for \$24.95), this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

and Michael Jackson’s physician Conrad Murray (offering a hazy conspiracy take on Jackson’s death). Williams also mentions his own recent arrests aimed at silencing his outspokenness (for the record, Williams is no Lenny Bruce). During the closing credits, viewers learn that Williams’ set was the finale, following five other performers; a longer runtime with more comics—a la *The Original Kings of Comedy*—would have offered more variety and comic bang for the buck. Extras include a clever animated short set to Williams’ rant about Obama’s presidency. Both strident and scattershot, this disappointing comedy special is not recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

Mariachi High ★★★

(2012) 54 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-60883-728-1.

The student musicians in the PBS-aided documentary *Mariachi High* are passionate about mariachi—a high-spirited, emotive strain of Mexican folk music. Senior Jennifer Santos believes that “mariachi builds character,” while music director Adrian Padilla notes that 100% of the mariachi participants go on to four-year colleges. Located in Zapata, TX, many of the champion ensemble mariachi players at Zapata High School are of Latino descent, although everyone is welcome. Collin Moffett, the only apparent Caucasian member, feels that mariachi “can just change a person.” Directors Kim Connell and Ilana Trachtman open their profile at the beginning of the school year as Padilla chooses his musicians, with a focus on violin, trumpet, and percussion (his daughter, Belen, contributes as a singer and harpist). Zapata may be a small school, but the band has won three out of the last four

THE ARTS

Katt Williams: Kattpacalypse ★1/2

(2011) 60 min. DVD: \$19.98. eOne Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4172-3736-8.

Standup comic and actor Katt Williams reportedly retired from the mic in 2009 but returns for this 2011 New Year’s Eve set at the Nokia Theatre in Los Angeles. The transition to 2012—a key year for a few New Age/Mayan prophecy doomsday scenarios—inspires Williams to riff in blurry, profanity-laced fashion on apocalyptic themes. Williams says that the world economic crisis and recession are nothing new; black people have been living this life for generations. Williams also blasts atheism (“Jesus has been kickin’ ass for a long time”), evolutionary theory, child-molesting Catholic clergy, critics of Barack Obama, the presidential aspirations of Herman Cain,

Mariachi Vargas competitions against larger institutions with multiple directors, and here they travel to Austin, and to San Antonio to perform at the state capitol. Since it's a traditional musical form, band members need to look the part, so Marina Flores, whose hair color fluctuates throughout filming, sprays her hair black before competing. While most documentaries would end after the big competition, *Mariachi High* continues to the end of the year as the seniors prepare for the next stage in their lives, grateful for the head start that Padilla's music program has provided them. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (K. Fennessy)

The Perils of Show Business: Proceed at Your Own Risk ★★

(2012) 60 min. DVD: \$19.99. Limelight Editions (avail. from www.limelighteditions.com). PPR. ISBN: 978-0-87910-398-9.

For almost five decades actor Charles Grodin has entertained audiences on stage, TV, radio, and particularly in films such as *Midnight Run*, the original *The Heartbreak Kid*, and the popular *Beethoven* dog series. According to Grodin, acting is simple. But how many actors can make a living at it? In this curious program, Grodin faces the camera, while offering opinions, advice, and memories about the thespian profession. Ranging across topics related to acting, writing, and directing, Grodin delivers pithy remarks and one liners, such as recalling that early in his career he lived in a fleabag apartment, which has "since been upgraded to a homeless shelter." Grodin says that all actors must learn to deal with rejection, but while he provides tips on handling critical or unsupportive directors,

he also carries a chip on his shoulder—calling renowned actress and drama coach Uta Hagen a "bully," and offering similar put-downs of director-choreographer Jerome Robbins and Roman Polanski (who gave Grodin a small part in *Rosemary's Baby*). In between segments, the program flashes effusive quotes regarding Grodin's performances and charitable activities. Unfortunately, *The Perils of Show Business* is a meandering effort that doesn't offer starving actors really helpful advice or encouragement, and much of it lacks the generous spirit usually associated with Grodin. Not recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

Play in the Gray ★★

(2012) 85 min. DVD: \$14.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

The idea of men in drag can easily conjure up memories of wild classic comedy gems, running the gamut from the frothy vaudeville shtick of Milton Berle to the boundary-pushing underground nihilism of Divine. But on the distaff side, there are relatively few culturally significant entertainment milestones featuring women dressed in male drag. Kaitlin Meelia's documentary focuses on the Boston-based all-female theatrical troupe All the Kings Men, which specializes in offering a "drag king" alternative to the more prevalent drag queen style of comedy. Meelia gives equal attention to each performer, with in-depth interviews focusing on personal histories and performance styles, eliciting interesting opinions on gender identity in both standup comedy and in the wider society. Unfortunately, the insights and energy evident during the in-

Nina Conti: Her Master's Voice ★★★1/2

(2012) 60 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors).

Although the lines between mockumentary, performance art, and confessional essay are hard to decipher in this enormously entertaining film, it's sure fun watching the boundaries blur as British actress-director Nina Conti, a YouTube sensation often credited for reinventing the art of ventriloquism, goes on a long pilgrimage—both to sort out ambivalent feelings about her career and to bequeath several puppets to a retirement home somewhere in Kentucky. Conti (daughter of actor Tom Conti) attends an annual ventriloquist convention with her trademark hand puppet—the somber and plainspoken Monkey—and several large latex-and-wood creations left to her by her late mentor and lover, Ken Campbell, an influential maverick actor and director on the experimental-theater scene in London. Throughout her trip, Conti uses private interactions with Monkey and the other puppets (one of whom resembles Campbell) to confront ghosts from her past as well as uncertainty about whether she should have remained in ventriloquism after Campbell nudged her in that direction. These conversations are often very funny and tender (one of the puppets, an old woman whom Campbell had used as a Gertrude Stein figure, requires a lot of care), but they can also be unnerving (especially when the Campbell-like figure asks Conti about a long-ago abortion). Conti's stage act crosses over into mind-bending unreality—a dynamic that extends to this film, as the viewer is not sure what's genuine and what's not (but it's all intriguing). DVD extras include audio commentary by Conti and Monkey, extended scenes, and Conti's convention stage performance. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



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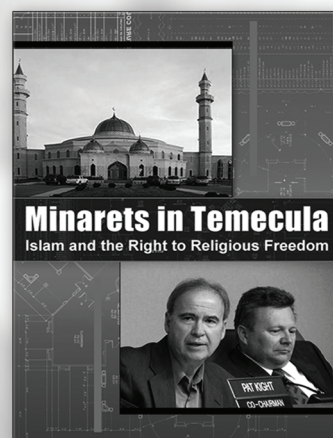
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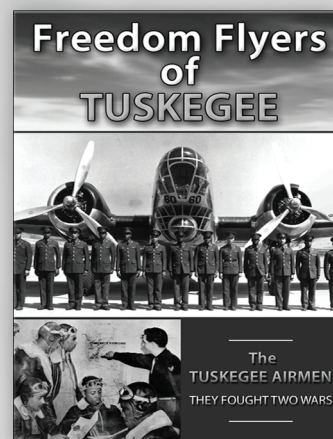


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dividual profiles evaporate when the women come together for their shows; indeed, the onstage comedy selections presented here come across as a second-rate riff on *Saturday Night Live* sketches. Ultimately, the broadly vulgar and fairly predictable nature of the troupe's comedy reminds us that it doesn't matter who is wearing what clothing—if the jokes aren't funny, the whole thing won't work. An optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

School Play ★★★

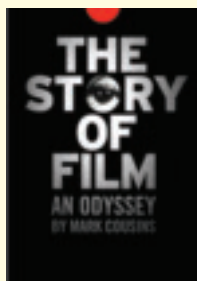
(2010) 72 min. DVD: \$99. Stenhouse Publishers. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-57110-960-6.

School Play follows five suburban New York fifth-graders during auditions, rehearsals, and an eventual performance of a staged version of *The Wizard of Oz*. The kids run the gamut of behavioral types: an admitted class clown; an outcast who struggles to make friends; a popular, competitive girl; a boy who stutters but loves to be the center of attention; and the savvy youngest child in a family of stage performers. The director and school principal talk about the importance of the annual play, and parents are seen in roles extending beyond helping the children to learn lines—talking about their own work with their offspring, while one father draws a parallel for his son between working on *Oz* and doing anything well in life. Filmmakers Rick Velleu and Eddie Rosenstein fall short in a few areas: the film jumps from one participant's discouragement to elation without showing any connection; the overuse of atmospheric shots and folk music slow the momentum; and, disappointingly, the students' journey ends with excerpts of the performance shown in only a brief montage, as the soundtrack gives way almost entirely to Cat Stevens. But *School Play* is still an effective reminder of the power of childhood experiences. DVD extras include a viewing guide with related video clips. Recommended, overall. Aud: I, C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

Tales from a Ghetto Klown ★★★

(2012) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-731-1.

According to actor John Leguizamo, "theater is the extreme sport" of acting. Although Leguizamo is familiar to moviegoers from his work in films (such as *Carlito's Way* and *Executive Decision*), he has also written and starred in five one-man shows, including *Mambo Mouth* and *Spic-O-Rama*. His latest, *Ghetto Klown*, chronicles the "journey of an artist," depicting the joy and pain of discovering what it means to be a Latin actor in America. Ben DeJesus directs this PBS special on how *Ghetto Klown* was conceived, rehearsed, and refined during the long tryout process, taking the actor



The Story of Film: An Odyssey ★★★★★

(2011) 5 discs. 915 min. DVD: \$69.95. Music Box Films (avail. from most distributors).

Irish critic and filmmaker Mark Cousins offers a master class in cinema history in this superb eight-part series originally presented on Britain's More4 television. Running over 15 hours, *The Story of Film*—narrated by Cousins—serves up an incredibly comprehensive, wonderfully evocative survey of the medium's first century-plus. The approach here is basically chronological, beginning with Edison in America and the Lumière brothers in France and continuing up through the digital age in the 2000s.

Featuring literally hundreds of illustrative clips (from William K.L. Dickson's 1894 *Anabelle Butterfly Dance* to Christopher Nolan's 2010 *Inception*), the series also interviews a wide array of filmmakers, including Wim Wenders, Lars von Trier, Gus Van Sant, Jane Campion, and John Sayles. Cousins delivers an imaginative, highly personal treatment of a great art form in which several major themes emerge, ranging from the centrality of the director (essentially the auteur theory) to the global character of film. While Cousins doesn't neglect Hollywood or Europe, impressive coverage is given to the rest of the filmmaking world—China, Japan, Korea, Russia, India, the Middle East, Africa, South and Latin America—with segments also focusing on various genres, like Japanese horror and Hong Kong martial arts movies. Cousins also encourages an appreciation of cinematic technique, often juxtaposing scenes from disparate eras and locales to illustrate the influence of one filmmaker on another, and to emphasize innovation—narrative as well as technical—in the medium's development. One of the chief joys of this series is that while it is educational and entertaining, it will also inevitably invite discussion and debate. Bundled with a 44-page booklet, *The Story of Film* is a brilliant achievement. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

from California to an out-of-town opening during a Chicago blizzard, and finally to Broadway. Of course, even a one-man show requires collaborators, such as director and fellow actor Fisher Stevens, as well as a choreographer, and sound, set, and costume designers. Leguizamo describes comedy as an antidote to his often tough childhood, although a big challenge lies in getting the tone right, scaling back on the anger, and emphasizing instead hope and survival. After a fairly successful Broadway opening, the actor is challenged to take the show to his hometown of Bogotá, Colombia, performing it in Spanish (even though he is not fluent). Rosie Perez and others describe Leguizamo as part of a new breed of Latin actors helping to bring ethnic and working-class audiences to Broadway. DVD extras include bonus scenes. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

HISTORY & CURRENT EVENTS

9/11: Day That Changed the World

★★★★1/2

(2012) 136 min. DVD: \$19.98. Inception Media Group (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks have been called the 102 minutes that changed both America and the world. Narrated by Martin Sheen, this Smithsonian Channel documentary presents a 10th anniversary "inside" look at the nation's confusion, uncertainty, and

fear, followed by the determination and resolve to identify and punish the attackers. Filmmaker Leslie Woodhead's *9/11: Day That Changed the World* begins with rare footage of President Bush jogging early in the morning of that clear-skied, beautiful but terrible day, before dropping in on an elementary school class in Florida. As word of the attacks spread, the decision had to be made about a possible shoot-down order that could kill innocent civilians on the planes (an official recalls that it was "like living in a Tom Clancy novel"). After grounding all civilian aircraft, a frantic attempt was made to secure key government officials, particularly the President, who had to be protected, but also seen to be in charge. The documentary features interviews with Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Vice President Dick Cheney, Laura Bush, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and a number of first responders, who recall nightmare images of victims leaping from upper floors at the World Trade towers, frustration at not being able to find or help survivors after the buildings collapsed, and post-disaster efforts to regain control and prevent another possible wave of attacks. *9/11* also covers the formation of the "Bush doctrine" on retaliating against countries aiding terrorists, as well as the need for military and political leaders to adjust their thinking, which had changed little since the end of the Cold War. DVD extras include the bonus program *9/11: Stories in Fragments*. One of the best 9/11 anniversary documentaries, this powerful film is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

10 Years On: Afghanistan & Pakistan

★★★

(2011) 35 min. In English, Dari & Pashto w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$65: public libraries & high schools; \$195: colleges & universities. KJF Documentaries. PPR.

Filmmaker Kathleen Foster's standalone sequel to her 2007 *Afghan Women: A History of Struggle* argues that even though the U.S. purportedly invaded Afghanistan in order to disarm terrorists and free Afghans from oppressive Taliban rule, Americans actually ushered in more poverty and corruption instead of peace. Foster has compiled scenes of warfare, impoverishment, and destruction, along with interviews of Afghan men, women, and children, who talk about the ongoing turmoil. Many perceive Americans as "suspicious of anyone who even talks about Islam," driving Afghans from their homes and killing civilians without a thought. Eyewitness interviews underscore Foster's argument that U.S. aid and taxes funneled into Afghanistan actually support comfortable lifestyles and consumerism among the American military, and that the conflict continues because it's profitable and because the West wants control of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. Foster points out that fighting has spilled over into Pakistan, deepening rifts among religious sects, while financial aid intended for the Pakistani people is diverted to profit the local government, army, and large landowners. The film closes on a hopeful note, focusing on Afghan and Pakistani efforts to network, organize, and demand new governments. Offering a strikingly different (as well as arguable and controversial) perspective from what is reported in the general media, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

Atomic Mom ★★★1/2

(2011) 80 min. In English & Japanese w/English subtitles. DVD: \$89: public libraries & high schools; \$295: colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

As a child in the early 1950s, filmmaker M.T. Silvia was impressed that her mother Pauline did classified work as a researcher at the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory in San Francisco. Silvia's mom participated in five atomic bomb detonations at the notorious Nevada Test Site and also subjected mice and dogs to painful radiation testing. When, as an adult, M.T. learned more about the associated horrors, she became an anti-nuclear activist, after which mother and daughter did not discuss the issue for years. *Atomic Mom* juxtaposes archival footage, photographs, and expert interviews, with a series of conversations between parent and child in which the retired scientist finally shares the details of her work. But while Pauline can be candid, she refuses to discuss her health problems or acknowledge that they could have been caused by exposure to radiation. She's also

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5 Broken Cameras ★★½

(2011) 90 min. In Hebrew & Arabic w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$349 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). Kino Lorber.



The struggles and successes of non-violent protest are at the center of this eye-opening documentary from co-directors Emad Burnat (Palestinian) and Guy Davidi (Israeli), who build *5 Broken Cameras* around footage that Burnat shot using consumer-grade equipment. A native of the occupied West Bank village of Bil'in, Burnat narrates, offering a personal perspective on Israeli-Palestinian relations. A father of four, Burnat describes himself as a "fellah" or peasant. After the birth of his son, Gibreel, in 2005, Burnat bought a camera, noting that throughout his life, he has watched his community lose land to Israeli settlements. Deciding to document every subsequent development, Burnat becomes Bil'in's official cameraman. But while gaining a sense of purpose, Burnat also loses one camera after another during the turbulence that surrounds him. "When I film," he says, "I feel safe, but it's an illusion." Burnat's material captures demonstrations, tree-burning, tear-gassing, and other sights unlikely to be witnessed by Westerners, including the arrests of his three brothers and the shooting of a friend. As a contrast, Burnat also films Gibreel over five years as he grows up in a close-knit community that also becomes increasingly dangerous. Although the underlying politics are more complicated, Burnat depicts such peaceful protests that it's hard to feel much sympathy for the Israeli security forces, who are quick on the trigger, even when confronted by child protestors. Eventually, Burnat is arrested and taken in for questioning, but continues to film upon his release. Putting a human face on a half-century-plus conflict, this Sundance Film Festival award-winner is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Femmessy)

haunted by her past—memories of the suffering canines' toenails scraping against the lab table still bring her to tears. Silvia also interviews Emiko Okada, a Japanese woman who is one of the few remaining survivors of Hiroshima. Okada is also filled with guilt, certain that her daughter's incurable blood disease is the result of her own exposure to radiation in childhood. Okada and Silvia's mother ultimately share a connection, lending intimacy to an issue that resonates globally. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Cruver)

Death and the Civil War ★★½

(2012) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-759-5.

Aired on PBS's *American Experience* series, Ric Burns' documentary offers an elegiac look at how the Civil War forever changed the way Americans viewed death, noting that both the North and South were unprepared for the massive carnage. The conflict's first major military campaign, the Battle of Bull Run, claimed more casualties than the entire Mexican War, and with each new engagement the number of battlefield fatalities staggeringly rose. Complicating matters were the era's primitive medical conditions—two out of three deaths were attributed to diseases that spread through the Army encampments. Neither side went into war with the infrastructure needed to identify and bury the dead and notify next of kin, so many families learned of the loss of loved ones in letters written by soldiers who were dying from their wounds. Burns follows the famed protocol

set by his brother Ken, combining excellent photographs (most notably, Mathew Brady's still shocking pictures of the corpses that littered abandoned battlefields—which helped spur the Lincoln administration to create national military cemeteries) with interviews of articulate experts who offer insights on the subject. Writer George Will stands out here with his observation of how the 19th-century killing machine was "lubricated every step of the way with blood." Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (P. Hall)

Holding on to Jah ★★½

(2012) 96 min. DVD: \$79: public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Seventh Art Releasing.

Reggae music is among the most beloved of Jamaican exports, yet reggae's heritage is marked with pain and tribulation. Roger Landon Hall's documentary traces the development of reggae in conjunction with the fight by Jamaica's Rastafarian population for equal treatment from both the British colonial occupiers and, for the last half-century, the Jamaican government. A great deal of the confusion and hostility towards the Rastafari movement can be traced to the movement's rejection of traditional Christian tenets. Rastafarians celebrate the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie (1892-1975) as the reincarnation of Jesus—indeed, the emperor's visit to Jamaica in 1966 set off a riot of jubilation by the island's Rastafarians. Jamaican authorities routinely targeted the community with social and economic discrimination accompanied by heavy-handed police tactics. However, the emergence of reggae during the 1960s,

coupled with the international acclaim bestowed on iconic performers such as Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff, brought a more positive image to the Rastafari movement. *Holding on to Jah* is a lively and provocative history, featuring rarely seen film footage and insightful interviews with Rastafarians who saw their community move from the fringes of Jamaican society into the global spotlight. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Incident in New Baghdad ★★½

(2011) 23 min. DVD: \$79: public libraries; \$249 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Seventh Art Releasing.

James Spione's short documentary falls into the growing category of nonfiction films about maladjusted U.S. military veterans who have returned from recent wars harboring bitterness and resentment. In this case, the subject is Ethan McCord, an Army specialist who was among those shown on the classified video of the July 12, 2007, Baghdad air strike that was released by Julian Assange's WikiLeaks under the title *Collateral Murder*. McCord was not responsible for the attack—indeed, McCord was one of the soldiers seen taking an injured child to medical care—but the incident, together with other events during his tour of duty, left him angry and sour. Back home, McCord suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder that led to alcohol abuse and a hostile relationship with his family (and the news following the release of *Collateral Murder* only made matters worse). McCord is brutally honest about his feelings, speaking in depth about the controversial air strike (which was initially covered up by the Pentagon) and adding that there was "nothing patriotic in what I was doing over there." McCord later found a calling as an activist against the war in Iraq. Although the film received an Oscar nomination for Best Documentary Short Subject, this is essentially a cinematic vehicle for McCord to vent his frustrations over his unexpected role in a horrifying incident. A minor addition to the canon of Iraq-related works, this is still a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Narrow Escapes of World War II

★★★½

(2012) 4 discs. 653 min. DVD: \$79.99. Athena (avail. from most distributors).

This 13-episode British documentary series—broadcast in the U.S. on the Military Channel—offers invigorating insights into some of the most audacious raids and escapes that occurred during World War II. A few of the historic events depicted here will be very familiar to those versed in wartime history, most notably Col. Jimmy Doolittle's astonishing raid on Tokyo and the heroic defense of Tobruk by Australian Gen. Leslie Morshead. However, most of the episodes here examine incidents that rarely receive attention in American documentaries. Among these

relatively little-known events are the March 1944 battle in the Himalayan Indian village of Kohima against a Japanese invasion, and the September 1944 Allied push to expel Nazi forces from the Netherlands. This series is also

unusual in that it offers examples of German victories, including the extraordinary evacuation of hundreds of thousands of German civilians from the Baltic ports ahead of the oncoming Soviet juggernaut. Combining

newsreel footage, dramatic re-creations, and interviews with veterans who survived these dangerous missions, the series is bundled with a viewer's guide that offers a helpful overview of the war in Europe and Asia. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

High Ground ★★½

(2012) 97 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors).

An engrossing award-winning documentary, *High Ground* reminds viewers that in addition to the thousands of deaths of American military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last decade, hundreds of thousands of soldiers have sustained brain injuries, lost limbs, suffered burns, and continue to struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. Here, 11 veterans who survived terrible injuries in battle decide to face their pain and demons by climbing the 20,000-foot Himalayan giant Mount Lobuche. Led by blind guide Erik Weißenmayer and other summiteers, the climbers turn to one another for support and collective courage while traveling to Nepal and slowly scaling Lobuche's sheer peak with far more than the usual hindrances. Along the way, filmmaker Michael Brown interweaves the climbers' personal stories, revealing the source of each survivor's disability (including blindness and amputation), while also touching on the residual pain, trauma, and sometimes guilt that everyone feels. Among the climbing party is a former combat diver who took the brunt of an underwater explosion; a soldier who watched as a rocket-propelled grenade came towards him but was powerless to protect himself; and the mother of a soldier who died heroically. Wonderful moments occur when these men and women share with one another, and there is much to enjoy in scenes set in a monastery and later at a base camp where joyous rituals take place. A powerful, inspirational film, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



Neither Allah, Nor Master! ★★★

(2011) 71 min. DVD: \$348. Icarus Films. PPR.

Current concerns with events in Egypt, Libya, and Syria have eclipsed the fact that the Arab Spring began in Tunisia with the deposition of long-time dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. This documentary from Franco-Tunisian filmmaker Nadia El Fani not only serves as a reminder but also explores what has since been happening in the North African country, particularly the resurgence of the militant Islamic fundamentalism that the former dictator and his predecessor, Habib ibn Ali Bourguiba, had tried to contain. El Fani, an avowed atheist, is deeply concerned that the secularist attitude she embraces is being smothered in her native land by public confusion regarding Islamic and civil law. She makes her points both through conversations with friends and family (who see the shift in their own lives) and with ordinary Tunisians who assume that the observance of Ramadan is a matter not merely of religious conviction but of legal necessity. As a result, those who

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break the Ramadan fast feel compelled to do so in a clandestine manner—essentially becoming de facto criminals in the process—as shops and restaurants obligingly close down for the month or simply refuse to serve non-foreigners. While offering no practical solutions, El Fani's deceptively casual film—which juxtaposes interviews with scenes of bustling markets and beaches—thought-provokingly argues that Tunisia may be in the throes of simply replacing one master, the deposed dictator, with another, an emboldened religious establishment. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Pilgrim Fathers ★★½

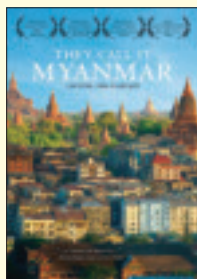
(2012) 30 min. DVD: \$64.95. TMW Media Group. PPR.

This brief but highly informative documentary traces the history behind the *Mayflower's* voyage to the New World in 1620, which brought Puritan exiles from England to America. *The Pilgrim Fathers* interweaves animated illustrations and dramatic re-enactments with comments by historians to tell the story, which begins in the late 16th century amidst the plague in England and an unbearable rise in persecution against separatists by an intolerant Church of England. Years of secret meetings run by defrocked preachers led to a decision by some Puritans to leave England and settle near Amsterdam. Despite experiencing considerable culture shock, the community stayed for 12 years before determining that their destiny was in the New World. The film details the many hardships during the *Mayflower's* crossing from Devon, England, and also looks at the concerns the Pilgrims must have felt upon seeing the barren landscape of Plymouth, near what is now Cape Cod. The Pilgrim settlement was not the first in the future America, but the sacrifices made by the survivors, coupled with the drafting of the Mayflower Compact—a governing document embracing the concept of majority rule—are among the reasons we continue to revere the Pilgrims today. DVD extras include an online teacher's guide. Highly recommended. Aud: I, J, P. (T. Keogh)

Rescue ★★★

(2012) 46 min. DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Stephen Low directed this IMAX documentary about four individuals—three military officers and a volunteer firefighter—who calmly engage in everyday acts of heroism. Nevada Army National Guard Maj. Matthew Jonkey, U.S. Air Force Capt. Lauren Ross, and Canadian Forces Maritime Command Cmdr. Peter Crain detail how today's North American military forces provide aid and support for humanitarian missions outside a war zone, while fireman Stephen Hecklen describes selfless and life-risking rescues of



They Call it Myanmar: Lifting the Curtain ★★★

(2012) 83 min. DVD: \$29.95. Docurama (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-2228-6.

Filmmaker Robert H. Lieberman's documentary offers an enlightening portrait of Myanmar—formerly known as Burma—moving beyond the basic headlines/soundbites about an Asian dictatorship that kept reformist and Nobel Peace prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi under high-profile house arrest for decades. Elegantly shuttling back forth between Myanmar's epic past and post-colonial present, Lieberman depicts a police state with some impressive contradictions. Devout Buddhism (brought by a hero-king of old from nearby Sri Lanka) helps inhabitants accept misfortune (peasants subsist in dire poverty, daily pawning the pots in which they cook their food), yet Buddhist monks are often in the forefront of protest against a brutal regime. Myanmar's military autocracy is rather unique, since it features no Big Brother-figure strongman, just a blundering series of blindly obedient generals who come and go in distressingly smooth succession, although the 1990 success at the polls for Suu Kyi's party—the National League for Democracy—coupled with her much-publicized arrest (she was released in late 2010) have brought hope for change to a younger generation. Despite some official meddling in his inquiries, Lieberman captures the country's splendor (the regime certainly doesn't discourage tourism dollars) and refreshing human elements, such as the interviewee who will not discuss politics but does bemoan that martial-law lockdown restricts access to his favorite import, *Perry Mason*. DVD extras include deleted scenes and footage of Suu Kyi accepting the Nobel prize. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

people facing a fiery death. All four, along with dozens of their peers, were among those saving lives in Haiti following the devastating 2009 earthquake. While each of these real-life heroes is truly admirable, the fact that *Rescue* was originally intended for exhibition in 3D on the supersized IMAX screen—with many scenes framed to take full advantage of that format—means that much of the power of the cinematography is lost here (especially for those watching the 2D DVD version instead of the 3D Blu-ray release), chiefly during lengthy shots of roaring ocean waves and sweeping landscapes. The heartbreaking scenes in Haiti, however, retain their raw emotional power, and it is this record of courage amid unfathomable horror that ultimately makes this well worth watching. Extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (P. Hall)

Where Soldiers Come From ★★½

(2012) 91 min. DVD: \$75; public libraries & high schools; \$299: colleges & universities. New Day Films. PPR.

Filmmaker Heather Courtney's *Where Soldiers Come From* follows young men from Michigan's Upper Peninsula who sign up for state National Guard service while also anticipating military rotation for nine months in U.S.-occupied Afghanistan. A \$20,000 payout and promise of college-tuition aid are the lure, rather than post-9/11 fervor. Courtney focuses on a modern day band of brothers who are working-class friends, particularly aspiring artist Dom Fredianelli and his easy-going buddy Cole Smith. After arrival in Afghanistan the cinema vérité-style narrative

follows the young men, who wonder if they are going to kill another human being or not. Along the way, a convoy headset conversation straight outta Quentin Tarantino—mocking “hippie” film festivals—is interrupted by a bomb attack; the election of Barack Obama is viewed by the Smith family back home with “hope”; and both Dom and Cole return home scarred physically and psychologically—angry at the world (Cole especially) and undergoing PTSD therapy. Although this is no recruiting film (battle heroism is “all a bunch of bullshit”), it avoids obvious blaming and finger-pointing politics, making it a powerfully realistic portrait of contemporary soldiers in war. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Words of Witness ★★★

(2012) 68 min. DVD: \$99.95; public libraries; \$295: colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. ISBN: 0-7815-1419-3.

Czech-Egyptian director Mai Iskander examines Egypt's revolution through the eyes of Heba Afify, a 22-year-old Cairo journalist for an independent newspaper. For 30 years, President Hosni Mubarak kept his people in line through state security forces, who are believed to have tortured and killed as many as 30,000 citizens for speaking out against his regime. After the populace rose up against Mubarak in 2011—using cell phones, YouTube, Twitter, and other social networking technologies to share information and organize the seminal gatherings in Tahrir Square—and forced his resignation, the Army took over. Afify uses the same new technologies here to receive updates and pass on her findings to readers. One of her first articles

focuses on people who have gone missing since the revolution (Afify suspects the involvement of state security). She also reports on a protest at state security headquarters, a referendum regarding the presidential election, and the aftermath of a church burning that exacerbates tensions between Christians and Muslims. While Afify's older sister and their mother, Hanan, don't share her interest in politics, her father supports her efforts. As the rioting continues, Hanan pressures Afify to stay out of harm's way, but the latter doesn't want to miss a story, so she squeezes into crowds with her notepad and camera in hand. Along the way, the rest of Afify's family starts to become more politicized; even Hanan is now eager to share her voting experience with her Facebook friends. Now a contributor to the *New York Times*, Afify offers a potent look at the newly powerful intersection between social media and a motivated citizenry. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY

Cornwall with Caroline Quentin ★★★
(2012) 2 discs. 176 min. DVD: \$39.99. Athena (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Celebrated in literature, Britain's Cornwall region—a former mining area that now attracts five million tourists each year—boasts spectacular scenery, rugged coastlines, close-knit villages, quaint customs, and a mild, invigorating climate. Hosted by actress Caroline Quentin, this eight-episode series takes viewers on a summer vacation to beautiful, historic Cornwall—a journey that features many sites, but the emphasis here is on the residents, both newcomers and old timers,

who are proud of their communities and couldn't imagine living anywhere else, but also know that they need tourist money to sustain them over the long off-season. Quentin visits a camping site, restaurants offering local produce and seafood, vineyards, and a "letting" agency looking for properties to rent to well-heeled families. Other activities covered here include rowing, surfing, "belly boarding," and annual or end-of-season events. Of course, after the fun comes the inevitable visit to a quaint local pub. Points of interest include a large country estate that once housed American soldiers who were set to embark on the D-Day invasion, and the iconic St. Michael's Mount castle, now only accessible by ferry at high tide. Quentin emphasizes residents' efforts to preserve their history and customs in this leisurely, scenic series sure to appeal to Anglophile armchair travelers. Recommended. Aud: P. (S. Rees)

BIOGRAPHY

Adventures in Plymptoons! ★★★

(2012) 85 min. DVD: \$19.95. Cinema Libre Studio (avail. from most distributors).

Over the decades, Oscar-winning animator Bill Plympton has developed a cult following, going his own, hand-drawn way in an era of computer-generated cartooning while also creating works that are not just cheeky but often positively subversive in terms of subject matter. Anchored by excerpts from an interview with Plympton in which he recalls his childhood, education, and career, Alexia Anastasio's documentary profile *Adventures in Plymptoons!* is punctuated by clips from his films, behind-the-scenes glimpses of the artist in

his workshop, and comments from family, friends, and colleagues (including Ed Begley Jr., Terry Gilliam, Ralph Bakshi, and Ron Jeremy), some of whom are wittily irreverent in their remarks. Plympton himself also gets into the act by donning a bad disguise to appear as W.P. Murton, a pontificating academic who dismisses Plympton's entire output as repetitive and uninteresting. The result is a warm but not airbrushed portrait of a prolific, well-regarded artist who looks at himself with a healthy dose of self-deprecation and amazement at his success, while also rejoicing in being a wisecracking outsider. DVD extras include additional interviews with Plympton, and a bonus short. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Anne Braden: Southern Patriot

★★★1/2

(2012) 77 min. DVD: \$24.95; individuals; \$49.95; public libraries & high schools; \$195; colleges & universities. California Newsreel. PPR. Closed captioned.

Filmmakers Anne Lewis and Mimi Pickering rescue the legacy of a forgotten heroine of the Civil Rights movement: Anne Braden (1924–2006), a Southern white journalist/social advocate whose challenge to the Jim Crow laws made her an enemy of the segregationist politicians of the 1950s and '60s. Archival footage and stills illustrate this story, much of which is recounted by Braden herself in a series of interviews over the years. Braden's landmark 1972 essay "A Letter to White Southern Women" boldly challenged its readers to fight against the prevailing status quo and rethink their racial and gender attitudes (the essay is included as an extra). Braden and her husband, Carl, were indicted for sedition for purchasing a home in a "white" suburb of Louisville, KY, for a black family (the house was repeatedly attacked and eventually bombed). As the editor of *The Southern Patriot* newspaper, the far-left Braden was the subject of criticism that crudely questioned her patriotism. Needless to say, time proved to be her ally. While Braden is modest in discussing her work here, the film also offers input from Cornel West and Angela Davis, among others, on the value of Braden's pursuit of social equality in a hostile and violent environment. Also included is the rare 1961 short documentary "Wasn't That a Time." Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Freddie Mercury: The Great Pretender

★★★

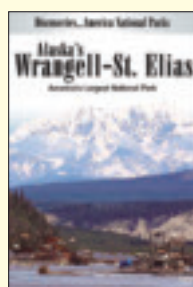
(2012) 107 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Although Freddie Mercury's (1946–1991) career with Queen has been well documented, this BBC profile also covers his activities outside of the group. Band members and as-

Discoveries...America National Parks: Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias ★★★

(2012) 85 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.95. Bennett-Watt HD Productions. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-60490-164-1 (dvd).

This new entry in Jim and Kelly Watt's visually stunning series highlights America's largest national park: the Wrangell-St. Elias Park and Preserve in Alaska, which sprawls across 13 million acres—an area about as big as Vermont. The camera travels along rough and primitive roads (actually former rail beds), while offering glimpses of remote homesteads and views of spectacular scenery, including nine of the nation's highest peaks, the biggest glaciers in North America, and the continent's greatest concentration of volcanoes. Along the way, we learn about fishing methods dating back to the beginning of recorded history, as native Alaskans use dip nets and fish wheels (contraptions that look like Ferris wheels of buckets) to scoop up salmon on the Copper River. Among the few modern imprints on the landscape are the Kennecott copper mill and mine, once a thriving enterprise and now part of a National Historic Landmark; and the tiny community of McCarthy, whose population of around 30 permanent residents balloons up to about 200 during the summer tourist season. DVD extras include "Bush Alaska Insights" and a featurette on the McCarthy Museum. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)



The Island President ★★½

(2011) 101 min. DVD: \$27.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Capturing the impassioned efforts of a reformist politician, this fly-on-the-wall documentary focuses on the work of Mohamed Nasheed—a former political prisoner turned elected president of the nation of Maldives—as he sets about trying to save his country of 1,200 small islands (just off the southwest tip of India) from the ravages of global climate change. While rising ocean levels in the 21st century remain a distant problem for most industrialized and developing countries, the crisis for Maldives is literally washing up on their shores, where the rapidly eroding low-lying islands are threatened with submergence in the Indian Ocean. This is the stark truth that Nasheed vigorously confronts after his 2008 election—replacing a brutal, 30-year dictatorship. Filmmaker Jon Shenk begins with a look back at Nasheed's rise as an advocate for democracy—arrested 12 times, tortured twice, and held in solitary confinement for 18 months—ultimately ascending to power and deciding to make climate change an essential priority for saving Maldives. Most of the film tracks Nasheed's long struggle to convince other developing nations to sign onto an agreement to lower carbon emissions, a difficult task that becomes more improbable as the world's superpowers get into the act at the 2009 climate change conference in Copenhagen. During the strategic meetings and arguments with other heads of state, Nasheed emerges as both a visionary and practical leader. DVD extras include an interview with Shenk. A powerful portrait of one man's extraordinary efforts to change the world, completed before Nasheed was sadly ousted in a coup d'état in early 2012, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



sociates, including guitarist Brian May, drummer Roger Taylor, and manager Jim Beach, offer present-day reflections, while archival footage allows the ever-witty Mercury (born Farrokh Bulsara in Tanzania) to speak for himself. Rhys Thomas's documentary begins with a look at Mercury's mutual admiration society with Michael Jackson (Mercury signed a whopping deal with Jackson's CBS label, which caused some friction with his colleagues). Mercury recorded his 1985 solo debut, *Mr. Bad Guy*, in Munich, where he lived more openly gay than he ever did in London. Mercury also felt more comfortable being himself in Manhattan, where he plunged into the club scene, eventually bringing his passion for disco to Queen with mixed results. If the Chic-inspired "Another One Bites the Dust" became a hit, Mercury's solo album was a flop, although it didn't deter him from releasing the 1988 follow-up *Barcelona*, a collaboration with opera singer Montserrat Caballé and lyricist Tim Rice. Other speakers here include producer Reinhold Mack and comedian Matt Lucas, who attended the 1991 vigil for Mercury. *The Great Pretender* covers some of the same ground as the BBC special *Queen: Days of Our Lives* (VL-5/12), but still offers a fascinating portrait of a complex and often misunderstood figure. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Femmessy)

In the Footsteps of Liszt ★★½

(2011) 52 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9222-4.

One of a series of biographical documentaries on great composers, this program profiles Franz Liszt (1811–1886), the Hungarian pianist whose recitals of his own fiendishly

difficult music made him the epitome of the romantic keyboard virtuoso. As the title indicates, this French production (dubbed into English) covers Liszt's life in chronological sequence, featuring newly shot footage and artwork to illustrate his childhood and musical education, his travels throughout Europe (where his playing evoked wild reactions), and the decade he spent in Weimar as conductor and composer of orchestral works as well as piano pieces. Along the way, director Laure Delalex interweaves clips from interviews with historians and curators of museums dedicated to preserving Liszt's memory, as well as comments by pianists Leslie Howard, Maurizio Baglini, and Claire-Marie Le Guay, who also play brief excerpts from his works. *In the Footsteps of Liszt* effectively conveys the superstar status that Liszt enjoyed in his day, and does not ignore his rather scandalous personal life, which involved a succession of mistresses and innumerable romantic liaisons. Other new titles in the series include *In the Footsteps of Mahler* and *In the Footsteps of Offenbach*. Offering a solid introduction to the composer's life and work, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

VideoLibrarianOnline

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during January and February, including: *America's Book of Secrets*, *Brave New World*, *Golf: The Inner Game*, *Last Call at the Oasis*, *Produced by George Martin*, *Queen & Country*, *When China Met Africa*, 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.

Newly available from PBS Home Video is **Craft in America: Crossroads** (60 min., DVD: \$19.99), the ninth episode of the Peabody Award-winning series, which explores the evolution and global influences of handmade and modern crafts. See review of *Craft in America: Messages* in VL-11/11.



Also recently released by PBS is **Cook's Country: Season Five** (345 min., DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99), featuring host Christopher Kimball and chefs from *America's Test Kitchen*, who provide tips and recipes in segments including "Thrill of the Grill" and "Super-Easy Comfort Food." See review of *Cook's Country: Season One* in VL Online-3/09.

The latest title from HIT Entertainment and Lionsgate's popular stop-motion animated preschool series is **Bob the Builder: Teamwork Time!** (55 min., DVD: \$9.98), following Dizzy's attempt to save the day before a special performance. See review of *Bob the Builder: Celebrate with Bob* in VL-11/02.

From Shout! Factory, **R.L. Stine's The Haunting Hour, Volume Three** and **R.L. Stine's The Haunting Hour, Volume Four** (110 min. each, DVD: \$14.98 each) are the latest compilations from the Hub-aired anthology series based on works by YA horror author R.L. Stine (of *Goosebumps* fame). See review of *R.L. Stine's The Haunting Hour, Volume One* in VL-11/12.

The most recent Athena release featuring acclaimed broadcast journalist Bill Moyers is the Emmy-nominated **Bill Moyers—Becoming American: The Chinese Experience** (263 min., DVD: 2 discs, \$49.99), a 2003 documentary series featuring stories of Chinese immigrants to America that interweaves personal narratives with historian interviews. See review of *Bill Moyers on Faith & Reason* in VL Online-2/08.



Aria: The Scarlet Ammo

★★★1/2

(2011) 4 discs. 325 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2594-9.

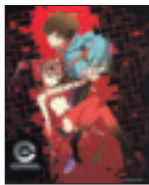


Bullets and blades and schoolgirl-fetishizing, oh my! In a violent world, Tokyo's Butei High School trains teens to be "Butei," i.e., freelance bodyguard/avenger/mercenaries (it's the one campus that requires every student to carry a loaded gun and a knife). Kinji is reluctantly enrolled, mainly to redeem the memory of his fallen Butei brother, but he becomes the center of an action-harem of heroines and villainesses, chiefly half-English Aria (who is adorned with demon horns and fangs, for some reason) and magic-wielding Shirayuki. The trio face assorted ancestral enemies and each other, in situations sometimes derived from films like *Speed* and *Pulp Fiction*, while jealous warrior-girls with varied (and much-discussed) bosom sizes compete for the main male. There is a mild twist in that the principle characters are descendants of famous historical figures and other anime characters, including the master thief Arsène Lupin (but any continuity with Japan's classic *Lupin* cartoon adventures is tenuous at best). And Kinji involuntarily lapses into a secondary personality of a super-cool 007-type during moments of extreme stress or sexual arousal (the nudity here is mostly saved for the bathhouse epilogue episode). Compiling all 13 episodes from 2011 on a dual-language set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries. Optional. (C. Cassady)

C: Control—The Money and Soul of Possibility: The Complete Series

★★★

(2011) 4 discs. 275 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$69.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2597-3.



C: *Control* isn't the first anime to merge fantasy-action-adventure with high-finance and currency-exchange macroeconomics, but it does so on an impressively large scale. Economics student Kimimaro is snatched from his going-nowhere recession-era existence and taken to the secret "Financial District" of Tokyo, a gilt-edged wonderland where a paranormal entity called the Bank of Midas issues its own money. Here "entrepreneurs," crossing over from the regular world, fight duels (aka "deals") using magical creatures called "Assets" to increase their largesse. But the system exerts a metaphysical toll on reality, as more and more Midas money seeps into earthly circulation, and desperate entrepreneurs literally gamble the future of this world

as collateral for their deals. The 2008 world finance crisis and Japan's chronic business woes lend a piquant tone, even if the fights and monetary Armageddons (quite brilliantly animated) become so complex it would take an MBA to figure it all out (at least nobody mentions derivatives). In a cute touch, the violence here unleashes showers of money rather than gore. Compiling all 11 episodes from 2011 on a dual-language set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries and a helpful economics lexicon. Recommended. (C. Cassady)

Deadman Wonderland: The Complete Series

★★★1/2

(2010) 3 discs. 325 min. DVD: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2590-6.



"Bloodsport" takes on new meaning in this ultraviolent action anime set in mid-2030s Tokyo. Fourteen-year-old Ganta is the sole survivor of a dismemberment-massacre of all his classmates by a floating wraith he calls the "Red Man." Nobody believes Ganta, who is convicted of mass-homicide and sentenced to Deadman Wonderland, a for-profit penitentiary that combines a theme park with lethal Japanese game-show contests—killing inmates in front of cheering crowds. But wait, there's more! Inside lies a secret, even nastier prison, holding warped convicts infected with (or genetically modified for) a virus that turns them into various super-powered weapons. These prisoners are forced to duel each other for online voyeurs...or military R&D...or something. Hard to tell, as the 12 episodes here—based on a manga—devolve into a gory, betrayal-soaked prison break, during which super-powered characters declaim at length even while being sliced to pieces. The abrupt end leaves many narrative strands unresolved, with brutalized Ganta still frustratingly clueless about the shocking identity of the Red Man (which is revealed long before to the viewer). A twisted, bloody, profane series, *Deadman Wonderland* is presented in a dual-language set, rated TV-MA, with extras including a video commentary with the U.S. vocal cast, and a prequel OVA episode. Optional. (C. Cassady)

Ergo Proxy: The Complete Series

★★★★ (2006) 4 discs. 575 min. DVD: \$39.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2513-2.



This futuristic anime series takes place in the city of Romdo, which is protected beneath a massive dome from the effects of an eco-

logical catastrophe that occurred thousands of years earlier. But all is not well in Romdo: the careful social balance between humans, androids, and robots is disrupted when its mechanical residents become infected with the Cogito virus, which causes them to turn homicidal. The Civilian Intelligence Office sends detective Re-l Mayer and her android partner, Iggy, to investigate, but Re-l is attacked by humanoid monsters called Proxy. After Re-l reports the attack, she's removed from the case while her superiors erase Iggy's memory of the crime. Re-l then becomes involved with a Russian illegal immigrant and his female android, and the investigator's further inquiries uncover secrets about life within and outside of Romdo. Much of *Ergo Proxy* feels borrowed from a half-dozen sci-fi classics, ranging from *Metropolis* to *A.I.*, with pieces of *Battleship Earth* thrown in (all that's missing is a Soylent Green dinner). But despite the lack of originality, this nicely paced series is stylish and entertaining. Compiling all 23 episodes from this 2006 series in a dual-language set, rated TV-MA, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Recommended. (P. Hall)

Freezing ★1/2

(2011) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$69.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2527-2.



Featuring balloon-breasted pinup types in various forms of dishabille and dismemberment, this 2011 anime series is set in the late 21st century, a time when periodic invasion by inscrutable aliens called Nova—who radiate immobilizing "freezing" fields—has forced humanity (well, Japan, anyway) to mount a defense in the shapely form of genetically-modified girl warriors called Pandoras. West Genetics Academy trains teenage Pandoras—with males enrolling, as well, because a Pandora achieves full combat potential via some sort of orgasmic bonding with the right "Limiter" dude. Icy blonde Satellizer, who lacks a Limiter, is such a feared Pandora that her mean-supergirl classmates jeeringly dub her the "Untouchable Queen." Yet sensitive schoolboy Kazuya, still grieving his Pandora sister's death in action against the Nova, somehow breaks through Satellizer's reserve and forms an attachment with the indomitable Amazon, to the amazement of the academy's class hierarchy. While similar Japanimation cheesecake has been done as self-parody, *Freezing* presents this sci-fi/action saga mostly straight-faced—although that doesn't make it any better. Compiling all 12 episodes (plus six OVAs) in a dual-language set, rated TV-MA, extras include episode commentaries. Not recommended. (C. Cassady)

Heaven's Memo Pad: Complete Collection

★★★

(2011) 325 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$69.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5283-3 (dvd), 978-1-6161-5284-0 (blu-ray).



In Japan, the acronym NEET, which stands for Not Employed, being Educated or in Training (and, significantly, is “teen” spelled backwards), defines a youth subculture who have given up on (or just never cared about seeking a foothold in) the weak job market and focus their energies instead on hobbies or media. Tokyo teen Narumi is not a classic NEET, but he falls in with such a group—including a military enthusiast and a martial-arts brotherhood—banded around Alice, a reclusive, waifish computer hacker sequestered above a ramen shop with her stuffed-animal menagerie. Alice is a self-proclaimed “NEET detective,” solving mysteries or avenging the voiceless “dead” on her own initiative—think Nero Wolfe meets Lisbeth Salander, kind of, Japanese-style. Alice imperiously dubs Narumi her trainee assistant for a caseload that includes yakuza gangsters (one of them, amusingly, a disgraced baseball pitcher), drug-related suicide, exploited prostitutes, and immigrants. A healthy knowledge of Japanese culture is helpful, although not essential, to enjoy this generally serious, non-fantasy-oriented series. Compiling all 12 episodes of the 2011 series on a dual-language set, rated TV-14, this is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

iDOLm@ster Xenoglossia: Collection 1 ★★★

(2007) 3 discs. 325 min. DVD: \$49.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5286-4.



In this 2007 TV anime series inspired by a video game, young Haruka thinks she's trying out for a singing competition when she attends a Tokyo audition, but in fact she has accidentally applied to operate iDOLs: giant flying robots. Displaying phenomenal potential, Haruka is recruited into the elite “secret” school—although it seems to be no big secret, as the humanoid machines are routinely used by Japan in an international sky patrol against constant meteorite bombardment (other nations fire missiles at the meteorites, but forbidden-from-militarism Japan had to invent big robots that literally punch the space rocks into dust). After enrolling and bringing along her pals (one of whom cosplay-dresses as animals), Haruka makes BFFs, lethal foes, and frenemies among the fiercely competitive machine jockeys. Belatedly, we learn the alternate-history origin of all this: namely, the moon

exploded a century ago, creating both an orbital meteor-belt and a little-understood extraterrestrial AI technology that enabled Japan to develop the iDOLs. All in all, however, this is largely familiar stuff about big-eyed schoolgirls serving as unlikely pilot/symbiotes for cherished colossal robots. Presented in a Japanese-only set (with English subtitles), rated TV-14, extras include OVA “shorts” with dialogue layered over pinup/cheesecake art from the obligatory swimsuit episode. Not a necessary purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Maria Watches Over Us: Season One ★★★1/2

(2004) 4 discs. 325 min. DVD: \$39.99. The Right Stuff International (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-57032-719-X.



Yumi is a first-year Catholic high school student at the prestigious Lillian Girls' Academy. Like most of her peers, she reveres the upperclassmen—especially members of the student council, whose leaders are referred to as Roses. When the older and much-admired Sachiko impulsively asks Yumi to be her *soeur*, or little sister, modest Yumi is astonished, since this means Sachiko will be her guide throughout her years at the academy. The elaborate school hierarchy serves as a surprisingly effective venue for the exploration of relationships in *Maria Watches Over Us*, derived from novels by Oyuki Konno. The first season focuses largely on developing friendships within the three tiers of Roses: Yumi discovers that she and Sachiko aren't so different, while new friend Yoshino makes a difficult choice to distance herself from an overprotective sister of her own. By turns cute, romantic, and overwhelmingly earnest, the animation here boasts a restrained artistic beauty backed by a sweeping classical musical score. Compiling all 13 episodes of the 2004 debut season in a Japanese-language set (subtitled in English), rated 13-plus, DVD extras include comical bonus shorts, liner notes, and character bios. Highly recommended. [Note: *Maria Watches Over Us: Season Two* is also newly available, with *Season Three* slated for release on Jan. 22, and *Season Four* bowing Mar. 12.] (L. Martincik)

Persona 4: The Animation, Collection One ★★★

(2012) 305 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$59.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5277-2 (dvd), 978-1-6161-5278-9 (blu-ray).



While his parents are abroad for a year, Tokyo teen Yu reluctantly relocates to an unfashionable provincial town, which is struck by a series of strange deaths as well as

rumors of a “Midnight Channel” supernatural TV broadcast on rainy nights that features grainy images which seem to foretell the dire future. Before long, Yu discovers that he and his new friends can step right through television monitors into a weird alternate universe that is also having Midnight Channel-related problems with invading “shadows.” Yu and his schoolmates are able to combat the marauding entities with “personas”—powerful beings of their own invocation. Since the personas and the shadows dredge up unreconciled issues and anxieties within Yu and his pals, the super-powered fights kind of double as therapy sessions, as the series alternates unevenly between *Pokemon*/*Yu-Gi-Oh!*-style battles and seriocomic high school teen fare. Inspired by the popular video game franchise, the first 12 episodes from 2011-12 are presented in a dual-language set, rated TV-14. Extras include a director's cut version of the opening episode. Recommended. [Note: *Persona 4: The Animation, Collection Two* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)

Steins;Gate ★★★1/2

(2011) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$69.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2581-7.



Although described in a recent *Otaku Magazine* cover story as a semi-sequel to *Chaos;Head*, there is actually little resemblance between that series and *Steins;Gate* (besides the weird shared semicolon), which resists several anime clichés: no robots or magic schoolgirls are on hand here, and the narrative features an adult hero rather than the usual teen. Self-proclaimed “mad scientist” (complete with sinister laugh) and conspiracy buff Rintarō operates a “Future Gadget Laboratory” aimed at developing technology to overthrow the social order. Rintarō's efforts unexpectedly lead somewhere when (purely by accident) a tricked-up microwave oven in the Lab becomes a time machine—under the right conditions. Unfortunately, teleported matter—essentially squeezing stuff through tiny black holes—turns it into reconstituted goo, but sending binary data works effectively. The upshot is that Rintarō and his growing team of “lab assistants” (including mysterious and possibly traitorous girls) can use text-messaging to alter the present. But with each experiment they wind up disturbing reality more drastically than before, ultimately drawing powerful and malevolent attention. Weaving in genuine urban-legend lore and legitimate scientific theories about time travel, this is a brainy, transfixing sci-fi saga. Compiling the first 12 episodes from the 2011 series in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries. Highly recommended. [Note: *Steins;Gate, Part Two* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)

Arabella ★★½

(2012) 152 min. In German w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Unittel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).

Richard Strauss's 1933 opera—his last to feature a libretto by his frequent collaborator, the poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal—is essentially an elegant comedy of manners with dark undercurrents, presented here in a brilliant 2012 staging at the Wiener Staatsoper. Count Waldner's gambling has left him deeply in debt, but if his beautiful daughter Arabella marries well, his money problems could be solved. Unfortunately, she has rejected all suitors, including the soldier Matteo, while awaiting Mr. Right. Her younger sister, Zdenka, whom her parents have kept disguised as a boy, loves Matteo and writes to him in Arabella's name. The solution to the family's difficulties arrives in the person of Mandryka, who's enraptured with Arabella just from looking at her photo, feelings that are returned when she immediately perceives him as her soul mate. But things are thrown into confusion when Mandryka mistakes Zdenka's advances towards Matteo as coming from Arabella. Everything works out, of course, after a great many apologies are exchanged. Franz Welser-Möst draws richly romantic playing from the Vienna State Opera Orchestra, bringing out the full opulence of Strauss's score; and the singing by Emily Magee (Arabella), Genia Kühmeier (Zdenka), Tomasz Konieczny (Mandryka), Michael Schade (Matteo), and Wolfgang Bankl (Waldner) is uniformly excellent. Although the staging updates the opera from the mid-19th century to the 1930s, the elegant sets and stylish costumes fit the work perfectly. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray version) and LPCM stereo, extras include a cast gallery. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



C(h)oeurs ★★½

(2012) 129 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Teatro Real (dist. by Naxos of America).

Alain Platel's artistically and politically provocative new work—the title refers to both choruses (*choeurs*) and human hearts (*coeurs*)—showcases the chorus of Madrid's Teatro Real as well as members of his own dance troupe, “les ballets C de la B,” while also making a statement about the inequities in the contemporary economic system that have spurred popular street protests worldwide. For the music, Platel has strung together choruses and orchestral interludes from operas by Verdi and Wagner that, he believes, express the yearning for freedom during the mid-19th century and continue to do so today. Against that aural



background (which includes occasional verbal interruptions that sound like tidbits of existential philosophy), Platel situates 10 dancers who initially appear as stiff-limbed mannequins—their mouths stuffed with cloth—but gradually liberate themselves from invisible shackles as they adopt more limber poses, spit out their gags, and shed their garments. Meanwhile the choristers mill about and act as pallbearers for two young boys who apparently represent the next generation of slaves to an unjust and oppressive system. The combination of highly mannered (often deliberately grotesque) choreography, a politically charged message, and abundant nudity makes *C(h)oeurs*—despite the beautiful music—a challenging work. But students of modern dance may find it intriguing. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray version) and LPCM stereo, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

The Doors: Live at the Bowl '68 ★★½

(1968) 135 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

“We want the world and we want it now,” Jim Morrison screams during “When the Music's Over,” the opening cut of this legendary July 5, 1968 performance by The Doors at the Hollywood Bowl. The lyric is in perfect keeping with the height of the protest-era '60s, although the seriousness is somewhat undercut by the fact that Morrison precedes the line with an energetic belch and a boyish smile. Charismatic bad boy Morrison—who dropped LSD right before taking the stage—delivers an even weirder than usual performance here (at one point offering a spontaneous “ode to a grasshopper” he sees onstage that—on closer inspection—turns out to be a moth) on a dozen Doors numbers that include both classics (the timeless anthem “Light My Fire”) and then-brand-new tunes such as “Spanish Caravan,” “Hello, I Love You,” “Five to One,” and “The Unknown Soldier” (an electrifying mood piece in which Morrison pantomimes being shot—collapsing on the stage floor). Backed by Ray Manzarek's hypnotic keyboards, Robby Krieger's jazzy guitar, and John Densmore's solid drumming, the show (which itself is only 71 minutes long) climaxes with a superb rendition of “The End” (known to later generations from its dramatic inclusion in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*) that includes the famous (and still shocking) oedipal lyrics. Although the music truly would be over three years later when Morrison died of an apparent drug overdose, it shines in this concert that looks and sounds fantastic, thanks to an incredible restoration effort (including lifting audio from other Doors performances to fill



in dropouts or completely useless tracks, such as “Hello, I Love You”). Fun fact: The Doors appear before a virtual wall of sound—52 amplifiers total—but only a few are actually plugged in. 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 three featurettes (on the history of the Hollywood Bowl, reminiscences from surviving Doors members, and the restoration process), a trio of TV-appearance bonus tracks, and liner notes. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Etta James: Live at Montreux 1993 ★★½

(1993) 160 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

By 1993, R&B road warrior Etta James (1938-2012) had been performing for five decades, and if the 11-song set here from Montreux that year is rough around the edges, her earthy alto is as distinctive as ever. Following two instrumentals from the band (“Funky Good Time” and “Hold On, I'm Comin'”), James enters in a gold jacket over a black pantsuit to growl her way through “I Just Want to Make Love to You,” working up such a sweat during the performance that she remains seated for most of the remainder. Other selections that work well include “Beware” and “Hard to Handle,” although ballads like “I'd Rather Go Blind” are not as successful, largely because James forgoes the subtlety that made them such powerful recordings (the growling is better suited to the rocking tunes). James also updates “Come to Mama” to sound more like a contemporary soul-jazz number, which doesn't quite satisfy like the original arrangement. The real jewel of this release, however, is the bonus feature: 90 minutes of material from 1975-1990, including a spectacular, 10-minute version of “Respect Yourself” from her first Montreux appearance, and a fine 1978 rendition of the Eagles' “Take It to the Limit.” 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)



Fela Kuti Double Feature: Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense / Berliner Jazztage '78 ★★½

(2012) 146 min. DVD: \$24.95. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors).

This double feature kicks off with Dennis Marks' 1984 BBC Arena-aired documentary *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense*, which offers a rough but effective sketch of Nigerian superstar Fela Anikulapo Kuti, who explains the meaning behind his full moniker: “he who



emanates greatness," "one who has death in his pouch," and "one who never dies" (Kuti changed his middle name from the Anglo-Saxon Ransome). By the mid-'80s, Kuti had released dozens of records, faced numerous arrests for speaking out against governmental corruption, and married his female backing singers. Concerning his childhood, Kuti notes that his father was a pastor and that English was the family language. Later, Kuti studied in England and lived in America, where black leaders such as Malcolm X raised his consciousness, after which he returned to Lagos to pursue his music career—choosing to sing in English, so that everyone could understand him. Along with interviews, Marks incorporates clips from Fela's 1984 appearance at Glastonbury. The companion piece, *Berliner Jazztage '78*, serves up a vintage set broadcast on German and Nigerian television, which begins with Quincy Joppes' introduction of the gold-suited Africa 70 ensemble (including drummer/band leader Tony Allen), followed by Kuti's emergence in a boldly-printed pantsuit to say a few words before launching into the jazz-funk number "V.I.P.," his term for "vagabonds in power." As Kuti alternates on organ and saxophone, six purple-clad ladies arrive to dance and respond to his calls. In the third track, "Pansa Pansa," Kuti encourages the audience to join in. He rounds out the night with "Power Show" and "Cross Examination of the African Colonial Soldier." Even though Kuti is in a talkative mood throughout, the performances make it all worthwhile. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Gregg Allman: I'm No Angel—Live on Stage

★★★

(2012) 52 min. DVD: \$16.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Opening for Stevie Ray Vaughan at Nashville's Cannery in 1988, Gregg Allman's style here doesn't differ much from that of his famed band, the Allman Brothers, although jazz and fusion play a more prominent role through the combination of organ (Allman), piano (Tim Heding), and two percussionists (David Toler and Chaz Trippy, who manages a quartet of congas). Once Allman starts to sing, however—with his nicotine-stained growl—Southern soul and Chicago blues enter the picture (and never leave). While possessing one of the most distinctive voices in rock and roll, Allman had lost some clarity by the 1980s and his mumbling renders many of the lyrics indistinguishable, while still always managing to put the requisite emotion across. No one can replace Allman's late brother, Duane, who died in 1971, but Allman Brothers' guitarist Dan Toler still serves up plenty of fluid solos. The hour-shy 10-song set combines solo tracks and classic Allman covers, including Blind Willie McTell's "Statesboro Blues" and

"One Way Out," the latter credited to both Elmore James and Sonny Boy Williamson II. The performances are solid, even if Allman's solo material—mostly from 1988's *Just Before the Bullets Fly*—isn't especially memorable, with the exception of 1986's "I'm No Angel," the title track of his third studio recording, and an apt summation of Allman's turbulent life. The mullet hairstyles, shiny dusters, and rolled-sleeve blazers scream '80s, but some of the music is timeless. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

The Groundhogs: Live at the Astoria ★★1/2

(1998) 81 min. DVD: \$11.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



In a taped segment, founder Tony McPhee introduces this 1998 concert, noting that the lineup of the blues-rock outfit has changed several times since the 1960s, and apologizing for the condition of his voice as he was recovering from the flu at the time. In the 11-track set filmed in London, the three-piece band powers through a combination of originals and covers, heavy on the Howlin' Wolf, since they were on tour in support of their album *Hogs in Wolf's Clothing*. Although McPhee was no longer a young gun, he has no problem keeping up with younger comrades Pete Correa on drums and Eric Chipulina on bass. And even though his voice isn't at peak strength, it doesn't really matter, since he keeps the emphasis on the instrumental interplay, especially his guitar-playing (although the Wolf selections almost feel more like Hubert Sumlin covers). After prolonged applause from the audience, the gentlemen return to encore with Muddy Waters' "Down in the Bottom." Visually, this is a fairly straightforward gig, other than a few op-art slides that materialize behind the band on occasion (with slow motion and multiple-exposure effects added during post-production). Although McPhee chats between tracks, it isn't always possible to make out what he's saying—a problem that more audio sweetening of the Dolby Digital stereo mix might have fixed. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Hungarian Rhapsody: Queen—Live in Budapest ★★1/2

(1986) 118 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Arena rock superstars Queen take their act behind the Iron Curtain for this 22-song 1986 concert before an audience of 80,000 in Budapest. Fronted by flamboyant lead singer Freddie Mercury (on his last tour with the group; Mercury

would die of AIDS in 1991), with Brian May on guitar (one of the few instantly recognizable guitarists in rock), John Deacon on bass, and Roger Taylor on drums, the band was at a new popular height, thanks to an electrifying performance beamed round the world at 1985's Live Aid concert. Touring in support of their 12th album, *A Kind of Magic* (also considered the unofficial soundtrack to the film *Highlander*), the quartet open with their then-current hit "One Vision," followed by abbreviated versions of "Tie Your Mother Down" and "Tear It Up (among others) before finally settling in to deliver solid renditions of "A Kind of Magic," "Under Pressure," and "Who Wants to Live Forever" (the last especially poignant with lyrics that could stand as a commentary on the terrible sentence of AIDS: "there's no chance for us/it's all decided for us"). Not surprisingly—given the locale—the rousing "I Want to Break Free" resonated with the audience, as did a Hungarian folk song the band played as Mercury read the foreign lyrics penned on his hand. Fans of '70s Queen may be a bit disappointed by the '80s-heavy setlist (notable omissions include "Somebody to Love," "Killer Queen," "Another One Bites the Dust," and "Play the Game"), but there are enough big hits here—such as "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," "We Will Rock You," and "Radio Ga Ga"—to satisfy most. Triumphant closing with "We Are the Champions," this is a winning concert—handsomely filmed by János Zsombolyai (one of Hungary's leading cinematographers)—that is only briefly interrupted by four short segments of each of the band members having fun in Budapest. Presented in DTS-5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray version) and LPCM stereo, extras include the archival featurette "A Magic Year," and liner notes. Also available in deluxe editions with two bonus audio CDs of the concert (DVD: \$34.98, Blu-ray: \$39.98), this is highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

I Puritani ★★★

(2009) 173 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



The last work by Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835), *I Puritani*—set after the English civil war of the 1640s—suffers from a weak libretto that draws on the political turmoil merely as the basis for a standard-issue *bel canto* romance (complete with obligatory mad scene). But the music is both beautiful and historically important, serving as a bridge between Rossini and Verdi in Italian opera. In this 2009 production from De Nederlandse Opera, conductor Giuliano Carella brings out the passion and color of the orchestral writing, and he has restored from the original 1835 Paris

score several numbers traditionally excised, thereby strengthening the threadbare characterizations. The stylized set—featuring a metallic backdrop on which biblical verses are inscribed, along with tiered rows of singers—is imaginative, and the period costumes are suitably austere. But the singers, unfortunately, do not always meet Bellini's extravagant demands. Mariola Cantarero is somewhat strained as Elvira, the Puritan woman who goes mad when her royalist lover, Arturo (powerfully sung by John Osborn), apparently jilts her in order to free the captured Queen Enrichetta (Fredrika Brillembourg, the strongest of the supporting cast). But even though the vocalism here is not top-drawer, this Dutch production is a strong offering, thanks to the expanded text, superior orchestral work, and fine staging. Presented in DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a background featurette, and a cast gallery. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

★★★1/2

(2011) 170 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9191-3 (dvd), 978-0-7697-9190-6 (Blu-ray).



Rossini's 1816 comic masterpiece is one of those indestructible operas that will survive even a mediocre performance, as demonstrated by this 2011 production from the Teatro Regio di Parma, which barely suggests the work's infectious sense of fun but remains moderately enjoyable. Dmitry Korchak cuts a reasonably handsome figure as Count Almaviva, who fails in courting the lovely Rosina (Ketevan Kemoklidze) because her elderly guardian, Bartolo (Bruno Praticò), wants her for himself—at least, until the wily Figaro (Luca Salsi) teaches the nobleman a few hilariously underhanded tricks. Unfortunately, Korchak's tenor, while strong, suffers from a nasal tone, and although Kemoklidze is an agile vocalist, she looks a trifle old for the part. Salsi, moreover, is more actor than singer, making the barber a genial rogue who growls many of Rossini's low notes. And in Praticò's hands, Bartolo isn't quite the amusing figure he should be. This overall blandness extends to the supporting singers and company orchestra, which Andrea Battistoni conducts vigorously but without the joviality suggested by the score. The result is a rather unsmiling *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, an effect accentuated by traditional yet lackluster sets and costumes, coupled with staging by Stefano Vizioli that is frankly lackadaisical. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD and Blu-ray, this is an optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Il Prigionier Superbo/La Serva Padrona ★★★

(2011) 177 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



Following the release of a rarely resurrected *opera seria* by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–36)—namely, *Adriano in Siria*, which includes the comic intermezzo *Livietta e Tracollo* (VL-7/12)—we now have another: 1733's *Il Prigionier Superbo* (*The Proud Prisoner*), accompanied by the far more famous intermezzo *La Serva Padrona*. Both productions presented here were filmed in Jesi—the composer's birthplace—in 2009 and 2011. Although the opera features a convoluted plot, involving a rivalry between Metace, a tyrannical Gothic king, and Viridate, a Danish prince, for the hand of Princess Rosmene, whose father is Metace's captive, this is a typically static piece in which characters merely stand and deliver a succession of formulaic arias. *La Serva Padrona*, by contrast, is a high-spirited farce in which feisty servant Serpina bullies her employer into marrying her. The mostly female casts—Marina de Liso as Metace, Marina Comparato as Viridate, Marina Rodriguez Cusi as Rosmene, and Alessandra Marianelli as Serpina—deliver stylish vocalism, and receive vigorous orchestral support from the period-instrument band Accademia Barocca de i Virtuosi Italiani, under Corrado Rovaris. Unfortunately, Henning Brockhaus stages *Il Prigionier Superbo* with the singers in garish modern dress, manipulating puppets to represent the characters, and for some reason situates *La Serva Padrona* in a traveling circus troupe. In both cases, thankfully, the quality of the performances overrides these drawbacks. Presented in 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)

Iolanta/Perséphone

★★★

(2012) 187 min. In Russian & French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Teatro Real (dist. by Naxos of America).



On the surface, this 2012 Madrid double-bill of a one-act fairy-tale opera by Tchaikovsky and a three-act melodrama by Stravinsky based on an ancient Greek fertility myth seems a curious coupling. But both are relatively neglected works by important Russian composers, and both are pieces with spiritual overtones about princesses who suffer for a higher end. In Tchaikovsky's 1892 final opera *Iolanta*, the fact that Iolanta (Ekaterina Scherbachenko) is blind has been kept from her by her royal father, but she's miraculously cured after he threatens her lover with execution. The music

is uncharacteristically lyrical and serene, ending with a long hymn of praise to God for restoring her sight. In Stravinsky's 1934 *Perséphone*, the titular Greek goddess (Sam Sathya) spends fall and winter in Hades' underworld before celebrating the annual rebirth that comes with spring. Although thematically related to the composer's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, this piece is musically the famed ballet's polar opposite, written in a neoclassical style devoid of percussive bombast, and concluding with a choral hymn to nature's bounty. Peter Sellars is usually the most flamboyant of directors, but his staging for both works is positively chaste; the major departure of note being his employment of four traditional Cambodian dancers to represent the major figures in *Perséphone*. Excellent solo and choral work, sensitive conducting by Teodor Currentzis, and lush visuals add to the appeal. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a "making-of" featurette. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

La Didone ★★★1/2

(2011) 176 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



The recent spate of releases devoted to the works of Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676)—*Ercole Amante* (VL-7/10), *La Virtù de' Strali d'Amore* (VL-5/12), and *Il Giasone* (VL-9/12)—continues with this superb reading of his take on Virgil's familiar story of Dido and Aeneas, which has inspired nearly a hundred operas over the years. Cavalli's interpretation is unusual in that the first act concentrates on Cassandra's trauma over the fall of Troy (which she was unable to prevent), while in the Carthage-set second, Dido doesn't die as a result of Aeneas's desertion, but instead weds the suitor she'd long rejected. Although coming early in the composer's career, this 1641 opera is musically mature, and performed vivaciously here, with William Christie conducting his period-instrument group Les Arts Florissants for this 2011 staging at the Théâtre de Caen. Christie catches every nuance in the score, and the orchestral work is complemented by excellent vocalism from the young cast, many of whom take multiple roles as both the mortals caught up in events and the gods and goddesses who intervene in human affairs. Particular standouts include Katherine Watson (Cassandra), Kresimir Spicer (Aeneas), and Anna Bonitatibus (Dido). The sets are spare—bare walls and scaffolding on which the deities stand—and the costumes are plain; but this is a musically vivid mounting that does Cavalli's third opera full justice. Presented in DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a cast gallery. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

La Traviata ★★½

(2011) 141 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opera Australia (dist. by Naxos of America).



Spectacle is the main selling point of Francesca Zambello's 2011 Opera Australia version of Verdi's ever-popular tale of the consumptive courtesan who selflessly rejects her lover at the urging of his father. Presented on a huge outdoor stage in Sydney Harbor (with the iconic Opera House and city skyline as backdrop), the production features brightly colored '50s-style costumes, a couch that appears to be a block long, a fireworks display during the opening party scene, and—the pièce de résistance—a huge color-changing chandelier that hovers over the set. Unfortunately, however, the actual performance doesn't quite measure up. The one outstanding musical element is Emma Matthews, who sings the role of Violetta with accuracy and power (although her acting is rudimentary). Matthews is leagues ahead of co-leads Alfredo (a braying Gianluca Terranova) and Germont (a wobbly Jonathan Summers). Given the logistics—with the orchestra situated beneath the stage—Aubrey Murphy conducts respectably, and the musicians produce reasonably well-balanced sound. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray version) and LPCM stereo, extras include interviews with Zambello and costume designer Tess Schofield, pre-production behind-the-scenes clips, and a cast gallery. Considering the numerous musically superior versions of *La Traviata* available—such as the 2009 Covent Garden mounting (VL-9/11)—this is an optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Le Grand Macabre

★★★

(2011) 122 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$29.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



The sole opera by Hungarian composer György Ligeti (1923–2006) premiered in 1978, but this 2011 performance from Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu employs the composer's 1996 revision in English translation. Based on a 1934 absurdist play, the libretto tells a satirically apocalyptic tale about a tyrant named Nekrotzar (here ably sung by Werner Van Mechelen), who literally rises from the dead intent on destroying the world—rejoicing when his astrologer, Astradamors (Frode Olsen), informs him that a catastrophic comet will arrive at midnight. Numerous subplots involve bickering government ministers, drunken revelry, an inept prince, and Astradamors' harridan wife, all leading to a finale that finds the characters still alive, Nekrotzar chagrined,

and a pair of lovers emerging from seclusion to preach a hedonist philosophy. Ligeti's dissident score has playful elements, exemplified by the inclusion of doorbells, car horns, rubber squeeze toys, and pots and pans in the orchestra. The staging by the innovative Catalan group La Fura dels Baus is extravagant, beginning with a short film of an obese woman dying of a heart attack, after which a huge statue of her is placed center stage, allowing the splashily costumed characters to scamper all over it. Although *Le Grand Macabre* certainly won't appeal to everyone (the dialogue features some gross obscenities), this is an important work by a serious modern artist. 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, and an interview with conductor Michael Boder. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Le Nozze di Figaro

★★★★½

(2010) 178 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).



This 2010 Paris Opera mounting offers a traditional rendering of Mozart's 1786 opera about the shenanigans surrounding Figaro's upcoming wedding to the maid Susanna, who is lusted after by their noble employer. Susanna conspires with the Countess to foil the Count's amorous advances, while elderly housekeeper Marcellina schemes to have Figaro marry her instead, abetted by her employer, Bartolo. This sequel to *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* is filled with delicious twists, while Mozart's endlessly inventive score—a succession of masterful arias and ensembles—is an unalloyed delight. The production is based on the classic design by Giorgio Strehler from the mid-1990s, as recreated by stage director Humbert Camerlò. Soft lighting and elegant sets and costumes create a painterly appearance, while musically this production is very strong, with Ludovic Tézier and Luca Pisaroni excellent as the Count and Figaro, and Barbara Fritoli and Ekaterina Siurina their matches as the Countess and Susanna. Some of the supporting roles are weaker—veterans Robert Lloyd's Bartolo and Ann Murray's Marcellina are rather wobbly—but overall the ensemble is solid, and Philippe Jordan conducts in restrained fashion, allowing for the opera's darker moments to register. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an interview with Camerlò. One of the best performances of this masterpiece available on home video, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Led Zeppelin: Celebration Day

★★★★½

(2007) 124 min. DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99. Warner Music Group (avail. from most distributors).



Also known as the " Ahmet Ertegun Tribute Concert" (for the head of Atlantic Records, who died in 2006), this legendary December 10, 2007 reunion performance in London's O2 arena features the three surviving members of heavy metal progenitors Led Zeppelin: golden-maned (assuredly dyed) singer Robert Plant, proudly gray virtuoso guitarist Jimmy Page, and still young-looking bassist John Paul Jones, along with Jason Bonham (son of original late drummer John Bonham). Serving up a 16-song set in the usual arena rock style (with smoke, lights, and a massive video wall projecting a barrage of colorful imagery), the band only performs five songs from their early first three albums, including "Ramble On," the mega-hit "Whole Lotta Love," and the blues rock anthem "Dazed and Confused," which Plant prefaces by saying of the setlist, "certain songs...had to be there, and this is one of them." The same can be said for the very next song played: "Stairway to Heaven," often called the greatest rock song ever. Although the quartet initially seem to be going through the motions—Plant, especially, whose vocals are sometimes submerged beneath the hammer-of-the-gods musical onslaught—the band gels about a third of the way through, performing stellar versions of "Nobody's Fault But Mine," "No Quarter," "The Song Remains the Same," "Misty Mountain Hop," and the epic "Kashmir" (although the title cut, "Celebration Day," is oddly not played here). While the whiplash editing sometimes detracts, and the concert cannot match the virtuosity or energy of 1976's *The Song Remains the Same* (VL-3/08), this possibly final Led Zep concert is still a powerful journey down memory lane. 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 two bonus audio CDs of the entire concert (a "deluxe" edition, priced at about a dollar more for both formats, includes a bonus DVD featuring an unremarkable one-camera take of a rehearsal performance). Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Nabucco ★★★

(2009) 137 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Unital Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



In the third installment of their chronological survey of the complete Verdi operas, the forces of Parma's Teatro Regio take on the composer's first acknowledged masterpiece, a treatment of the Babylonian

Captivity of the Jews in the sixth century B.C. Of course, there are embellishments: the Assyrian king is struck mad when he claims divinity, he struggles with his daughter Abigail over the crown, and a romance blossoms between a Jewish warrior and another Babylonian princess. Embraced by nationalist Italians as a thinly veiled call to arms against their foreign rulers, this 1842 opera cemented the composer's wider European reputation. Displaying the real beginnings of Verdi's mature style, *Nabucco* has retained a firm place in the repertory. Imaginatively conducted by Michele Mariotti—who fashions an especially refined reading of the famous choral lament “Va, pensiero”—this 2009 performance benefits from veteran Leo Nucci in the title role, slightly frayed of voice but still a powerful stage presence, as well as Dimitra Theodossiou as the hardhearted Abigail. The remaining principals are solid if unexceptional, the chorus is splendid, and the minimalist sets are serviceable. The only serious drawback here is the costuming, a bewildering mixture of period and modern garb. Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an introduction to the opera. Better than the 2004 staging in Piacenza (VL-7/06), this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Oberto ★★★

(2007) 124 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



The first in a planned series of all of Giuseppe Verdi's 26 operas, performed around Parma, near his birthplace, this is a 2007 performance of his 1839 debut, a formulaic romantic triangle about Riccardo, a nobleman who seduces lovely Leonora before casting her aside for Cuniza, who in turn rejects him after learning of his infidelity. Leonora's furious father, Oberto, thereupon challenges Riccardo to a duel and is killed, prompting the conscience-stricken younger man to leave Italy. Rarely performed today, this *Oberto* features the creative talent of the Teatro Regio di Parma, but was mounted at the tiny Teatro Verdi di Busseto. Since the stage is so small, director Pier'Alli had little choice but to opt for a very static presentation that often feels more like an oratorio with costumes. Nonetheless the orchestra—sounding like a reduced version of the Parma house band—is conducted with vigor and sensitivity by Antonello Allemandi, and the singing is uniformly fine, with the men—Giovanni Battista Parodi as Oberto, and Fabio Sartori as Riccardo—especially strong, although Mariana Pentcheva's Cuniza isn't far behind. Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an introduction to the opera. Fairly evenly matched with the 2007 perfor-

mance of *Oberto* in Bilbao (VL-1/08), this is recommended, especially for those who don't own the earlier release. (F. Swietek)

Rinaldo ★★★1/2

(2011) 190 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Handel's 1711 opera, the first he composed after settling in England, boasts magnificent music but is extremely difficult to stage, since it is a huge crusading epic—filled with battle scenes and magic—pitting Christian heroes besieging Jerusalem against a wicked sorceress, the queen of Damascus. In this 2011 production from the Glyndebourne Festival, director Robert Carsen solves the staging problem by setting it at an English boys' school, where Rinaldo is a bullied, depressed student who imagines himself raising a force to defeat his tormentors—including the sadistic teachers. The concept works surprisingly well, especially when adopting a cheeky tone—such as Rinaldo soaring aloft on his bicycle, *E.T.*-style, or a gymnasium depicted as a torture chamber controlled by the dominatrix-clad “queen,” or sparklers set off in a lab to represent magical weapons. Under conductor Ottavio Dantone's vigorous beat, the period-instrument Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment plays crisply and sprightly, and the singing is outstanding across the board, with contralto Sonia Prina (Rinaldo), soprano Brenda Rae (Queen Armida), and countertenor Tim Mead (Rinaldo's friend Eustazio)—in particular—handling the demanding coloratura with incredible aplomb. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include separate interviews with Carsen and Dantone, as well as a cast gallery. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Rockwell: A Night of Legendary Collaborations ★★★1/2

(2011) 66 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



This 14-track set presents highlights from a 2011 charity concert at London's O2 Arena in support of the Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy. Razorlight begins the show with an earnest brand of piano rock led by a front man who appears to have spent some quality time with the recordings of Patti Smith and Lou Reed. Robert Plant takes a more international approach by blending Eastern and African influences (tabla and kora) with conventional rock instrumentation for one cover and two Led Zeppelin classics, “Black Dog” and “Whole Lotta Love.” Joss Stone hits the stage in bare feet and form-fitting mini-dress to perform two numbers, including a

too-long version of “Free Me.” Consummate professional Tom Jones sings “It's Not Unusual” with customary charm, which helps to compensate for a lackluster showing in the vocal department, particularly on “Sex Bomb.” Jones and Stone also duet on the Isley Brothers' “It's Your Thing,” while David Gray joins up with the string players of Escala. The evening ends with a group sing-along on the Beatles' “Let It Be” (Jones refers to a lyric sheet, while Plant and Gray opt out). Like many multi-act highlights concerts, *Rockwell* is a mixed bag. Presented in PCM stereo, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

The Rolling Stones: Charlie is My Darling, Ireland 1965 ★★★1/2

(1965) 65 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99. ABKCO Films (avail. from most distributors).



Rolling Stones devotees have every reason to celebrate the release of this chronicle of the band's 1965 tour of Ireland. Directed by Peter Whitehead and overseen by then-Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham, the hour-plus titular documentary adopts a format similar to *The First U.S. Visit*, the Maysles brothers' film about the Beatles' 1964 trip to America. The camera follows the Stones in the limo and on the train; mucking about in hotel rooms (where Keith Richards, who always has an acoustic guitar at hand, and Mick Jagger work on new Stones songs, as well as amusing, ad hoc renditions of “Eight Days a Week,” “I've Just Seen a Face,” and other Fabs faves); in interviews (dominated by the always self-conscious, camera-aware Jagger); and tuning up backstage. Best by far are the roughly half dozen songs performed live on stage, which—thanks to an impressive restoration effort—sound fantastic: “The Last Time,” “Time Is on My Side,” “Around and Around,” “I'm Alright,” and their then-smash hit “(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction.” The performances are viscerally exciting, as fans storm the stage. With the Stones marking their 50th anniversary, it's a pleasure to see the band in the days before drugs, arrests, and general depravity set in. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo on DVD and DTS-HD 5.1 and stereo on Blu-ray, extras include both the director's and the producer's cuts of the film, bonus interview clips, and a featurette on the restoration process. Considering how little footage exists from this era of the Stones' career (appearances on *The T.A.M.I. Show* and *Ed Sullivan* are about it, officially), this is highly recommended. (S. Graham)

Roméo et Juliette ★★

(2011) 177 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).

Charles Gounod's 1867 adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy about doomed young

lovers isn't entirely faithful to its source—subtracting scenes, while also introducing Romeo's troublemaking page, and having Juliette wake from her slumber before Romeo dies to allow for a soaring final duet. But on its own terms, this is a lovely and elegant opera, while Verona, naturally, would seem to be the perfect venue. Unfortunately, however, the city's cavernous outdoor arena induces director Francesco Micheli to run riot with the staging, ultimately smothering this sweet, lyrical piece in empty spectacle, including a corrugated shack from which the story "emerges," tall defensive towers for the Montague and Capulet families, and—most absurd—a flying machine for Queen Mab. The bewildering costumes feature shiny vinyl and feathers, part of a motif in which Juliette is portrayed as a caged bird (to reinforce the characters' emotions, weirdly costumed dancers also periodically appear to "enact" their mood swings). The orchestra plays decently, even if the tempos favored by Fabio Mastrangelo push the limits. But among the singers, only Nino Machaidze, as Juliette, stands out; she is strikingly beautiful and her strong soprano handles most of the role's demands. By contrast, Stefano Secco sings Romeo adequately, but doesn't look the part and he adopts an unsuitably stiff demeanor. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this disappointing production is optional, at best. (F. Swietek)



Samson et Dalila ★★½
(2010) 125 min. In French w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



Modern productions of Camille Saint-Saëns' opera seem determined to remake the familiar biblical tale in odd modern terms (in the 2009 staging from the Vlaamse Opera [VL-11/11], for instance, the Hebrews in effect became the Palestinians, with Samson a guerilla leader). In this 2010 mounting from the Badisches Staatstheater in Karlsruhe, Germany—described as a live recording despite no sign of an audience and apparent dubbing at some points—the set for the first and third acts depicts a landscape covered with working oil rigs (one of which Samson will be chained to at the climactic "bringing down the temple" moment). The obvious point made here is that the new god is money, so the related conflict is less religious than economic, essentially between the greedy and the poor. Unfortunately, this rather shallow concept leads to some strange visual juxtapositions—including a jarring contrast

between the modern attire of the men and the period tunics worn by Dalila and her fellow priestesses. But the musical side is solid, with José Cura (who also directed and designed the production) as Samson and Julia Gertseva as Dalila, backed by strong playing from the company orchestra under Jochem Hochstenbach. The last-act Bacchanale suffers, however, from poor staging, turning what is supposed to be an alluring dance into little more than a simple seduction, with music as background noise. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo, this won't replace traditional versions, but can still be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Sigismondo ★★★
(2010) 164 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



The last of the Venetian operas that would make the young Gioachino Rossini's reputation, this notorious 1814 failure has long been dismissed as irredeemable, but the Pesaro Rossini Opera Festival's 2010 revival reveals this to be a substantial (if also uneven) offering. In a libretto reminiscent of *Othello*, Sigismondo the king is duped by an Iago-like minister named Ladislao into believing that his wife, Aldimira, is unfaithful, and orders her execution. Still haunted by this decision after 15 years, Sigismondo is startled to discover a peasant woman who looks exactly like Aldimira. It turns out that she actually is Aldimira—having conveniently escaped her death sentence—and she reconciles Sigismondo with her father, the understandably hostile king of Bohemia, while also compelling Ladislao to admit his crime and accept well-deserved punishment. Director Damiano Michieletto sets the action in a mental institution where Sigismondo has been committed—a somewhat hackneyed device in which other inmates silently convey the characters' emotional states, adding an illusion of psychological depth. The musical side is stronger, however, with conductor Michele Mariotti leading a passionate performance, and mezzo Daniela Barcellona (Sigismondo) and soprano Olga Peretyatko (Aldimira) delivering excellent turns, although it's tenor Antonino Siragusa, as Ladislao, who soars with amazing coloratura dexterity. 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. An intriguing piece, this Rossini rarity is recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Sleeping Beauty ★★★½
(2011) 138 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).

This 2011 production of Tchaikovsky's

perennial fairy-tale classic by Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet was a gala event for a number of reasons, since it inaugurates the company's newly refurbished main stage, boasts opulent sets (glistening with gold leaf) and sumptuous new costumes, and features David Hallberg, the first American to become a permanent member of the famed Russian troupe, as Prince Désiré. The high-flying Hallberg is well paired with Svetlana Zakharova as Aurora, the awakened princess who was sent into slumber by the wicked Carabosse (Alexey Loparevich). As one would expect, the other dancers are also superb, and while there's a hint of the routine in Vassily Sinaisky's conducting, the orchestra comes through nicely. A slight drawback in choreographer Yuri Grigorovich's new version of the piece is that it does not change locales as often (which tends to downplay some of the libretto's dramatic transitions), although this is likely due to the elaborate nature of the set. All in all, this is a sumptuous production of Tchaikovsky's lovable score, done up in typically grandiose Bolshoi fashion and offering the opportunity to see Hallberg, erstwhile star of the American Ballet Theatre, in his new professional home. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, the sole extra is a booklet. Supplanting an earlier Bolshoi version (VL-11/89) and easily equal to the fine 2006 Covent Garden staging (VL-5/09), this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



So: Peter Gabriel ★★★
(2012) 94 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Peter Gabriel reflects on the making of 1986's *So* in this illuminating edition of the *Classic Albums* series. A former drummer, Gabriel says that he tends to think from a percussive point of view, although he didn't initially want to use cymbals on the album (preferring a cleaner, less cluttered sound). Producer Daniel Lanois convinced the stubborn musician otherwise as the pair spent 10 months recording the seminal album in a country house, a brief period of time by Gabriel's standards, even if the hit "In Your Eyes"—a duet with Senegalese vocalist Youssou N'Dour—took 96 takes to finish. Although observers assumed that Gabriel designed "Sledgehammer" to storm the charts, he says he was just trying to put his own unique stamp on R&B. Bass player Tony Levin, drummer Manu Katché, and trumpeter Wayne Jackson (the Memphis Horns) also weigh in here about their contributions to the track, while the unforgettable stop-motion video for "Sledgehammer" mer-

its commentary from Peter Lord and David Sproston of Aardman Animations (*Wallace & Gromit*), who worked on it with director Stephen Johnson and the Quay Brothers. Viewers will learn that "Don't Give Up" (with Kate Bush) was originally intended for Dolly Parton and drew from the photographs of Dorothea Lange, while "This Is the Picture (Excellent Birds)" (with Laurie Anderson) was inspired by the works of poet Anne Sexton. A half-hour-plus of bonus footage goes into more detail on the "Sledgehammer" video, the song "Big Time," and Gabriel's involvement with Amnesty International. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo on DVD, and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Stephen Sondheim's *Company* ★★★

(2011) 145 min. DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



This star-studded 2011 concert version of Stephen Sondheim's 1970 Broadway musical features Neil Patrick Harris as Bobby—a 35-year-old New Yorker pondering whether he should finally commit to one of his three girlfriends—who looks at the troubled marriages of four friend couples, as well as a fifth on the verge of getting hitched. Since *Company* is more psychological study than conventional narrative, it suffers less than most shows from the stripped-down staging here, which nonetheless boasts enough detail to suggest changes in location. The New York Philharmonic, under Paul Gemignani's knowing baton, renders Sondheim's witty, inventive score with polish and vibrancy (as usual in revivals, the "Marry Me a Little" number cut from the original is included here). Surrounding Harris—who gets a big laugh with a double-take when another character asks him if he's gay—is a cast featuring Broadway veterans (Patti LuPone), TV stars (Jon Cryer, Stephen Colbert), and movie actors (Martha Plimpton). With the exception of LuPone's "Ladies Who Lunch"—a true showstopper—the singing here isn't always the concert's strong suit, but there are no clunkers, and the extended dialogue scenes are especially well done. The result is a solid performance of a Sondheim show whose icy brilliance makes it difficult to love but impossible not to admire. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and Dolby Digital 5.1 on Blu-ray, extras include liner notes. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Tosca ★★★

(2010) 142 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9193-7 (dvd), 978-0-7697-9192-0 (Blu-ray).

Lovers of Puccini's ever-popular opera

about the diva who kills the lascivious police chief Scarpia—in hopes of saving the life of her condemned lover, the painter Cavaradossi—will want to check out this 2010 production from Genoa's Teatro Carlo Felice for the nigh-irresistible reason that the sets are based on Adolf Hohenstein's design for the Roman premiere of 1900. Veteran Daniela Dessì certainly benefits from her experience in singing *Tosca*, but her voice is no longer as supple, and she exhibits more power than control. But while the same might be said of Fabio Armiliato as Cavaradossi, the enthusiastic audience nevertheless demands encores of their most famous arias—*Tosca*'s "Vissi d'arte" and Cavaradossi's "E lucevan le stelle." Claudio Sgura's Scarpia is both well sung and interestingly interpreted in that it is not as sinister (indeed, Sgura brings an unaccustomed degree of sympathy to the character), while the lesser roles are solid. Under Marco Boemi's baton, the choral and orchestral work is also fine. In short, while this *Tosca* may not be superb, the distinctive aesthetic element makes it well worth the watch. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)



Un Giorno di Regno

★★★★1/2

(2010) 119 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



The second issue in Unitel's planned release of all 26 of Giuseppe Verdi's operas marks the first video appearance of his 1840 sophomore effort, which was such a disaster that it almost convinced him to give up composing. Fortunately, this 2010 performance from the Teatro Regio in Parma is excellent, demonstrating that while *Un Giorno di Regno* may be no masterpiece, it's certainly better than suggested by its initial reception. The plot centers on the kind of romantic nonsense common to comic operas of the period, revolving around two women slated to marry wealthy men they do not love, rather than those they do. As an added complication, one of the preferred beaux is posing as the king of Poland, while the other is penniless. Although it's difficult to work up much enthusiasm for the convolutions that lead to the inevitable happy ending, Verdi's bubbly score is delightful, especially in this exhilarating presentation. Donato Renzetti secures fine work from the orchestra and chorus, and while none of the principals are well known internationally, all handle their arias with aplomb, and their voices

nicely blend during ensembles. The sets and costumes are traditional, and Pier Luigi Pizzi's staging is conservative but pleasing. Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an introduction to the opera. Verdi completists will definitely want this, but the fine quality here also makes this highly recommended for general music collections. (F. Swietek)

The Who: Live in Texas '75 ★★★

(1975) 117 min. DVD: \$14.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Transporting viewers back to the days of bell-bottoms and fringe, this 25-song 1975 concert by The Who filmed in Houston, TX, is something of a visual and aural mess—a two-camera bootleg show (presented in standard-aspect video that is often fuzzy and occasionally spruced up with cheesy effects that are merely annoying) backed by plain old Dolby Digital stereo that fails to deliver room-encompassing sound. And yet, many of the faithful will still appreciate this characteristically rousing performance, marked by golden-locked, mic-twirling Roger Daltrey's soaring vocals, windmilling guitarist Pete Townshend's (now) classic rock riffs, Keith Moon's exuberant drumming, and John Entwistle's supple (if also legendarily stoic) bass playing. Touring in support of their seventh album, *The Who by Numbers* (a scaled-down release after the rock operas *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia*, and the synth-heavy *Who's Next*), the band performs the then-new tunes "However Much I Booze" and "Dreaming From the Waist" (Townshend's confessionals on alcoholism and womanizing, respectively), as well as the hit "Squeeze Box" ("Slip Kid" is unfortunately absent). Other treats include "Naked Eye" (off the 1974 rarities compilation *Odds & Sods*), the non-album single "Join Together," a cover of Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues," and Entwistle's delightful "Boris the Spider." Of course, the show also features a veritable hit parade of Who classics: "I Can't Explain," "My Generation," "Behind Blue Eyes," "Won't Get Fooled Again," "Magic Bus," "Baba O'Riley," "Drowned," and a half-hour medley of tunes from *Tommy* (including "Amazing Journey," "Sparks," "Pinball Wizard," "Acid Queen," "Fiddle About," "I'm Free," and "We're Not Gonna Take It / See Me, Feel Me / Listening to You"). While *The Who at Kilburn 1977* (VL-3/09) is a superior choice with much better audio and video, this concert still boasts some enjoyable music for those who can look beyond the technical drawbacks. DVD extras include liner notes. Recommended, overall. (R. Pitman)

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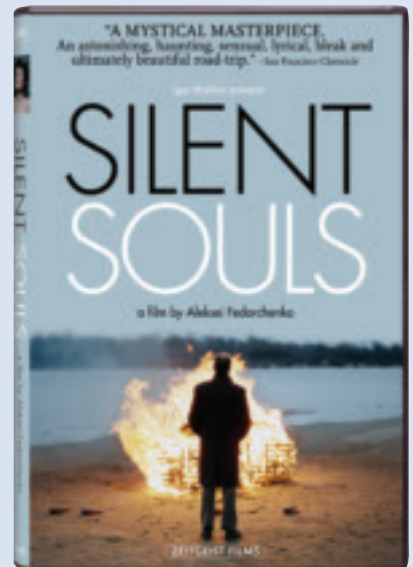
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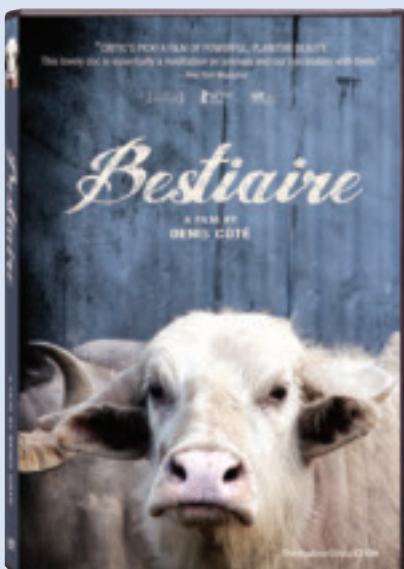
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Real Life

If you're reading this, then the Mayans have clearly failed to win the Jeane Dixon Crystal Ball award for 2012.

And that's great news, since you will be able to watch some of the wonderful documentaries profiled in our eighth annual Best Documentaries list (see pg. 47).

Is it me, or has Hollywood generally gone to the proverbial dogs over the past decade? With each passing year, I find myself wowed by fewer movies (although, to be fair, I've also aged well beyond Tinseltown's demographic target audience—which appears to be thirtysomethings with a sixth-grade sense of humor).

While raunchy brain-dead comedies and implausible whiplash-edited thrillers have become the depressing norm in multiplexes, excellent real world documentaries have been flourishing in limited theatrical runs before reaching wider audiences on DVD and Blu-ray.

From July through October of last year, *Video Librarian* staff literally spent hundreds of hours checking out 150-plus documentaries—reviewed either in the magazine itself or on *Video Librarian Online* during

the calendar year—to compile our annual annotated list of 25 best documentaries.

Past "Best Documentaries" lists have featured a wide array of higher-profile films (including *The Cove*, *Grizzly Man*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Inside Job*, *Jesus Camp*, *Man on Wire*, *March of the Penguins*, *Murderball*, *No End in Sight*, *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*, *Dear Zachary*, *Family Affair*, *Four Seasons Lodge*, *Hacking Democracy*, *The Hobart Shakespeareans*, *A Life Without Pain*, *Lucky*, *Monster Camp*, *No Impact Man*, *Nursery University*, *Sister Helen*, *So Much So Fast*, *Sunset Story*, and *Yellow Brick Road*).

Once again, what stands out on this year's list is the wide range of fascinating people whose stories are told. In filmmakers Philip Lyall and Nimisha Mukerji's *65_RedRoses*, young cystic fibrosis patient Eva Markvoort's unflagging optimism is both inspiring and heartbreaking. In Yoav Potash's hard-hitting *Crime After Crime*, Deborah Peagler—a battered woman serving in a California penitentiary for over 25 years—maintains hope while her case is fought by two committed attorneys working pro bono. In Peter D. Richardson's power-

ful *How to Die in Oregon*, Cody Curtis, a woman with liver cancer and a six-months-to-live diagnosis, nevertheless carries on day-to-day life with a sunny outlook. In Peter Wiedensmith's *Raw Faith*, Marilyn Sewell, the chief minister at a Portland, OR, Unitarian church, spreads love among her congregation but has almost given up on finding a personal soul mate herself. And in David Gelb's *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, impish 85-year-old sushi chef Jiro Ono is a dedicated artisan who admits that he was a bit of a bad kid growing up.

From films that made us laugh, such as Christoph Baaden's often funny documentary about marathon racers, *Hood to Coast*, to others that made us cry, like David Weismann and Bill Weber's sad and moving remembrance of the emergence of the AIDS crisis, *We Were Here*, this year's best documentary crop is a strong one.

And many people will only be able to find some of the excellent lesser-known documentaries like Chad Freidrichs' *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, Susan Saladoff's *Hot Coffee*, and Justine Jacob and Alex D. da Silva's *Ready, Set, Bag!* at their local libraries.

Mayan prophecies notwithstanding, here's to happy viewing in 2013.

Randy Pitman

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