

January-February 2012

Video Librarian

VOL. 27 ■ THE VIDEO REVIEW MAGAZINE FOR LIBRARIES ■ NO. 1



IN THIS ISSUE

2011 Best Docs | Project Nim | Sons of Perdition | Food Stamped | Nostalgia for the Light | Out Late | The Shock Doctrine

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Associate Editor: Jazza Williams-Wood
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Graphic Designer: Carol Kaufman
Marketing Director: Anne Williams

Contributing Writers

Kathleen C. Fennessy, *Reviewer*,
Amazon.com
Erika Gieschen, *Teacher*, *Norwalk-La Mirada*
Unified School District of Los Angeles County
Sam Graham, *Reviewer*, *Amazon.com*
Susan Granger, *SSG Syndicate*
Donald Liebenson, *Reviewer*,
Entertainment Weekly, *Amazon.com*
Stephen Rees, *Librarian*, *Bucks Co. Free*
Library, Levittown, PA
Frank Swietek, *Associate Professor*
of History, University of Dallas, TX

Additional Contributors:

Sean Axmaker
Carson Block
Charles Cassidy
Fran Gardner
Bill Gibron
Phil Hall
Tom Keogh
Lisa Martincik
Maureen Puffer-Rothenberg
Michael Sandlin

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Telephone/Fax/E-mail
Subscriptions: (800) 692-2270
Editorial: (360) 626-1259
Advertising: (800) 265-7965
Fax: (360) 626-1260
E-mail: vidlib@videolibrarian.com
Web: www.videolibrarian.com

Spotlight Review

Worst in Show

★★★

(2011) 59 min. DVD:
 \$19.99. *Breaking Glass*
Pictures (avail. from most
distributors).

Sporting a face that only a mother (possibly sight-impaired) could love, Rascal is a Chinese Crested purebred dog: hairless, wart-ridden, and toothless—meaning his tongue hangs out...a lot. In filmmakers Don R. Lewis and John Beck's *Worst in Show*—a documentary focusing on the 2010 World's Ugliest Dog competition held in Petaluma, CA—Rascal, a multiple award-winner owned by the somewhat obsessive celebrity-name-dropping Dane Andrew, faces tough competition in a crowded field. Other contenders include Miles Egstad's reigning champion Pabst, a boxer-mix with a serious under-bite; Jon Adler's Icky, a hairless dog sporting a mohawk (just like his owner); Ashley Brown's Winston, a Hurricane Katrina survivor; and Kathleen Francis's Princess Abby, a hunchbacked chihuahua with a deformed left eye. Although the contest—celebrating 20 years—might seem exploitative (the rules were actually rewritten after a cancer-ridden dog won



one year), these animals are clearly loved. Taking viewers behind the scenes, *Worst in Show* also features interviews with contest promoters and dog owners, including Susie Lockheed, owner of three-time champion Sam (whose first win one newspaper described as a "landslide victory of mythic proportions"). A blind Chinese Crested canine who looked like he walked off of a George A. Romero movie set, the ailing Sam was euthanized in 2005 at the age of 14. Along the way, viewers witness the usual emotions associated with beauty contests, ranging from simmering insecurity to outright backbiting—on the part of the owners, of course, not the dogs, who seem plenty happy to shine, however unlikely, in the spotlight. DVD extras include a directors' commentary, a pair of short films by the directors, and outtakes. Recommended. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

We're Moving!

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Video Newsbriefs

"Belle de Jour," "Traffic," and "Godzilla" Blu-rays Lead January Releases for Criterion

Criterion's January slate kicks off with the January 17 release of Luis Buñuel's iconic 1967 erotic art-house hit *Belle de Jour* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), featuring Catherine Deneuve as a chilly Paris housewife by night and bordello prostitute by day. Bonus features include audio commentary by author Michael Wood, interviews, and a booklet. Also available on January 17 is Steven Soderbergh's Oscar-winning 2000 drama *Traffic* (Blu-ray: \$39.95), which explores the subject of drugs intersecting with politics, business, and lifestyle along the U.S.-Mexico border. The star-studded film appears in an upgraded Blu-ray edition with audio commentaries and deleted scenes. Available January 24 is *Godzilla* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), featuring Ishiro Honda's original 1954 Japanese version and the 1956 American reworking (starring Raymond Burr) of the roaring granddaddy of all monster movies, a melancholy drama made in Japan when the country was still reeling from nuclear attack. Bonus features include audio commentary, interviews, and an illustrated audio essay. Also slated for the same date is Italian provocateur Francesco Rosi's rarely shown 1964 drama *The Moment of Truth* (DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95), which takes a visceral plunge into the life of a famous torero known as Miguelín—played by real-life bullfighting legend Miguel Mateo. Bonus features include an interview and a booklet. In addition, January 17 will see the release of the latest volume in the extra-less *Eclipse* series: *Three Popular Films by Jean-Pierre Gorin* (DVD: 3 discs, \$44.95), which compiles a trio of documentaries: *Poto and Cabengo* (1978), *Routine Pleasures* (1986), and *My Crazy Life* (1992).

"Lady and the Tramp: Diamond Collection" Blu-ray Coming in February from Walt Disney

Walt Disney Studios has announced the addition of *Lady and the Tramp* (Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99) to the high-definition Diamond Collection, slated for release on February 7. Generations of fans have fallen in love with Disney's 15th animated masterpiece—an irresistible song-filled adventure about Lady, a lovingly pampered cocker spaniel, and Tramp, a roguish mutt from across the tracks. *Lady and the Tramp: Diamond Edition* features the voices of Barbara Luddy,

Larry Roberts, Peggy Lee, and others, with new bonus features including "Inside Walt's Story Meetings" audio commentary, a "Remembering Dad" segment with Diane Disney Miller, three never-before-seen deleted scenes, and the unused song "I'm Free as the Breeze"—along with classic DVD extras such as production featurettes, storyboards, and music videos. The Academy Award-nominated *Cinderella* is also slated for a Diamond Collection release during the fall of this year.



"To Kill a Mockingbird" 50th Anniversary Edition Bows on Blu-ray from Universal

One of the silver screen's most beloved and critically-acclaimed films, *To Kill a Mockingbird* bows in a 50th anniversary edition on January 31 from Universal Studios Home Entertainment in a Limited Edition Collector's Series Blu-ray/DVD Combo pack for \$39.98 (with Blu-ray, DVD, and digital copies of the film, along with a hardcover book), a Blu-ray/DVD Combo set for \$26.98, and on DVD for \$19.98. Directed by Robert Mulligan, this powerful and poignant 1962 adaptation of Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel hits the half-century mark in a digitally remastered and fully restored edition created from high resolution 35mm original film elements. Screen legend Gregory Peck stars as courageous Southern lawyer Atticus Finch—an Academy Award-winning performance hailed by the American Film Institute as embodying the Greatest Movie Hero of All Time—in a tale of innocence, strength, and conviction that also features Robert Duvall, Brock Peters, Mary Badham, John Megna, Rosemary Murphy, and William Windom. Bonus features include audio commentary by Mulligan and producer Alan J. Pakula, a "Fearful Symmetry" making-of documentary with cast and crew interviews and a visit to Peck's hometown, a conversation with Peck (including interviews and home movies), "100 Years of Universal: Restoring the Classics" on the film restoration process, Peck's acceptance speeches for his Oscar and Life Achievement awards, an excerpt from Peck's daughter Cecelia's "Tribute to Gregory Peck," "Scout Remembers" featuring Badham, and more.



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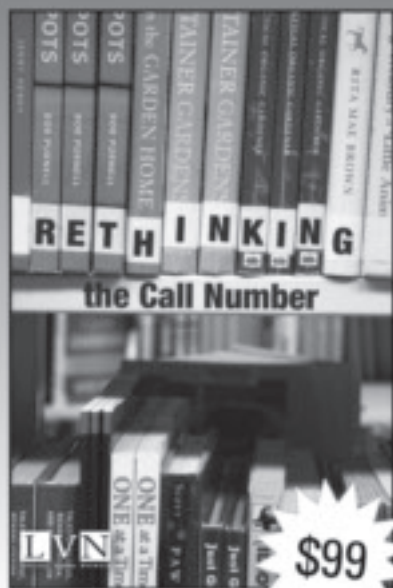
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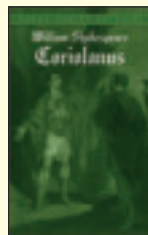


800-441-TAPE

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

Coming in January

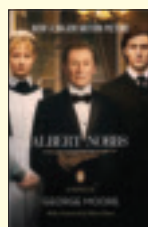
Coriolanus (Jan. 20) is an adaptation of Shakespeare's 17th-century tragic play. Directed by and starring Ralph Fiennes, the film costars Gerard Butler, Jessica Chastain, and Vanessa Redgrave.



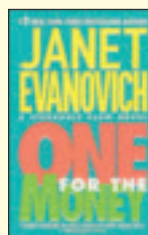
Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (Jan. 20) is adapted from the 2005 novel by Jonathan Safran Foer. Directed by Stephen Daldry, this 9/11-themed drama stars Tom Hanks, Sandra Bullock, John Goodman, and Thomas Horn.



Albert Nobbs (Jan. 27) is based on Irish writer George Moore's 1927 short story "The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs." Directed by Rodrigo Garcia, the film stars Glenn Close—who first played the cross-dressing titular character in a 1982 stage production—along with Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Mia Wasikowska, Brendan Gleeson, and Janet McTeer.



One for the Money (Jan. 27) is adapted from Janet Evanovich's 1994 first novel, featuring spirited female bounty hunter Stephanie Plum. Directed by Julie Anne Robinson, the film stars Katherine Heigl, Jason O'Mara, John Leguizamo, and Debbie Reynolds.

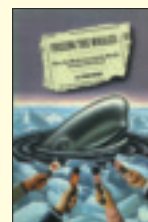


We Need to Talk About Kevin (Jan. 27) is based on Lionel Shriver's Orange Prize-winning 2003 novel. Directed by Lynne Ramsay, this story of a mother stricken with guilt over her son's murderous school rampage stars Tilda Swinton, John C. Reilly, and Ezra Miller.



Coming in February

Big Miracle (Feb. 3) is adapted from Tom Rose's 1989 nonfiction book *Freeing the Whales*, chronicling the Operation Breakthrough rescue effort. Directed by Ken Kwapis, the romantic drama stars Drew Barrymore, John Krasinsky, Kristen Bell, and Ted Danson.



The Woman in Black (Feb. 3) is based on the titular 1983 ghost story thriller by Susan Hill. Directed by James Watkins, the film stars Daniel Radcliffe, Ciarán Hinds, Janet McTeer, and Sophie Stuckey.



Journey 2: The Mysterious Island (Feb. 10) is loosely based on Jules Verne's 1864 adventure novel. A sequel to 2008's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, director Brad Peyton's update stars Dwayne Johnson, Vanessa Hudgens, Michael Caine, and Josh Hutcherson, who is reprising his role from the first film.

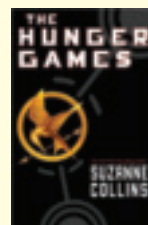


The Secret World of Arrietty (Feb. 17) is a Japanese-animated adaptation of Mary Norton's classic 1952 children's fantasy novel *The Borrowers*. Directed by Hiromasa Yonebayashi, the film features the voices of Amy Poehler, Will Arnett, and Carol Burnett.



Looking Ahead

Slated for March is **The Hunger Games**, the 2008 first book in Suzanne Collins's best-selling YA sci-fi trilogy. Directed by Gary Ross, the post-apocalyptic thriller stars Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Elizabeth Banks, Woody Harrelson, and Stanley Tucci.



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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

The Adventures of Tintin: The Game (Ubisoft, PS3/Wii/X360: \$39.99, Rated: E10+). Based on the new animated film by Steven Spielberg, this third-person action-adventure game finds players assuming the role of Tintin for a mysterious quest to find sunken pirate treasure.

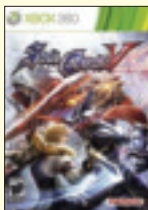
January 29—February 4

Final Fantasy XIII-2 (Square Enix, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: T). In this sequel to the blockbuster third-person role-playing game *Final Fantasy XIII*, players explore a richly developed world featuring both new and familiar faces, coupled with an enhanced strategic battle system.



NeverDead (Konami, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this third-person action game, players control Bryce Boltzmann—subject of a life-altering tragedy 500 years ago that rendered him immortal—as he pursues redemption through the extermination of demonic forces in the modern day world, working with his agency partner, Arcadia.

SoulCalibur V (Namco Bandai, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: RP). Taking place 17 years after the previous *SoulCalibur*, this latest entry in the premier weapons-based head-to-head fighting series continues the epic story of warriors in search of the legendary “souls swords” in 17th-century Europe.

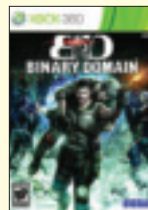


Zumba: Fitness Rush (Majesco, X360: \$49.99, Rated: RP). This Microsoft Kinect based exercise game features 42 hot new

music tracks, sizzling choreography, and a huge variety of new dance styles and arenas, offering players a fun way to dance their way into shape.

February 5—February 11

Binary Domain (Sega, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). Players land in the middle of a fast-paced and intense third-person battle for humanity in robot-invaded 2080 Tokyo, fighting through the derelict lower levels of the city while controlling an international peacekeeping squad that soon starts to question their actions.



The Darkness II (2K Games, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: RP). Set two years after the original supernatural first-person action game, players take control of Jackie Estacado, still recovering from the tragedy of his girlfriend's death. A sudden, unprovoked attack on Jackie heralds the start of a full-scale mob war that opens the door for the Darkness to reemerge.

Devil May Cry HD Collection (Capcom, PS3/X360: \$39.99, Rated: M). Compiling the first three *Devil May Cry* games that originally appeared on the PS2, this third-person action series puts players in the boots of Dante, a demon hunter in search of those who killed his family.

Inversion (Namco Bandai, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: RP). In this innovative third-person shooter, players take on the role of Davis Russel, a young husband and father who finds himself thrust into war—and forced to master zero gravity—when his peaceful city is invaded by an unknown enemy.

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning (Electronic Arts, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). From the vibrant city of Rathir to the vast region of Dalenarth to the grim dungeons of the Brigand's Hall Cavern, players battle through this sprawling third-person role-playing game inspired by the works of bestselling author R.A. Salvatore.



February 12—February 18

Ninja Gaiden 3 (Tecmo Koei, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: RP). In this latest entry from the bestselling third-person action-adven-

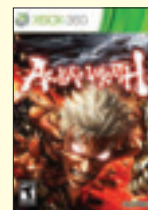
ture series, players once again pick up the Dragon Sword of super ninja Ryu Hayabusa for a new blood-soaked journey revolving around a mysterious masked figure.

SSX (Electronic Arts, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: RP). A modern day reinvention of one of the most critically acclaimed snowboarding arcade franchises of all-time, this third-person extreme sports entry serves up adrenaline-packed gameplay across iconic mountain ranges.

UFC Undisputed 3 (THQ, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: T). The bestselling third-person mixed-martial-arts franchise returns, taking players inside the Octagon for brutal toe-to-toe combat.

February 19—February 25

Asura's Wrath (Capcom, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: T). In this third-person action game, players take on the role of Asura, a former deity looking for revenge after being betrayed by his fellow gods and stripped of his powers.



Syndicate (Electronic Arts, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this re-imagining of the 1990s cult classic franchise, players embark on a unique sci-fi shooter adventure in a world where business is war, utilizing chip-enhanced technology to breach, manipulate, and control the wired world.

February 26—March 3

Blades of Time (Konami, PS3/X360: \$59.99, Rated: RP). In this third-person action-adventure game, players take on the role of gun/sword-wielding treasure hunter Ayumi, who carves a path of destruction to break free of the grasp of a mysterious possessed island.

TV on DVD/Blu-ray

Available Now

Case Histories (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Based on novels by Kate Atkinson, this *Masterpiece Mystery!*-aired six-part 2011 crime drama stars Jason Isaacs as astute Detective Jackson Brodie.



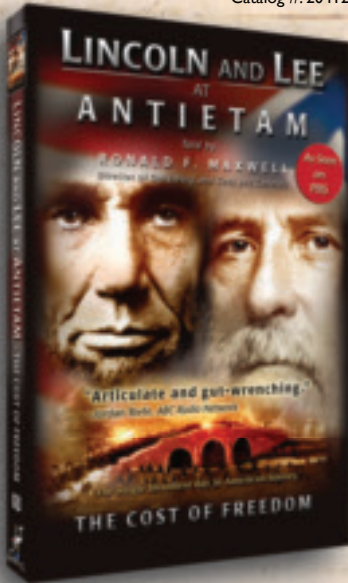
Doctor Who: The Complete Sixth Series (BBC, DVD: 6 discs, \$79.99; Blu-ray: 6

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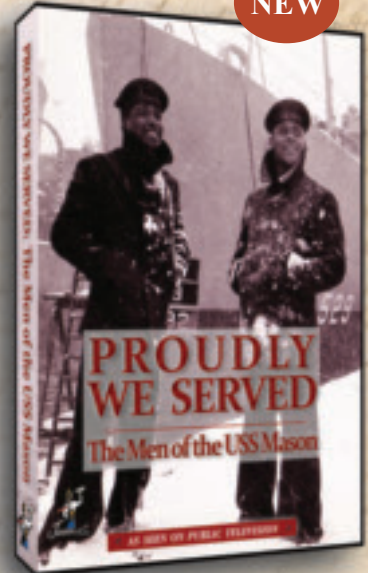
Written, produced and directed by Robert Child, *Lincoln and Lee at Antietam – The Cost of Freedom* vividly brings to life the story of America's fight for freedom in a battle that changed the course of the Civil War.

"Might be described as the definitive work on America's bloodiest battle. A very valuable addition to school collections." – *School Library Journal*

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NEW

This is the thrilling true story of the USS Mason (DE 529) and its crew, the only African-American sailors to take a U.S. Navy warship into battle during World War II. They challenged the segregation of the U.S. Military, fought the Nazi U-boats, and won. Narrated by actor **Ossie Davis**, the film interweaves the personal stories of individual crew members with archival footage of the ship and crew produced by the Navy.

"...this documentary deserves a spot in U.S. and African American history collections." – *Booklist Online*

WHISPERS OF ANGELS

MSRP \$24.95 • UPC# 6-4603202419-7
Catalog #: 20241 • Length: 60 Minutes



Defiant, brave and free, the great abolitionists Thomas Garrett, William Still and Harriet Tubman, along with hundreds of lesser known and nameless opponents of slavery, formed a Corridor of Courage stretching from Maryland's eastern shore through the length of Delaware to Philadelphia and beyond — making the Underground Railroad a real route to freedom for enslaved Americans before the Civil War.

Actors Edward Asner and Blair Underwood portray the two most prominent abolitionists on the eastern line of the Underground Railroad, Thomas Garrett and William Still.

"...This incredible movie provides excellent historical information about the underground railroad, the history of slavery and how two brave men bucked the system to insure that slaves could find their way to freedom and that people would know their stories. Highly recommended." – *Educational Media Reviews Online*

THE WERETH ELEVEN

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Catalog #: 20487 • Length: 60 Minutes • Plus Extra Features



NEW

The Wereth Eleven is an ambitious docudrama based on the true story of eleven African-American soldiers who were ruthlessly murdered by the Nazi SS during the Battle of the Bulge. The film weaves exciting visual effects, never before seen archival footage, and compelling interviews to detail one of the least known atrocities committed during World War II. *The Wereth Eleven* stars Ken Arnold (*Abduction*), and is narrated by actor Corey Reynolds (TNT's *The Closer* and Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal*).

"I was really moved and saddened by the story. I set out on a mission to make sure the citizens of America and Europe knew what had happened to the eleven victims and make sure they knew of their contribution during World War II." – Joseph Small, Executive Producer, *The Wereth Eleven*

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discs, \$89.99). Compiling all of the episodes from the 2011 sixth season, this latest entry from the popular sci-fi series starring Matt Smith as the titular time-traveler includes the 2010 holiday special "A Christmas Carol," featuring Michael Gambon.

Farscape: The Complete Series (A&E, Blu-ray: 20 discs, \$199.95). Featuring all four seasons—also separately available in five-disc high-definition sets for \$69.95 each—this Emmy-nominated 1999-2003 adventure sci-fi series from Rockne S. O'Bannon stars Ben Browder and Claudia Black.



Sledge Hammer! The Complete Series (Image, DVD: 5 discs, \$34.98). David Rasche, Anne-Marie Martin, and Harrison Page star in this 1986-88 cult classic police spoof series.

Underbelly: The Trilogy (eOne, DVD: 12 discs, \$99.99). Inspired by a real-life 1970s Australian crime wave, this boxed set includes three 13-episode series from 2008-10 starring Paul Tassone and Caroline Craig: *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Golden Mile*, and *War on the Streets*.

January 3

Alfred Hitchcock Presents: Season Five (Universal, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.99). The "Master of Suspense" is back with this 38-episode 1959-60 fifth season of the Golden Globe-winning cult classic series, featuring guest stars including Brian Keith, Walter Matthau, Steve McQueen, James Coburn, and Suzanne Pleshette.



Dr. Willoughby (Acorn, DVD: \$29.99). Joanna Lumley stars as a conniving actress who plays the titular kindhearted physician on a trashy daytime soap opera in this 1999 comedy series that also features Scott Hickman and Brian Protheroe.

Justified: The Complete Second Season (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.95; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.95). This 2011 sophomore season of the crime action series based on a character created by Elmore Leonard follows the duties of reassigned U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens (Timothy Olyphant), who protects his rural Kentucky hometown.

Man in a Suitcase: Set 2 (Acorn, DVD:

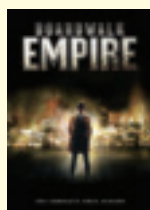
4 discs, \$59.99). Set during the Cold War era, this second box of episodes from the 1967-68 spy series stars Richard Bradford as a rogue intelligence agent for hire.

Mildred Pierce (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$49.99). Winner of two Emmy Awards, this 2011 five-part drama from filmmaker Todd Haynes follows a divorcee during the Depression, and stars Kate Winslet, Guy Pearce, Melissa Leo, Brian F. O'Byrne, and Hope Davis.

Royal Pains: Season Three, Volume One (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$26.99). Mark Feuerstein stars as Hamptons doctor Hank Lawson in this first volume from the 2011 third season of the USA Network dramedy series, with guest appearances by Joanna Gleason, Henry Winkler, and Greg Jennings.

January 10

Boardwalk Empire: The Complete First Season (HBO, DVD: 5 discs, \$59.99; Blu-ray: 5 discs, \$79.99). Steve Buscemi, Michael Pitt, and Paz de la Huerta star in this 2010 debut season of the Atlantic City-set Prohibition period drama based on the book by Nelson Johnson.



Columbo Mystery Movie Collection 1994-2003 (Universal, DVD: 3 discs, \$26.99). Peter Falk is back as the titular iconic detective in this compilation of seven TV movies from 1994-2003, including *Butterfly in Shades of Grey*, *Undercover*, *Strange Bedfellows*, *A Trace of Murder*, *Ashes to Ashes*, *Murder with Too Many Notes*, and *Columbo Likes the Nightlife*.

Dennis the Menace: The Final Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 5 discs, \$29.95). Based on the comic strip by Hank Ketcham, this fourth and final 1962-63 season features Jay North as mischievous youngster Dennis Mitchell, who harasses his senior neighbor, Mr. Wilson (Gale Gordon).

Doctor Who: Invasion of the Dinosaurs (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.99). The Doctor (Jon Pertwee) is flabbergasted when he discovers a Tyrannosaurus Rex on the streets of London in this six-part story arc from 1974. Also newly available is **Doctor Who: The Android Invasion** (DVD: \$24.99), featuring Tom Baker as the titular time-traveler.



Hawaii Five-O: The Twelfth and Final Season (Paramount, DVD: 5 discs, \$49.99). This 1979-80 12th season features the ultimate showdown between detective Steve McGarrett (Jack Lord) and his international super-criminal nemesis Wo Fat (Khigh Dhiegh).

Pacific Blue: The Complete Series (Mill Creek, DVD: 18 discs, \$69.98). Santa Monica bike cops protect beachgoers in this compilation that features the complete 1996-2000 action series starring Mario Lopez, Rick Rossovich, and Shanna Moakler. Also newly available is **Pacific Blue: The Complete First Season** (DVD: 2 discs, \$9.98).



Primeval, Volume Three (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$49.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$59.99). This third volume includes the complete 2011 fourth and fifth seasons of the BAFTA-nominated adventure fantasy series starring Andrew Lee Potts, Hannah Spearritt, and Ben Miller.

January 17

Adam-12: Season Six (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.99). An LAPD vet and rookie cop (Martin Milner and Kent McCord) continue to solve crime cases across the City of Angels in this penultimate 1973-74 sixth season of the police drama created by Jack Webb.

Delocated! (Warner, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). Created by Jon Glaser, this compilation includes the 2009-10 first and second seasons of the wacky Adult Swim-aired series built around a reality show that features a family under the Witness Protection Program.



MAD: Season One, Part Two (Warner, DVD: \$19.99). Compiling the second group of episodes from the 2010-11 debut season of the animated sketch-comedy series inspired by the titular magazine, this set features spoofs of *Pokemon*, *Two and a Half Men*, and *Twilight*.

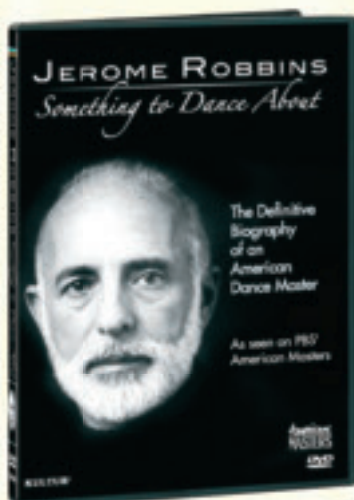
Sliders: The Fifth and Final Season (Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.99). A group of Sliders find their way into parallel universes in this 18-episode set from the 1999-2000 fifth and final season of the sci-fi series starring Cleavant Derricks, Kari Wuhrer, and Tembi Locke.

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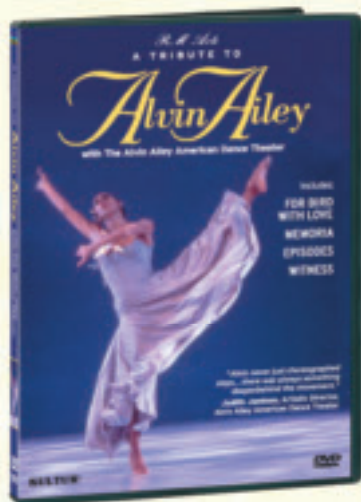
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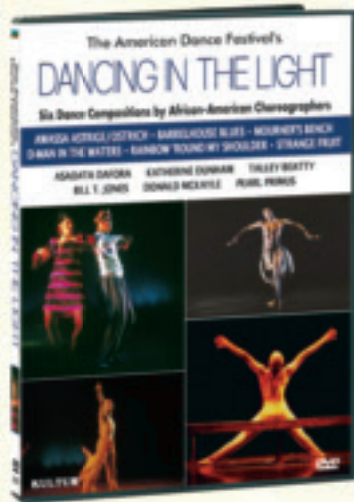
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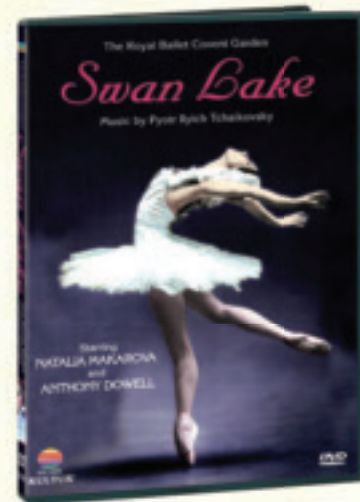
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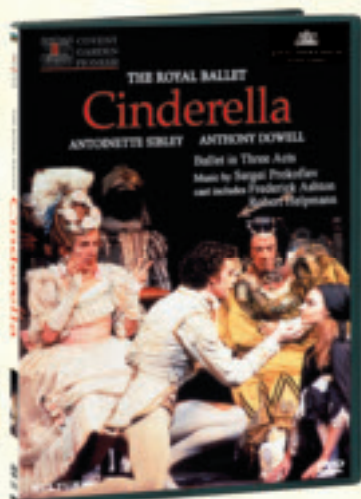
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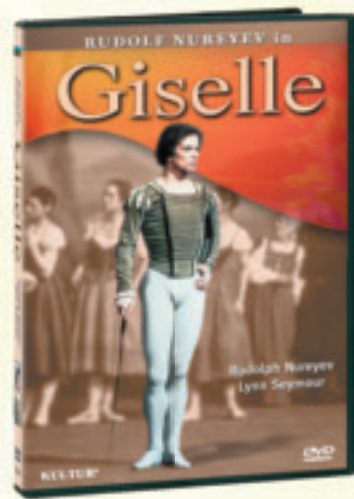
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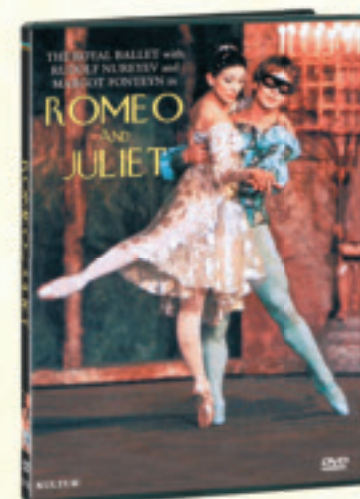
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Waking the Dead: The Complete Season Six (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). Detective Superintendent Peter Boyd (Trevor Eve) heads up a group of detectives and scientists working to solve cold cases in this 2007 sixth season of the International Emmy Award-winning mystery series.

January 24

Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations—Collection 6, Part 2 (Gaiam, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.98). Foodie Anthony Bourdain hosts this collection of episodes from his Travel Channel-aided culinary cultural series, including the 100th episode “What Were We Thinking?”



Kojak: The Complete Movie Collection (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.95). Created by Emmy and Oscar-winner Abby Mann, this 1973-1990 eight-movie collection starring Telly Savalas as the titular bald detective includes *The Marcus-Nelson Murders*, *The Belarus File*, *The Prince of Justice*, *Ariana*, *Fatal Flaw*, *None So Blind*, *It's Always Something*, and *Flowers for Matty*.

Mannix: The Sixth Season (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$49.99). Mike Connors stars as determined detective Joe Mannix in this 24-episode set from the 1972-73 sixth season of the Golden Globe-winning action series, featuring guest appearances by Rip Torn, Robert Reed, and William Shatner.

Tyler Perry's Meet the Browns: Season 4 (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99). Compiling episodes 61-80, this set from Tyler Perry's series focusing on the comedic ups and downs of the Brown family stars David Mann, Tamela Mann, and Lamman Rucker.

January 31

Hey Dude: Season 2 (Shout! Factory, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.99). The young workers at the Bar None Ranch are back in this 13-episode 1989 sophomore season of the Nickelodeon teen comedy starring David Brisbin, David Lascher, and Christine Taylor.



Poirot: Series 1 and Poirot: Series 2 (Acorn, Blu-ray: 2 discs each, \$49.99 each). Agatha Christie's super sleuth is showcased in these collections—newly available on

high-definition Blu-ray—starring David Suchet as debonair Belgian detective Hercule Poirot.

February 7

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Grave Danger (Paramount, Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$24.99). Newly available on high-definition Blu-ray, this two-part finale of the 2004-05 fifth season of the crime series is directed by Quentin Tarantino and features guest stars Tony Curtis and Frank Gorshin.

Downton Abbey: Season 2 (PBS, DVD: 3 discs, \$44.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99). The Crawley family and their servants experience trials and triumphs in this 2011 second season of the BAFTA and Emmy-winning WWI-era period drama starring Hugh Bonneville, Maggie Smith, and Elizabeth McGovern.



Far from the Madding Crowd (PBS, DVD: \$24.99). Paloma Baeza, Nathaniel Parker, and Jonathan Firth star in this 1998 *Masterpiece Classic* adaptation of the Victorian novel by Thomas Hardy.

Father Dowling Mysteries: The First Season (Paramount, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99). Tom Bosley stars as a Chicago priest who also works as a detective in this 1989 first season of the mystery series that also features Tracy Nelson and Mary Wickes.



Laramie: The Second Season (Timeless, DVD: 8 discs, \$39.98). Starring John Smith and Robert Fuller, this 33-episode 1960-61 sophomore season of the family Western series features guest stars including Ernest Borgnine, Lee Van Cleef, and Edward G. Robinson Jr.

New Tricks: Season Six (Acorn, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99). Semi-retired detectives tackle cold cases in this 2009 sixth season of the crime dramedy series starring Alun Armstrong and Amanda Redman.

Police Woman: Second Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 6 discs, \$44.99). Undercover police sergeant Pepper Anderson (Angie Dickinson) is back in this 1975-76 second season of the Golden Globe-winning action series, with guest appearances by

Robert Goulet, Ida Lupino, Erik Estrada, and Joan Collins.

February 14

Beavis and Butt-Head, Volume 4 (Paramount, DVD: 2 discs, \$22.99; Blu-ray: \$26.99). Created and vocalized by Mike Judge, this fourth volume features more immature antics from the animated dorks Beavis and Butt-Head, newly available on high-definition Blu-ray.



Doctor Who: The Caves of Androzani (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.99). The politically war-torn world of Androzani Minor is the setting for this special edition of the four-part 1984 story arc featuring Peter Davison as the Doctor. Also newly available is **Doctor Who: The Sensorites** (DVD: \$24.99), with William Hartnell as the Doctor.

Family Matters: The Complete Second Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99). Super-nerd Steve Urkel (Jaleel White) continues to annoy his Chicago neighbors in this 1990-91 second season of the Emmy-nominated sitcom, featuring guest stars such as Larenz Tate, Paul Winfield, and Beah Richards.

Murder, She Wrote: 4 Movie Collection (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$26.99). Angela Lansbury stars as author-turned-mystery-solver Jessica Fletcher in this collection that includes the TV movies—aired between 1997-2003—*South by Southwest*, *A Story to Die For*, *The Last Free Man*, and *The Celtic Riddle*.

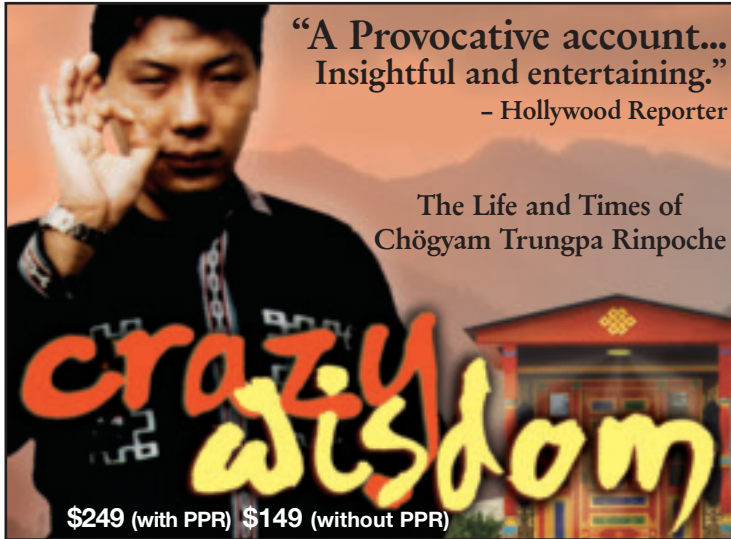
Overland Trail: The Complete Series (Timeless, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.98). William Bendix and Doug McClure star in this 1960 Western adventure series that includes guest appearances by Mary Tyler Moore, Robert Loggia, and Slim Pickens.

Robin of Sherwood: Set 2 (Acorn, Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$59.99). Newly available on high-definition Blu-ray, this second set from the 1984-86 BAFTA award-winning historical drama series stars Michael Praed, Ray Winstone, Jason Connery, and Judi Trott.



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DVD: 4 discs, \$24.98). Dean Cameron and Stuart Fratkin star as teen aliens who cruise Earth for girls in this 1990-91 sci-fi comedy series.

February 21

Hazel: The Complete Second Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.99). Based on *Saturday Evening Post* cartoons, this 1962-63 second season showcases the escapades of the titular boisterous maid (Shirley Booth).



Last of the Summer Wine Vintage 1991 (BBC, DVD: \$24.99). Created by Roy Clarke, this compilation includes episodes from the 1991 13th season of the long-running comedy series starring Bill Owen, Peter Sallis, and Brian Wilde.

Nurse Jackie: Season Three (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). Edie Falco is back in her Emmy and Golden Globe-nominated role as a pill-addicted NYC nurse in this 12-episode 2011 third season of the Showtime-aired dramedy series.

Weeds: Season Seven (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). Set after her three years of jail time, the marijuana-focused escapades of former soccer mom Nancy Botwin (Mary-Louise Parker) are showcased in this 2011 seventh season of the acclaimed Showtime dramedy.



February 28

Anthony Bourdain: A Cook's Tour—The Complete Series (Questar, DVD: 6 discs, \$59.99). Aired on the Food Network, this 35-episode 2002-03 travelogue series is hosted by epicure Anthony Bourdain.

Here Come the Brides: The Complete Second Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 6 discs, \$44.99). Set in a mid-19th-century Pacific Northwest logging camp, this 1969-70 second and final season of the series—revolving around the Bolt brothers and their search for love—stars Robert Brown, Bobby Sherman, David Soul, and Joan Blondell.

Law & Order: The Tenth Year (Universal, DVD: 5 discs, \$36.99). This 24-epi-

sode 1999-2000 tenth season of Dick Wolf's long-running crime drama series stars Jerry Orbach, Jesse L. Martin, Sam Waterston, and S. Epatha Merkerson.

Looking Ahead

Coming in March are the first seasons of *Game of Thrones* and *Pickers*, the second season of *Superjail!*, and more episodes of *Doctor Who*. Coming in April is the fifth season of *Ice Road Truckers*.

New to DVD/Blu-ray or Re-priced

Barbara Cartland: My Life Is a Novel (Kultur, DVD: \$19.99). Prolific British romance novelist Barbara Cartland (1901-2000) is showcased in this hour-shy biographical profile from 1996. Also newly available are **Aaron Copland: Music in the 20's**, **Discovering Havana: In the Footsteps of Hemingway**, **Irish Lighthouses**, **Jean-Paul Sartre: A 20 Year Absence?**, **The Legacy of Rosina Lhevinne**, and **The Trans-Siberian Muse**.



Bill Moyers: Amazing Grace (Athena, DVD: \$29.99). The enduring popularity of the titular spiritual classic is the subject of this fascinating PBS-aided documentary (VL-3/91 ★★★★★) exploring the historical and cultural history of the famed hymn, from its 18th-century inception to the modern day. Bonus features include the musical portrait "Pure Pete Seeger" from *Bill Moyers Journal*, and a 12-page viewer's guide.

Chess Kids (Lynn Hamrick Productions, DVD: \$19.95, web: chesskidsmovie.com). Lynn Hamrick's exceptionally entertaining documentary (VL-11/96 ★★1/2) follows the 1990 World Youth Chess competition, interviewing several strikingly eloquent young players, while also subtly examining one of the most hotly debated issues in the chess world: the role of gender. Bonus features include a follow-up on the players.



Great Directors (Kino Lorber, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95). In Angela Ismailos's documentary (VL-7/11 ★★★★★), a group of 10 internationally renowned filmmakers speak about their work, including Bernardo Bertolucci, Catherine Breillat, Todd Haynes, Richard Linklater, David Lynch, John Sayles, and

Agnès Varda. DVD extras include bonus interviews with each director.

Reel Injun (Lorber, DVD: \$29.95). Featuring Clint Eastwood, Adam Beach, and others, Canadian director Neil Diamond's thought-provoking overview (VL-7/10 ★★★★★) looks at a century's worth of Native American representations in film, from Thomas Edison's silent shorts to Disney's animated *Pocahontas*.



The Road to World War II (Questar, DVD: 6 discs, \$49.95). Hosted by former CBS correspondent Eric Sevareid, this 16-part series features original newsreels and rare archival footage in episodes including "Versailles: The Lost Peace," "The Great Depression and Foreign Affairs," "Latin America," "The Italian-Ethiopian War," "Japan Invades China," and "War Comes to Pearl Harbor." Bonus features include more than 50 Hearst newsreels.

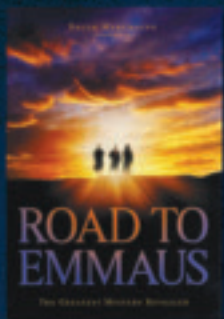
Satchmo: Louis Armstrong (S'More, DVD: \$14.98). Compiling more than a dozen classic performances, this 1989 documentary from the "Masters of American Music" series showcases instrumentalist Louis Armstrong and includes interviews with Tony Bennett, Wynton Marsalis, Dexter Gordon, and Dave and Iola Brubeck.

Toys of the Past (TM Books & Video, DVD: \$9.99). Hosted by Dr. William Furnish, this 1998 program (VL-11/98 ★★★★★) takes viewers on a tour of Furnish's amazing toy collection—from fire trucks to marionettes, wind-up camels to Charlie Chaplin action figures—while also exploring the ingeniousness and inventiveness of toy design throughout history.



Vietnam: The Secret Agent (New Day Films, DVD: \$50: public libraries; \$179: high schools; \$229: colleges & universities; web: newday.com). Directed by Jacki Ochs, this 1984 documentary combines archival footage and interviews to explore the moral, legal, and public health effects of chemical warfare during the Vietnam War. [Note: this is also newly available on home video for \$24.95 from Human Arts Association at www.vietnamthesecretagent.com.]

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Bruce Marchiano stars in this dramatic production which helps viewers discover what may have happened during the miraculous journey on the Road to Emmaus. It's a story that has captivated the imagination of many generations. Mourning the death of Jesus, two first-century travelers were joined by a mysterious stranger. Over the next few hours, the stranger revealed many mysteries from the past. Soon, the purpose of Jesus' life became clear...and the travelers' sadness turned to great joy. Discover the key to life...on the Road to Emmaus. Drama, 30 minutes.

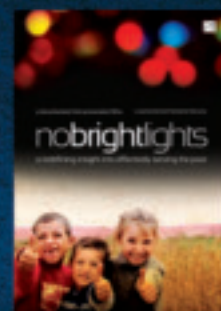
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Patrick

He's been shrouded in myth for centuries, but who is the real Saint Patrick of Ireland? This DVD explores the true story behind the legends surrounding his life. As a sixteen-year-old boy he was captured and sold as a slave to Ireland. After escaping enslavement he went home, but in an astonishing twist, he returned to Ireland to bring Christianity to his former captors. Learn about Patrick's extraordinary life in this docu-drama, featuring enlightening interviews with noted scholars and captivating reenactments of Patrick's life. 45 minutes.

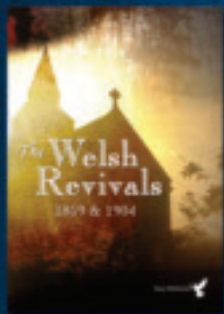
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No Bright Lights

No Bright Lights gives an up close and personal profile of Networks Romania, a relief organization reaching out to some of Romania's poorest people. In a shifting social and political environment, many Romanian children find themselves abandoned to the streets where they experience extreme poverty and injustice. Networks Romania works with the community to help stabilize families through word and deed. *No Bright Lights* takes us on an enlightening journey and delivers a critical message that may redefine the way we look at outreach. Documentary, 46 minutes.

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The Welsh Revivals of 1859 and 1904

The revivals of 1859 and 1904 in Wales stand as powerful examples, marked by a commitment to prayer, bold preaching for repentance within the church, and a community-wide spiritual awakening. During this time, churches were packed, and crime rates and other social ills decreased dramatically. This documentary traces the origins of the revival, introduces us to its leaders, and follows its lasting impact upon the world and on world missions. Documentary, 30 minutes.

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More than Chocolate and Cheese

What comes immediately to mind when you hear the word Switzerland? The majestic Alps, Swiss watches, international banking, chocolate and cheese? Switzerland encompasses all these things and more. Take an armchair journey through the sites and sounds of the real Switzerland in this fast-paced, fun and informative documentary. You'll learn about Switzerland's heritage, its unique form of democracy and its sometimes controversial position of neutrality in world affairs. From small quaint villages to magnificent mountain landscapes you'll see why Switzerland is so much more than chocolate and cheese. 28 minutes.

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Paul the Apostle

From the Emmy award-winning director Roger Young (*Joseph* and *Jesus*) comes the spectacular story of Paul the Apostle. Paul, originally known as Saul of Tarsus, was at the forefront of efforts to stamp out the early church until he was stopped on the road to Damascus, forever changing his life and mission. He joyfully faced persecution, imprisonment, and peril in order to share the message of Christianity. Beautifully shot in the Moroccan desert, *Paul the Apostle* is a sweeping saga of the man who brought the Gospel to the Western world. Drama, 145 minutes.

DVD - #501420D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01420 3



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★★★★ = Excellent

★★★ = Good

★★ = Fair

★ = Poor

5 Days of War ★★½

Anchor Bay, 113 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Director Renny Harlin forgoes his usual mindless action-adventure approach in this earnest, well-meaning drama about the 2008 conflict between Russia and the former Soviet republic of Georgia. The perspective here is unabashedly pro-Georgian, portraying Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (shown in news footage) as a cold-eyed villain, and the mercenary troops he unleashes on his neighbor as murderous thugs. By contrast, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili (Andy Garcia) is depicted as a freedom-loving nationalist willing to bend over backward to avoid bloodshed. And a coda, in which Georgian survivors testify about their losses while holding up photos of relatives killed in the invasion, represents the most direct form of accusation. But even if one uncritically accepts this view of events, the embedded fictional narrative is old-fashioned and hokey, centering on war correspondent Thomas Anders (Rupert Friend), who struggles to reveal to the outside world the atrocities being perpetrated. Anders' experiences turn the film into a chain of firefights, hair's-breadth escapes, explosions, and confrontations that become staring matches, occasionally interrupted by strategy sessions in Saakashvili's office, and haltingly romantic moments between the brave newsman and a Georgian woman. While Harlin handles the action sequences well, he's much less adroit with the more intimate material, and the "whole world is watching" denouement borders on the absurd. Optional. (F. Swietek)



5 Star Day ★★★

Breaking Glass, 97 min., not rated. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.98, Feb. 7

On his birthday, Jake Gibson (Cam Gigandet)—the callow twentysomething hero of this modest dramedy—reads a newspaper astrology column predicting that prosperity

and success in relationships await him. Almost instantly he is brutally downsized out of his corporate job, the first in a chain of personal disasters that make him decide to disprove astrology in his concurrent make-or-break college ethics class. Thus Jake hunts down (or stalks, as the case may be) other individuals born within hours of him in the same Chicago hospital, to see if their natal anniversaries went similarly awry. But during the process of becoming entangled in the personal lives of these strangers, Jake finds renewed purpose and a bright new start for himself. An alt-indie vibe permeates this minor serio-comic opus, which boasts an eminently college-radio-worthy soundtrack and a nice feel for the Windy City and its environs. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)



50/50 ★★★

Summit, 100 min., R, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$30.49, Jan. 24

The title of this poignant serio-comic film stems from the survival odds that 27-year-old Adam (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) faces after being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Seemingly healthy Adam works as an NPR producer, and regularly jogs around his hometown of Seattle. But occasionally his back aches and he suffers night sweats, a situation that leads him to discover that a large, malignant tumor is growing along his spine. Sharing Adam's shock, dread, and bewilderment are his raunchy buddy, Kyle (Seth Rogen); sexy, self-absorbed artist girlfriend, Rachael (Bryce Dallas Howard); and anxious mother (Anjelica Huston), who's caring for his Alzheimer's-afflicted father (Serge Houde). Predictably, each react differently. Adam's greatest support comes from Katherine (Anna Kendrick), the earnest young psychotherapist assigned to his case. Director Jonathan Levine elicits endearing performances from the ensemble, including the cranky curmudgeons in chemotherapy who get Adam high on marijuana-laced macaroons; but most memorable is the genuine friendship between Adam and Kyle. An emotionally cathartic, ultimately upbeat film, this is recommended. (S. Granger)



Aftershock ★★★

New Video, 136 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99

Although this Chinese film opens with the famous 1976 earthquake that struck Tangshan, China—killing an estimated 240,000 people—and ends with the Sichuan quake of 2008, this is no disaster movie. Rather, *Aftershock* serves up a sweep-



ing historical melodrama, a crowd pleaser with real-life resonance and no political subtext (kind of like a Chinese version of *Titanic*). The opening spectacle is used to illustrate the scale of the event that shatters one family, setting up a "Sophie's choice" dilemma for the hysterical, panicked mother (Fan Xu)—a decision that haunts the survivors over the decades. The foreboding shadow of Sichuan also hangs over the film, while the intervening years provide an interesting, if uncritical, survey of China during and after Mao. *Aftershock* may be full of sentimentality, but director Feng Xiaogang effectively explores the subject of loss while also paying tribute to the dead and damaged. While *Aftershock* didn't get much international acclaim or attention, it was hugely successful in China. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Amer ★★½

Olive, 90 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

The deliriously stylish Belgian film *Amer*, which revolves around a highly imaginative (and perhaps borderline mad) heroine named Ana, offers an homage to the beloved Italian horror genre known as "giallo," complete with overripe colors, intense close-ups, visceral imagery, flamboyant camerawork, hints of voyeurism—and, in a departure from the norm, almost no dialogue. *Amer* is a movie seen through keyholes, down hallways and staircases, through windows, and under doors, but mostly via the overheated mind's eye of Ana (played as a child, adolescent, and adult by Cassandra Forêt, Charlotte Eugène Guibeaud, and Marie Bos, respectively) as she transforms family drama and everyday encounters into hothouse moments of sexual desire and repression, conspiracy, witchcraft, stalking, and murder. We see the young Ana attempting to extract a pocket watch from the stiff hands of her grandfather's corpse, and then imagining him awakening; the teenager strutting before a group of leering men and realizing the power—and threat—of her sexuality; and the grown woman facing terror from a menacing taxi driver and a masked slasher. Writer-directors Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani have re-created the texture and psycho-sexual atmosphere of giallo's greatest works in a triptych that could be a horror flick, a coming-of-age story, or a twisted Walter Mitty adventure from a Dario Argento fanatic. Unlikely to have wide appeal, this cult-film-in-the-making is still a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



The Art of Getting By ★★

Fox, 84 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Writer-director Gavin Wiesen's *The Art of Getting By* finds precocious NYC prep school

FAMILY OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

DOUBLE FEATURES

THE LAST GREAT RIDE / LITTLE HEROES

Ian worries that his summer at Grandma's will be totally lame – even with his spirited dog Bentley with him. When Jules, the cute tomboy next door to Grandma Mimi's befriends him, the adventures begin, for there is a dark and haunted mansion. Can Ian and Jules solve the mystery of who owns the old house... really? Stars Academy Award™ Winner Ernest Borgnine, Eileen Brennan and Jason Hervey.

A young girl's heroic spirit and her faithful dog's phenomenal courage join to perform an impossible rescue! **Little Heroes** is a thrilling family outdoor adventure based on an amazing true story! Stars Raeann Simpson, Katherine Willis, and Keith Christensen.



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WIND DANCER / WOLF MOUNTAIN

Winner of the Worldfest Silver Award and awarded the Family Channel Seal of Approval, **WIND DANCER** is the touching and inspirational story of a spirited, purebred horse who holds the key to a young girl's future. Stars Brian Keith, Mel Harris, and Matt McCoy.

Mischief, myth and energy combine to form the incredible outdoor adventure of **WOLF MOUNTAIN**. In the woods of Wolf Mountain Park, Indian legend says that a "wolf spirit" exists and brings secret powers to those who follow the trail of honor and justice. Starring Mickey Rooney, Robert Z'Dar and Bo Hopkins.



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WALKING THUNDER / LONG ROAD HOME

John Denver, James Read, David Tom and Chief Ted Thin Elk star in this family outdoor adventure tale of the American west. When young Jacob's family gets caught in a terrible blizzard, their covered wagon provides little shelter. But the greatest challenge yet lies ahead – Jacob must confront the wild grizzly bear known only as **Walking Thunder**!

Seth is a twelve-year old city boy that is sent to live on a farm in Utah with his grandparents. When a giant grizzly attacks their neighbor's sheep, it becomes the story of a man and a boy against the untamed wilderness. **The Long Road Home** is a gripping family outdoor adventure that stars Michael Ansara, Mary Elizabeth Winstead and T.J. Lowther.



Cat # EPR-DV-2222 UPC 7-40178-22222-3

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misfit George Zinavoy (Fredie Highmore) dabbling in a first romance while struggling toward graduation. George is yet another modern-day Holden Caulfield, a student who literally does no work, although Principal Martinson (Blair Underwood) warns him of dire consequences. Instead of studying, the loner strikes up a relationship with classmate Sally (Emma Roberts) and painter alum Dustin (Michael Angarano), eventually introducing them to each other in what proves to be a major misstep. Meanwhile troubles escalate at home, where George is nagged by his clingy mother (Rita Wilson) and he discovers a secret about his stepfather (Sam Robards). Nothing about this rings remotely true. The writing—particularly the protagonist's narration—is much too precious, sounding like it comes straight from a word processor rather than any human; and the plot turns are both predictable and incredible (the most ridiculous involves Martinson's ultimatum that if George wants to graduate, he'll have to complete a full year's coursework in the remaining three weeks of the term—cut to montage of him scribbling away to meet the deadline). At one point George admits, "I have nothing to say"; unfortunately, he seems to say it for nearly an hour and a half. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



Astral City: A Spiritual Journey ★★

Strand, 102 min., in Portuguese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

The most expensive Brazilian film ever made, *Astral City* takes viewers on a New Age-y journey, based on a book by Chico Xavier, a self-styled medium who claimed the story was related to him by a deceased doctor named Andre Luiz. After dying, Luiz (Renato Prieto) awakens in a dark wasteland where he and others stumble about in confusion and pain. Rescued by medics, Luiz is carried to a city called Our Home, where he's tended to in a gigantic hospital ward. Here, Luiz eventually discovers the realities of human existence: namely, that men and women essentially commit suicide by giving themselves over to vice, and must be purified after death by learning patience and generosity (after which their future isn't specified). Luiz comes to terms with his own failings in life—depicted in flashback—and is joyfully reunited with his dead mother, eventually even joining the ranks of attendants in the city, who are warned of an imminent enormous influx of patients as a result of a terrible war that's broken out on earth (World War II, as it turns out). A curious, non-denominational parable that plays out slowly and pretentiously against antiseptic modernist



backgrounds that resemble the interior of some empty mall, *Astral City* may move some viewers hungry for spiritual pabulum, but most will probably find it a long, tedious slog. Optional. (F. Swietek)

Atlas Shrugged: Part One

★1/2
Fox, 97 min., PG-13, DVD: \$22.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Filmmaker Paul Johansson's first part of a proposed trilogy—a low-budget adaptation of Ayn Rand's 1957 novel extolling unfettered capitalism—covers roughly the first third of the book, in which heroine Dagny Taggart (Taylor Schilling) joins forces with industrialist Hank Rearden (Grant Bowler) to rebuild much-needed railways despite interference from a socialist-leaning government, corrupt unions, and greedy rivals. Although the material demands epic treatment, it's been reduced here to a succession of talky sequences marked by didactic dialogue and wooden performances. Oddly, although the action is updated to 2016—a cheesy prologue depicts a global crisis in which gas is selling for more than 30 bucks a gallon—the plot mechanics, fashions, and ambient music remain tied to the 1950s. John Galt (Johansson), the book's mysterious hero, appears here only as a shadowy figure recruiting important men to join him in a strike against a system that is crushing individualism and entrepreneurial spirit. A critical and commercial bomb, this disappointing opener is not recommended. (F. Swietek)



Baaria ★1/2

Image, 151 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Italian director Giuseppe Tornatore, best known for the Oscar-winning *Cinema Paradiso*, helms this sprawling epic of one man's lifelong odyssey in the Sicilian town of Bagheria (pronounced by the locals as "Baaria") during the tumultuous 20th century. Peppino (portrayed as a young child by Giovanni Gambino, as an adolescent by Davide Viviani, and as an adult by Francesco Scianna) follows in his father's humble footsteps and becomes a shepherd; however, intrusions from the outside world—Mussolini's fascist policies, the deprivations and destruction created by World War II, the Mafia influence on Sicilian society, and the postwar appeal of communism—ultimately have a profound effect on the protagonist. Peppino's embrace of communist ideology also creates problems when he falls in love with Manina (Margareth Madè), whose parents are violently opposed to his partisan leanings. In less melodramatic hands, *Baaria* might have emerged as an intense chamber drama



about a man's emotional evolution in a chaotic era. But Tornatore instead spins the film into a two-and-a-half hour epic, complete with thousands of extras and sequences that substitute scope for substance. Despite its pedigree as a Golden Globe nominee and the Italian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar (it wasn't nominated), *Baaria* suffers from a painfully predictable screenplay, especially during the scenes involving conflicts over agrarian reform. Not recommended. (P. Hall)

Bellflower ★★

Oscilloscope, 107 min., R, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

This ultra-low-budget indie, a Sundance Festival favorite, hails from writer-director-star Evan Glodell, who appears as amiable slacker Woodrow, recently moved to California from the Midwest with his pal Aiden (Tyler Dawson). The pair have no visible means of support but spend their time—and whatever cash they have—building industrial-strength flame-throwers and testing them out as though they were playing video games (the lads also fantasize about outfitting a muscle car). Eventually Woodrow and Aiden take up with a couple of freewheeling girls, one of whom has an angry boyfriend whose run-ins with our heroes lead to an apparently apocalyptic ending. "Apparently" is the operative word here because sections of the story are clearly hallucinatory episodes experienced by Woodrow—a fact that further fractures a movie already plagued by weird foreshadowing, sudden chronological shifts, and abrupt transitions. Some of this would-be sleight of hand may be due to the barebones funding, but more likely it's the result of Glodell's grandiose ambition to fashion something striking and intense in which the immediate effect is far more important than actual coherence. While Glodell deserves kudos for making a movie for \$17,000, a \$17,000 mess is ultimately no better than a \$300,000,000 one. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

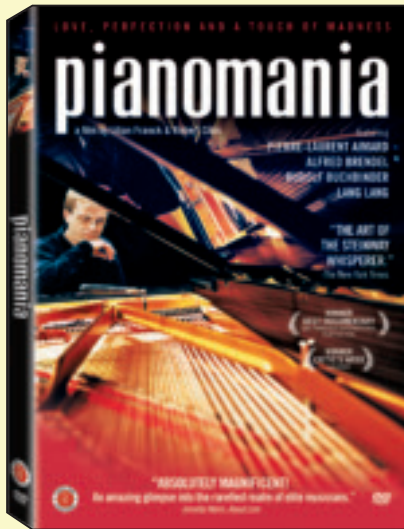


Blackthorn ★★1/2

Magnolia, 98 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

According to legend, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid were killed in a skirmish with the Bolivian military in 1908. But what if they'd survived? Apparently, Butch and Sundance pulled a switch with dead bodies and headed for the border, after which Sundance died in the mountains and Butch evolved into grizzled rancher James Blackthorn (Sam Shepard). Now, in 1927, after years of seclusion, Butch decides to return to the U.S., since his and Sundance's ex-girlfriend,





93 minutes, color, SRP \$27.95, FRF 914987D
Documentary | **STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 14**

PIANOMANIA

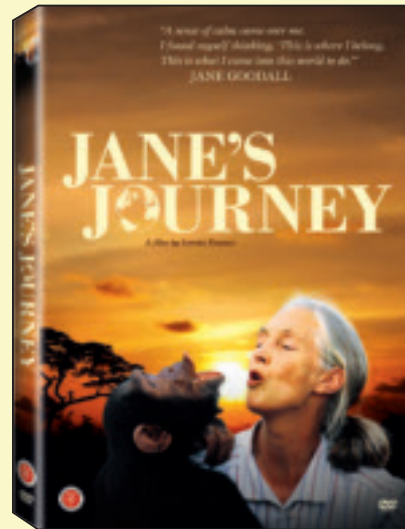
As Steinway's Chief Technician and Master Tuner in Vienna, Stefan Knüpfe is dedicated to the unusual task of pairing world-class instruments with world-famous pianists. Finding the perfect match requires endless patience and nerves of steel. *Pianomania* is a surprisingly suspenseful peek into the heated clash of wills between a genius craftsman and the renowned pianists who rely on his talent as they search together for that elusive perfect tone.

"The art of the Steinway whisperer."

-The New York Times

"Thoroughly enjoyable!"

-Christian Science Monitor



111 minutes, color, SRP \$27.95, FRF 914895D
Documentary | **AVAILABLE NOW**

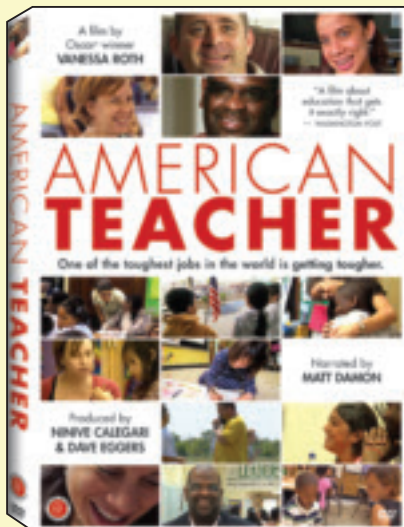
JANE'S JOURNEY

It would be hard to name anyone who has had more of an impact in the realm of animal research and wildlife conservation than Jane Goodall. Featuring a wide range of interviews and spectacular footage from her own private collection (including her years in Gombe), *Jane's Journey* is an inspiring portrait of the private person behind the world-famous icon.

"Fascinating & inspiring!"

An engaging, often personal look at the great primatologist-turned-conservationist."

-The Hollywood Reporter



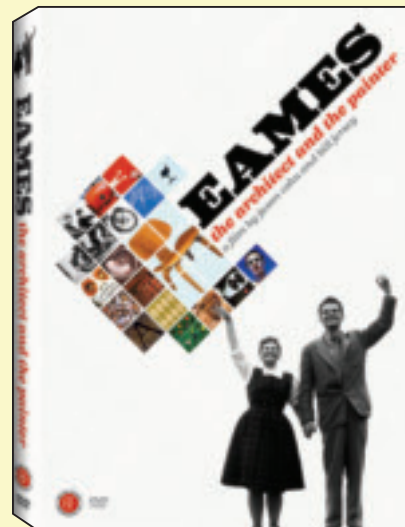
80 minutes, color, SRP \$24.95, FRF 914949D
Documentary | **STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 14**

AMERICAN TEACHER

As the debate over America's public schools rages on, the one thing everyone agrees on is the need for great teachers. Yet teachers are so underpaid that almost two-thirds must work a second job in order to make a living. *American Teacher* explores how we can re-value teaching and turn it into a prestigious, financially attractive and desirable profession.

"★★★★★! This heartbreaking and essential film ought to be seen by anyone concerned about the fate of the public school system, and the nation as a whole."

-New York Daily News



84 minutes, color, SRP \$27.95, FRF 914925D
Documentary | **AVAILABLE NOW**

EAMES: THE ARCHITECT AND THE PAINTER

The husband-and-wife team of Charles and Ray Eames are widely regarded as America's most important designers. Best remembered for the iconic Eames House and their plywood and fiberglass furniture, the Eames Office also created a mind-bending variety of other products. This is the first film since their death dedicated to these creative geniuses and their work.

"A thorough and vibrant examination of the master Modernists."

-Los Angeles Times

"Superb...a dazzling sensory adventure." -Seattle Times



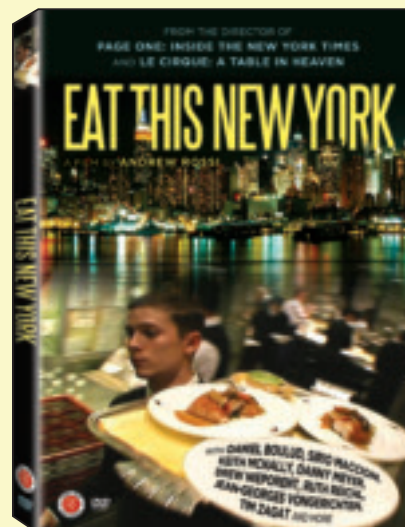
80 minutes, color, SRP \$24.95, FRF 914970D
Documentary | **STREET DATE: FEBRUARY 14**

THE SONS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Mardi Gras, drag balls and politics – where else could these elements come together but in New Orleans? Using "a treasure trove of archival footage" (NY Post), this joyful film charts the evolution of the gay Mardi Gras krewe scene over the decades, illuminating how its emergence was a seminal factor in the cause of gay liberation in the South.

"Southern grace & Mardi Gras glamour! A new chapter in the history of gay rights."

-The Hollywood Reporter



85 minutes, color, SRP \$24.95, FRF 914963D
Documentary | **STREET DATE: JANUARY 17**

EAT THIS NEW YORK

From the Director of *PAGE ONE: INSIDE THE NEW YORK TIMES* and featuring culinary luminaries Daniel Boulud, Sirio Maccioni, Keith McNally, Drew Nieporent, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and Danny Meyer, *Eat This New York* is the story of two friends' struggle to open a restaurant in the food capital of the world.

"The real deal. Should be shown to incoming classes at culinary schools for years to come."

-Anthony Bourdain

"Enormously satisfying and moving." -Washington Post

Etta, died in San Francisco, leaving behind a boy who may be Butch's son. En route, Butch is ambushed by civil engineer Eduardo Apodaca (Eduardo Noriega), who convinces the outlaw to spare his life by promising to share \$50,000 that he's stashed away nearby. Apodaca says he stole the money from one of Bolivia's largest mine owners and is on the run from a posse (not exactly true, as Butch later discovers). In the meantime, Butch is recognized by the determined detective (Stephen Rea) who's been on his trail for almost 20 years. Shepard controls every scene as the older and wiser Butch, with glimpses of his backstory revealed in flashbacks featuring younger actors (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau as Butch, Padraic Delaney as Sundance, and Dominique McElligott as Etta) in the iconic roles created by Paul Newman, Robert Redford, and Katharine Ross. Unfortunately, filmmaker Mateo Gil's *Blackthorn* is unevenly written and sparsely directed, although it does sometimes evoke Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns—with a superbly photographed showdown on the salt flats. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Bucky Larson: Born to Be a Star ★

Sony, 97 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99, Jan. 17



Comedian Nick Swardson, tricked out here with prosthetic buckteeth and a Prince Valiant pageboy haircut, stars as the titular goofball, a dimwit from Iowa who discovers that his blockhead parents (Edward Hermann, Miriam Flynn) were once porn stars. Hoping to follow in their footsteps, Bucky heads off to Hollywood to seek fame and fortune, falling in with down-on-his-luck director Miles Deep (Don Johnson). Turns out that Bucky has a tiny penis, but his organ spews wildly at the slightest provocation, leading him to become the industry's star of the year, much to the chagrin of heretofore reigning champ Dick Shadow (Stephen Dorff). Interspersed with the story of the hero's climb to celebrity is his unlikely romance with Kathy (Christina Ricci), a sweet waitress who appreciates the fact that he helps her overcome a fear of carrying large trays of food. Unfortunately, there is nothing remotely humorous in any of this, but it's certainly made worse by Tom Brady's hapless direction and Swardson's positively creepy performance as a guy who's meant to be a charming naïf but comes across as a mentally shortchanged weirdo. Even the notorious movies of Pauly Shore (who has a cameo here as an awards-show host) were better than this flop, which plays like a raunchy five-minute sketch cruelly extended to an insufferable 97 minutes. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Carlos ★★★1/2

Criterion, 339 min., in English, Arabic, German, Spanish, French, Hungarian, Japanese & Russian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$49.95



Olivier Assayas directs this near-six-hour Golden Globe-winning epic account of the life of notorious terrorist Carlos the Jackal, a committed activist who evolved into a media-hungry celebrity before finally being arrested in 1994. Édgar Ramírez plays Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, aka Carlos the Jackal, as a bundle of contradictions—a self-professed revolutionary out to destroy the capitalist system and champion the oppressed, but also a man whose love of luxury grows in direct relation to his notoriety. *Carlos* trails the protagonist on a globe-hopping journey across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, along the way incorporating a vast parade of secondary characters, while also maintaining a runaway pace as the numerous missions mount up: bombings, murders, and missile attacks on behalf of something Carlos calls the armed branch of the Palestinian Liberation Struggle. *Carlos* dissects the motivations of terrorism and political action in ways that say more about the individuals involved than the politics behind them. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Circumstance ★★★

Lionsgate, 105 min., in Farsi w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$27.99

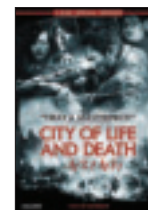


Set in contemporary Tehran, *Circumstance* finds 16-year-old orphan Shireen (Sarah Kazemy) living with her strict uncle, while her friend Atafeh (Nikohl Boosheri) enjoys loving parents and a more liberal home life. Atafeh's older brother, Mehran (Reza Sixo Safai), has traded his classical music career for a crack habit, and after a stint in rehab, he rejects Western art, embraces Islam, helps out at a mosque, and begins to spy on his family. While Mehran struggles to stay clean and secure a wife, Shireen and Atafeh sneak out to drink and dance to rock and hip-hop with a couple of likeminded male friends. Gradually it becomes clear that the feelings between the girls go deeper than friendship, and they even participate in a project to dub Gus Van Sant's *Milk* into Farsi in hopes that other Iranian youth will see the film and agitate for equal rights. After they tangle with the law, however, everything changes: Shireen's uncle pressures her to marry, leading Atafeh to devise a plan to solve all their problems. Filmed in Beirut, American-born writer-director Maryam Keshavarz's debut feature is not overtly political, but it is critical of the individuals and institutions standing in Shireen and Atafeh's way. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

City of Life and Death

★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 135 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.95



City of Life and Death is not the first Chinese production to tackle the subject of the Nanking Massacre—the brutal Japanese invasion and occupation of Nanking (now Nanjing), China, in 1937—but it's the most ambitious and acclaimed to date. Stark and grueling, the black-and-white film is short on dialogue, but long on atmosphere (mostly chaos and terror), and rich in detail, with harrowing observations of life in a culture where civilians are treated as inconveniences at best and spoils of war at worst. Director Lu Chuan observes the first few months of the event through the eyes of numerous characters, including John Rabe (John Paisley), the real-life German businessman who organized a safety zone for the noncombatants, and young, intellectual Japanese soldier Kadowaka (Hideo Nakaizumi), who's appalled by his own army's barbarism, which includes the systematic killing of 200,000 Chinese people. While Chuan doesn't shy away from the brutality, there is nothing gratuitous in his presentation of the atrocity. Criticized by the Japanese government (which still denies that the episode occurred, despite the evidence to the contrary), the film also generated controversy in China due to the sympathetic treatment of a single Japanese soldier. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Colombiana ★★★

Sony, 111 min., not rated, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99



In crime-riddled Bogota, Colombia, 9-year-old Cataleya (Amandla Stenberg) sees her mother and father gunned down on orders from drug cartel kingpin Don Luis (Beto Benites). Diving out a window, she evades the killers and makes her way to the American embassy, where a microchip with vital information "buys" her a passport to the U.S. Once there, she locates her gangster uncle, Emilio (Cliff Curtis), and says to him, "I used to want to be Xena, Warrior Princess, but now, when I grow up, I want to be a killer. Will you help me?" "Sure," he replies, and 15 years later, Cataleya (now played by Zoe Saldana) is determined to wreak her own brand of brutal revenge on the bad guys. Slithering through air ducts, elevator shafts, and shark tanks, she's a fearless animal pursuing its prey, sketching the outline of her namesake Cataleya orchid on each of her victims. While the seemingly unconnected homicides baffle a persistent FBI agent (Lennie James), it's all part of a master plan to bring Cataleya closer to the man who ordered her parents' murder.

Cataleya is also attracted to artist Danny (Michael Vartan), but is understandably cautious of swapping intimacies about her dangerous life. Directed by Olivier Megaton from a screenplay co-written by French filmmaker Luc Besson (whose *Leon: The Professional* and *La Femme Nikita* share similar themes), this is ultimately an uneven film that tries and fails to rise above its B-movie trappings. Optional. (S. Granger)

The Devil's Double

★★★

Lionsgate, 108 min., R, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Dominic Cooper gives a stunning double performance in director Lee Tamahori's energetic but highly fictionalized tale based on the memoir of Latif Yahia, an Iraqi soldier who was forced to serve as a stand-in for Uday Hussein, Saddam's reckless, lustful older son. The script accepts Yahia's contention that he was a principled man—compelled to submit to the volatile Uday's outrageous demands—who always tried to do the right thing. Thus Uday is portrayed as the very image of the unrestrained id while Latif, looking on with undisguised contempt, becomes the conscience totally lacking in the dictator's son.



Although this makes for a nice dichotomy, one can't help but suspect that things were actually far more morally ambiguous. What saves *The Devil's Double*, however, is the fact that Cooper and Tamahori go for broke. In a virtuoso turn, Cooper wallows in Uday's ostentatious malevolence, and broods as dour Latif, keeping the two characters distinct even when the double is doing his impersonation of Uday. As for Tamahori, after several inauspicious big-budget Hollywood efforts, the filmmaker successfully returns to his humbler roots here, imbuing the film with raw energy and a few shocking scenes of torture and killing (including a literal disemboweling). A romantic-triangle subplot slows things down a bit, and the film doesn't convince in strict historical terms, but it definitely works as an action-packed drama contrasting a demented villain and his right-minded doppelganger. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Dolphin Tale ★★½

Warner, 113 min., PG, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray: \$35.99

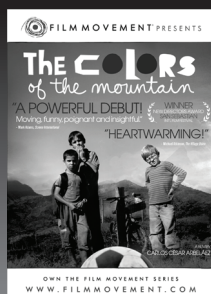
Walking down Florida's South Beach, 11-year-old Sawyer Nelson (Nathan Gamble) sees a dolphin caught in a crab trap. Determined to help, Sawyer cuts the ropes,



comforts the stranded animal, and summons a rescue team that delivers her to marine biologist Dr. Clay Haskett (Harry Connick Jr.) at Clearwater Marine Hospital. Named "Winter" by Haskett's daughter Hazel (Cozi Zuehlendorf), the dolphin requires amputation of her tail, and as the odds against her survival mount, Sawyer devotes himself to the animal's care—ditching summer school, much to the chagrin of his hardworking single mom (Ashley Judd). When Sawyer discovers that the military is developing new prosthetics, he convinces Dr. Cameron McCarthy (Morgan Freeman) at the VA hospital to help Winter. Combining fact with fiction, *Dolphin Tale* is a story of courage and persistence that dovetails with a subplot involving Sawyer's swimming-champion cousin (Austin Stowell), who returns home after being injured while deployed in the Middle East. Director Charles Martin Smith does a fine job relating this real-life story that led to the development of a flexible prosthetic material—dubbed WintersGel—which has changed the lives of physically challenged people. Indomitable Winter stars as herself (the film features fascinating documentary footage of her swimming with children and amputees), and she's backed by a remarkable ensemble cast that includes Kris Kristofferson and Frances Sternhagen. A heartwarming,

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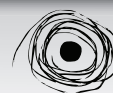
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family-friendly gem, this is highly recommended. (S. Granger)

The Double ★

Image, 98 min., PG-13, DVD: \$27.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98, Jan. 31

Despite its incessantly percussive music, director Michael Brandt's Cold War espionage thriller dilutes all tension and suspense by tipping its hand far too early while telling a story revolving around the hunt for a resurfaced Soviet-era assassin who has slit the throat of a United States senator. That premeditated murder cues the CIA that the hit squad known as "The Cassius 7" is back, or at least the notoriously shadowy Russian mastermind who led them (the name stems from the number of Roman senators who assassinated Julius Caesar). Agency supervisor Tom Highland (Martin Sheen) summons back into action retired, world-weary operative Paul Sheperdson (Richard Gere), who insists that he shot and killed the prime suspect several years ago. An enigmatic loner, Sheperdson is reluctantly paired with eager young FBI agent Ben Geary (Topher Grace), who extensively researched the Cassius 7 for his master's thesis at Harvard. "I feel like I know you," the rookie tells the veteran sleuth. "You don't!" replies Sheperdson grimly. "You're a librarian." An utterly formulaic cloak-and-dagger spy hunt flick, this is not recommended. (S. Granger)



Dream House ★

Universal, 92 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98, Jan. 31

This wannabe psychological thriller stars Daniel Craig as successful book editor Will Atenton, who decides to quit his publishing job in Manhattan and move to a seemingly idyllic suburban locale with wife Libby (Rachel Weisz) and their two young daughters (real-life sisters Taylor and Claire Geare) in order to work on his first novel. But Will soon discovers that a family was brutally murdered in their house five years earlier, and while the father was suspected of the horrific killings, the man was never convicted, and he's since been released from psychiatric care. Augmenting the bucolic creepiness, a strange, sinister figure (Elias Koteas) is skulking around, and goth teenagers hold candlelit rituals in the basement. Skittish neighbor Ann (Naomi Watts) obviously knows more than she's willing to share, but she's preoccupied, battling with her ex-husband (Marton Csokas) for custody of their daughter (Rachel Fox). What's baffling here is why respected director Jim Sheridan agreed to take on this ludicrous, derivative project that tosses together generic elements from *The Shining*, *The Amityville Horror*, *The Others*, *Shutter Island*, and even *The Sixth*



Sense. Tiresome, tedious, and disappointing—considering its impressive talent—this is not recommended. (S. Granger)

Drive ★★1/2

Sony, 100 min., R, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$30.99, Jan. 31

Viewers will find lots of grotesque violence in this purported "action film," but most of the time an artsy, self-conscious, existentialist stillness—or tedium—reigns, although Danish filmmaker Nicolas Winding Refn was lauded at Cannes for his hyper-stylish, neo-noir direction. Set in Los Angeles, the plot pivots around a nameless, emotionless wheelman (Ryan Gosling) who ostensibly works as a movie stunt driver but is often hired by mobsters to drive their getaway cars. In fact, he's so adept behind the wheel that his garage-mechanic boss, Shannon (Bryan Cranston), wants to bankroll him to race stock cars. After helping out sweet-faced neighbor Irene (Carey Mulligan) at a nearby supermarket, the driver winds up becoming involved with her, along with her wide-eyed young son, Benicio (Kaden Leos), and her ex-con husband, Standard (Oscar Isaac). Also thrown into the mix is a pawn-shop heist that goes terribly wrong, which infuriates gangsters played by Albert Brooks and Ron Perlman. Adapted from James Sallis's titular novel, *Drive* barely delineates the cars-and-crime storyline, let alone defines individual characters and their psychological motivations. Still, despite the film's drawbacks, Gosling shines as a moody, monosyllabic loner, evoking memories of Steve McQueen, Clint Eastwood, and Lee Marvin. But his performance isn't enough to keep *Drive* from ultimately stalling out. Optional. (S. Granger)



Dum Maaro Dum ★★1/2

Fox, 130 min., in Hindi w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$29.98

This stylized Bollywood thriller begins in India's smallest (and richest) coastline state of Goa, which 17-year-old Lorry (Prateik Babbar)—clearly ignorant about the resort mecca's hellish underworld—describes as "paradise on Earth." In need of cash so he can fly to the United States with his girlfriend, Lorry ends up working as a courier for a Russian gang that sets him up with a stash of cocaine intended for stateside distribution. Meanwhile, Kamath (Abhishek Bachchan), a corrupt narcotics officer with a tragic past, aims to rid Goa of the drug trade; he finds an ally in his put-upon partner, Mercy (Muzammil S. Qureshi), and enemies in a seemingly legit business tycoon known as "the Biscuit" (Aditya Pancholi) and mysterious supplier Michael Barbossa.



Musician and record store manager Joki (Rana Daggubati) becomes involved when the Biscuit offers Joki's beautiful girlfriend, Zoe (Bipasha Basu), a job as a flight attendant if she'll run drugs during her travels, but she ends up paying a steep price when one of her assignments goes wrong. Kamath eventually joins up with Joki to go after Lorry, but Barbossa proves more elusive. Director Rohan Sippy uses a zigzag structure to establish the connections between these various characters, and while the trademark Bollywood mix of ballads and brutality can be jarring at times, *Dum Maaro Dum* rarely fails to entertain. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

The Family Tree ★1/2

eOne, 91 min., R, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

This comedy directed by Vivi Friedman centers on that staple of American indie cinema, the dysfunctional family, embodied here by the Burnetts: wife Bunnie (Hope Davis), husband Jack (Dermot Mulroney), and their teenage twins, Bible-toting Eric (Max Thieriot) and promiscuous Kelly (Britt Robertson). Davis's Bunnie is quite appealing—at least after she wakes up with amnesia (caused by a mishap during an affair with a neighbor), which triggers a sudden burst of innocence and optimism—a complete change from the jaded, judgmental, and utterly miserable woman in the opening scenes. But for the most part, *The Family Tree* is a muddle of sloppy social satire, aggressively eccentric characters (Keith Carradine as a gun-loving reverend), aimless subplots, and trite caricatures of teen rebellion—all misguided elements in the movie's attempt to nudge the Burnetts toward a closer union. Unfortunately, the terrific cast—including Chi McBride as Simon (Bunnie's tryst partner), and Christina Hendricks as Simon's secretary—can't help this bland, blank film, a comedy so generic that it plays like a bad sitcom. Not recommended. (S. Axmaker)



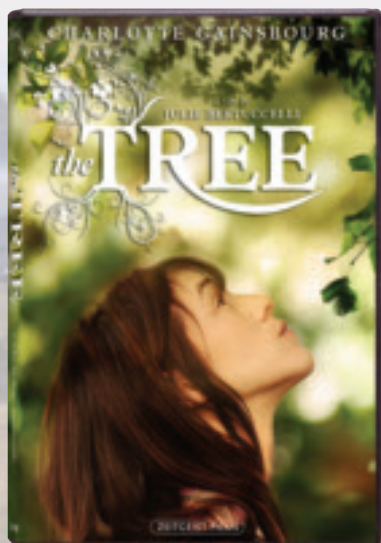
Final Destination 5 ★★

New Line, 92 min., R, DVD: \$28.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99

This successful horror franchise is based on a simple premise: someone has a premonition of an imminent catastrophe (like a car or airplane crash) and is able to help others escape. Problem is, fate (aka Death) doesn't like to be cheated and is determined to claim its victims, hunting down the clueless survivors one by one. But a macabre twist lies in the fact that the Grim Reaper (personified by Tony Todd) will spare those willing to kill someone else—at least until the rules change again. The disaster this time involves the spectacular collapse of a huge suspension



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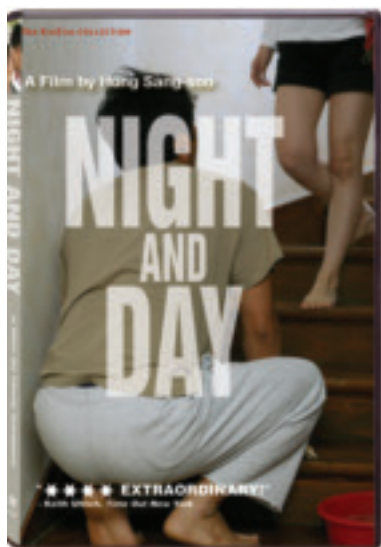
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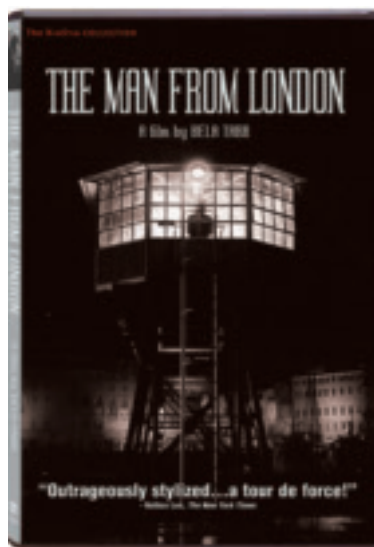
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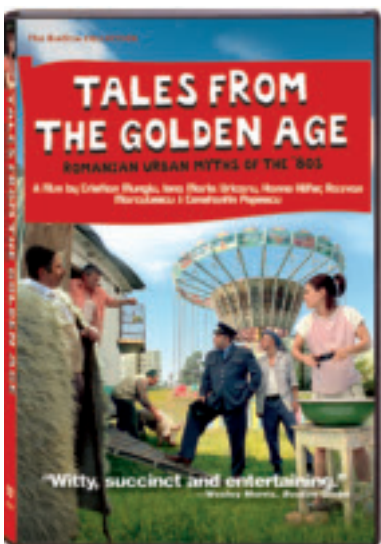
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2007 • B&W • 132 mins • Hungary/ France/
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SUMMER HOLIDAY (aka BOOGIE)

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UPC 698452209234

2008 • Color • 102 mins • Romania
In Romanian with optional English subtitles
Stereo • 16:9 aspect ratio

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—Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian* (UK)

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bridge, which is foreseen by Sam (Nicholas D'Agosto), a business sales rep who resourcefully saves seven young colleagues on a bus en route to a corporate retreat, after which they are killed in even more dastardly ways involving horrible "accidents." Characters like Sam's estranged girlfriend Molly (Emma Bell), corporate climber Peter (Miles Fisher), dodgy executive Dennis (David Koechner), and sexy Olivia (Jacqueline MacInnes Wood) are bland and uninteresting; an exception, perhaps, is sleazy, womanizing Isaac (P.J. Byrne), who—realizing that many of his co-workers are dead—steals whatever he can find in their desks, such as spare change and a coupon for a free massage. Meanwhile, a skeptical FBI agent (Courtney B. Vance) investigates how the bridge collapsed in a freak windstorm. Director Steven Quale piles on the gruesome violence, leavened with moments of ironic humor, but this franchise ran out of steam long ago, making this formulaic entry an optional purchase, at best. (S. Granger)

The First Grader ★★

Vivendi, 103 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.99

After Kenya's government offered free primary education to all in 2000, a hunched, hobbling, 84-year-old veteran lobbied to join 6-year-olds in a remote village school. Illiterate Kimani N'gan'ga Maruge (Oliver Litondo), who fought for the liberation of his country, is determined to learn how to read. While the province's skeptical head administrator, Jane Obinchi (Naomie Harris), is initially against Maruge enrolling, his subsequent appearance in a makeshift uniform with scavenged school supplies leads her to become a staunch supporter, and she sides with him against irate parents, recalcitrant colleagues, suspicious officials, and fuming radio talk-show host DJ Masha (Dan Ndambuki), all of whom rail against wasting precious space in an overcrowded classroom on an old man. Based on a true story (Maruge's quest attracted international attention, and he eventually wound up addressing the U.N.), *The First Grader* also weaves in flashbacks depicting fierce tribal conflicts and the brutality of British colonial rule, including Maruge's vivid memories of his suffering in a detention camp during the 1950s. Although saddled with a predictable script, director Justin Chadwick nevertheless creates an uplifting docudrama, pulling heartstrings here with the best of intentions. Wrestling with the complexities of letters and numbers, Litondo effectively conveys the elderly gentleman's dignity and dedication, while Harris is solid as a spirited, altruistic teacher whose stance puts her career and marriage at risk. The mischievously irresistible children featured here are students at the Rift Valley



Academy in Kenya, where the film was shot. Recommended. (S. Granger)

First Light ★★★

BFS, 79 min., not rated, DVD: \$22.99

This BBC drama on the brief career of Geoffrey Wellum is based on his 2002 same-titled memoir recalling his role as Britain's youngest Spitfire-aircraft pilot during World War II's epic Battle of Britain. Wellum was not even 18 when he signed up, and just 20 when a nervous breakdown permanently grounded him. Rather unexpectedly, the film evokes a pastoral tone, as Wellum (Sam Heughan) and his squadron take off from a small airfield in the deceptively peaceful English countryside to intercept German bombers and their scout planes en route to a burning (and never seen) London. Some of the young men manage to come back later to enjoy drinks at the pub, but most don't, and Wellum's success in battle seems to be dumb luck more than anything else. The flight scenes, depicted mostly in a first-person point-of-view from Wellum's cramped cockpit, clearly use actual aircraft whenever possible (with CGI-enhancement at other times). Along the way, the real-life Wellum is periodically shown visiting old haunts. Director Matthew Whiteman's plainly dealt narrative and reserved characters may seem thin compared to Hollywood big-budget efforts, but what *First Light* lacks in glitz, it makes up for with realism. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)



A Good Old Fashioned Orgy ★★

Sony, 98 min., not rated, DVD: \$26.99

Although the movie's title is clearly calculated to pander to the audience's basest instincts in this post-*Hangover* Hollywood era, *A Good Old Fashioned Orgy* ultimately falls short of its sniggering promise. Jason Sudeikis stars as Eric, a thirtysomething layabout who hosts extravagant parties for friends at his father's beach house. Along with beefy slacker buddy Mike (Tyler Labine), Eric plans to throw one final bash: a true orgy modeled after the Kama Sutra. After some initial reluctance, virtually all of the friends' pals—guys and gals—agree to participate. For an hour or so, filmmakers Alex Gregory and Peter Huyck follow the bumbling duo as they make preparations, delivering a few decidedly lowbrow laughs along the way. But when the orgy does finally arrive, it turns out to be a pretty tame affair, with little to titillate even the most prudish viewer. Predictably, the romp also proves to be the catalyst that brings together all of the couples that are meant for one another, so that what was intended as a night of wild



abandon becomes, in the best Hollywood tradition, the means of effecting the most conventional link-ups. Never rising above a slightly steamy version of a typical network sitcom, this is not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

The Guard ★★★

Sony, 96 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99, Jan. 3

Yes, there's murder, corruption, and drug trafficking in *The Guard*, but it's wry comedy that really propels this buddy cop/crime caper, set in a tiny town on Ireland's rugged west coast. To call paunchy, beer-guzzling Sgt. Gerry Boyle (Brendan Gleeson) a rowdy rebel would be an understatement. Boyle is a vulgar, irascible, crotch-grabbing curmudgeon, as his new young partner, Aidan McBride (Rory Keenan), discovers when the pair examine the bullet-riddled corpse of a man with Bible pages stuffed in his mouth, a potted plant between his legs, and the number "5 1/2" written on the wall above him. Apparently the victim is connected to half a billion dollars in drug-dealing money—but Boyle doesn't realize that until the arrival of American FBI Agent Wendell Everett (Don Cheadle) and the subsequent disappearance of McBride, as reported by his weeping Romanian wife, Gabriela (Katarina Cas). Meanwhile, Boyle is partnered with strait-laced Everett, searching the Gaelic-speaking Connemara region for the ruthless, cocaine-smuggling culprits, with Boyle also keeping a watchful eye on his dying mum (Fionnula Flanagan). Writer-director John Michael McDonagh emphasizes comedy over mystery (the bad guys—Liam Cunningham, Mark Strong, David Wilmot—are revealed early on) in this amusingly subversive film. Recommended. (S. Granger)



Higher Ground ★★1/2

Sony, 112 min., R, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$45.99, Jan. 10

Actress Vera Farmiga's directorial debut, based on Carolyn S. Briggs's memoir *This Dark World*, is a thoughtful, if ultimately unsatisfying, treatment of a story about spiritual searching. Central character Corinne is portrayed by McKenzie Turner as a child; Farmiga's younger sister, Taissa, as a teenager; and Farmiga herself as an adult. As a young girl, Corinne almost offhandedly declares she's been born again. In high school, however, she falls for campus rocker Ethan (Boyd Holbrook as a teen, Joshua Leonard as an adult) and adopts a hedonistic lifestyle that continues into their marriage. But after a near-fatal accident, both turn to religion and become members of a fundamentalist community living a simple, rigorous life. For the women it's an existence



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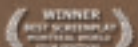
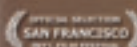


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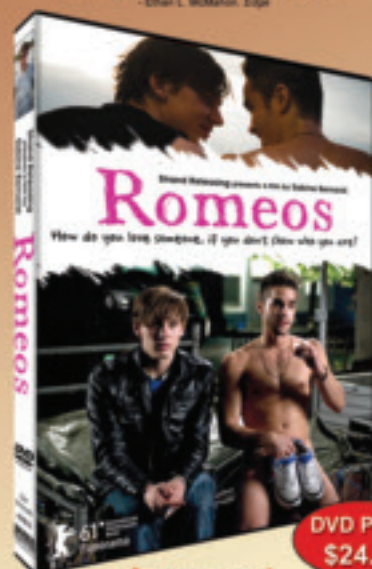
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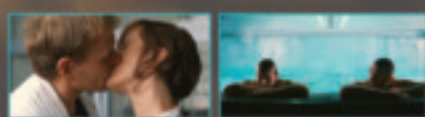
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of extreme modesty and subjection to their husbands, although Corinne and her friend Annika (Dagmara Dominczyk) occasionally challenge the status quo in private. But Corinne's faith is shaken by Annika's sudden illness, and she begins to feel increasingly hemmed in, eventually causing a rift with Ethan—and the congregation. What's good about *Higher Ground* is that it neither ridicules nor exalts the religious group to which Corinne belongs; the members' naïveté might seem slightly absurd to nonbelievers, but they are presented as sincerely seeking spiritual fulfillment. Unfortunately, Corinne's odyssey still ends up feeling opaque and inconclusive. Optional. (F. Swietek)

The Human Resources Manager ★★★½

Film Movement, 104 min., in Hebrew, Romanian & English w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



Winner of five of Israel's top film honors—including Best Picture—this moving, understated drama from director Eran Riklis charts the journey of the titular dissatisfied bureaucrat (Mark Ivanir) from Jerusalem to Romania to oversee the burial of "Employee 535," Yulia, a foreign worker who perished in a suicide bombing. Due to a snafu, the company did not claim her body, and the mix-up is a target for an investigative reporter (Guri Alfi) who wants to exploit the situation. The human resources manager (no characters other than the victim are identified by name) has his own problems—he hates his job and is estranged from his wife and daughter. But under orders from his boss (Gila Almagor) to save the reputation of his employer—a corporate bakery—he escorts the deceased Yulia back to her homeland. Darkly comic detours arise along the way, but as his trip progresses, the HRM comes to admire this person he never knew, ultimately rediscovering the humanity he has lost over the years. Highly recommended. (D. Liebenson)

I Don't Know How She Does It ★★

Anchor Bay, 89 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 3



Boston investment analyst Kate Reddy (Sarah Jessica Parker) tries to juggle the demands of married life, motherhood, and a career in this adaptation of Allison Pearson's wry bestseller. When Clark (Kelsey Grammer), ambitious Kate's boss, offers her the business opportunity of a lifetime, she's determined to do it all, including throwing elaborate birthday parties for her children and transporting them to school. Meanwhile, Kate's laid-off architect husband, Richard (Greg Kinnear), is starting his own firm, and

suave British widower/banker Jack (Pierce Brosnan) may be falling in love with Kate. Using the *Sex and the City* device of revealing insights to the camera, Kate's best friend, Allison (Christina Hendricks), burbles praise, while executive assistant Momo (Olivia Munn) expresses doubts, office rival Chris (Seth Meyers) smugly gloats about Kate's struggles, and nasty stay-at-home "momster" Wendy (Busy Philipps) constantly criticizes Kate's choices. Just like Parker's signature character, Carrie Bradshaw, it's all about simpering self-absorption; so when this ditz wails because her nanny took her 2-year-old son for his first haircut, it's hard to be sympathetic (it's also difficult to relate to pampered trophy wives who spend all day on the treadmill). Directed by Doug McGrath, this story about stereotypically stressed, privileged people seems both stale and out-of-touch with the times. Not a necessary purchase. (S. Granger)

Jane's Journey ★★★

First Run, 111 min., not rated, DVD: \$27.95



In 1960, naïve 23-year-old Jane Goodall sailed from London to Kenya with a pencil, a notebook, and a playful determination to study chimpanzees in Gombe Stream National Park on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. She had no university degree but, through observation and dedication, would become the best-known primatologist of our time. Long before Dian Fossey, Goodall realized that chimps weren't just capable of using tools, but also of making them—a discovery that astonished paleontologist Louis Leakey. Married twice, then widowed, Goodall raised her son, Hugo van Lawick, in Africa. Then in 1986, after attending an environmental conference, Goodall's life took an abrupt turn toward global humanitarianism, leading to her traveling 300 days a year to lecture and promote various conservation efforts, particularly her Roots & Shoots projects, aimed at teaching young people in 120 countries how to live in peace and harmony with the natural world. Utilizing archival footage, filmmaker Lorenz Knauer traces Goodall's journey from Bournemouth, England—where her father gave her a stuffed toy monkey—to her continuing work in Tanzania, following her around the globe as she carries a message of hope. From a Congolese refugee camp to South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation to Greenland's glaciers, Goodall continually stresses how Earth's future lies with children. Tall, slender, and possessing an incandescent smile, the indefatigable Dr. Goodall is a natural communicator, graciously accepting tributes from Angelina Jolie, Pierce Brosnan, and the U.N.'s Kofi Annan, among others, in this intriguing, inspirational profile. Recommended. (S. Granger)

The Juche Idea ★★★

Lorber, 62 min., in Korean, Bulgarian & English w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99



Filmmaker Jim Finn's satirical mockumentary sends up the notion of "juche," or national self-sufficiency, first enunciated by North Korean dictator Kim Il-Sung and elaborated by his son and successor Kim Jong-Il, concentrating on the latter's application of juche to filmmaking. One of the central elements here is a fictional narrative, carefully shot to look like documentary footage, about a South Korean filmmaker (Jung Yoo Lee) "in residence" at a North Korean artist colony. Interviewed by a Bulgarian journalist, she explains how she's trying to produce poems and scripts that will be able to pass muster in sessions that are euphemistically defined as self-criticism (one of her projects is titled "Dentures of Imperialism"). Her story is interrupted by other segments ridiculing North Korean propaganda films (some incorporating found footage), excerpts from actual Korean movies (often accompanied by quotations from the teachings of Kim Jong-Il), and archival glimpses of the regime's parades and appearances by the dictator. The result is a deadpan critique of the ideology of juche, often very funny but with a serious point to make. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Judy Moody and the Not Bummer Summer ★★

Fox, 91 min., PG, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Like *Kit Kittredge* and *Ramona and Beezus*, this slapstick comedy is aimed directly at preadolescent girls who have outgrown Disney but are still too young for *Twilight* mania. Based on Megan McDonald's popular preteen books, the story begins on the last day of third grade, when spunky Judy Moody (Jordana Beatty) realizes that she's stuck in her small Virginia town while her friends have made wonderful plans, such as traveling to Borneo or attending circus camp. Adding insult to injury, Judy's parents are leaving home to help her ailing grandfather; so the strong-willed tomboy and her annoying little brother, Stink (Parris Mosteller), must spend their summer vacation with their dreaded Aunt Opal (Heather Graham). To Judy's surprise, Aunt Opal turns out to be a free-spirited guerrilla artist, urging them to create their own adventures. That means searching for Bigfoot in a van with two strangers; scaring her bespectacled pal Frank (Preston Bailey) by dressing as the Bride of Frankenstein; falling off a tightrope into a river; and enduring a vomit-inducing roller-coaster ride. Unfortunately, the script errs on the side of caricature

and exaggeration, amplified by John Schultz's hyperactive direction (which is well suited to Judy's animated daydreams, but not live-action). Optional, at best. (S. Granger)

The King and the Clown

★★★

Pathfinder, 119 min., in Korean w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

In Lee Jun-ik's opulent but weird fable set in Korea during the early 16th century, Jang-sang (Kam Woo-seong) and Gong-gil (Lee Jun-ki) are comic performers traveling across the countryside to stage ragtag shows combining mild acrobatics with blue humor. Gong-gil dresses in convincing drag to play the female role in their act, and their manager pimps him out to rich customers. Arriving in Seoul, they join forces with three street performers, but their new routines begin to incorporate sharp humor that insults the Korean monarch's less-than-secret private affairs. When Jang-sang and Gong-gil's play is discovered by the royal court, the pair are brought before the king and given a life-or-death ultimatum: their lives will be spared if the king is entertained, but they will be killed if he is not amused. Giving away too much more of the plot would spoil the film's very



unusual focus, which eventually shifts into darker territory. What can be said is that *The King and the Clown* offers wonderful chemistry in Kam and Lee's intense performances, along with richly detailed production design and crisp cinematography. Recommended. (P. Hall)

Kung Fu Panda 2

★★★★1/2

DreamWorks, 90 min., PG, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$44.99

Taking up where the popular 2008 original left off, *Kung Fu Panda 2* finds the titular roly-poly, dumping-devouring bear now firmly established as Dragon Warrior Po (voiced by Jack Black) in the Valley of Peace. But dastardly albino peacock Lord Shen (Gary Oldman) is determined to rule all of China from Gongmen City with his Wolf Boss (Danny McBride) and a powerful new weapon: the cannon. So Po turns to his loyal friends, the Furious Five—Monkey (Jackie Chan), Mantis (Seth Rogen), Viper (Lucy Liu), Crane (David Cross), and Tigress (Angelina Jolie)—to turn back the threat. And there are new characters, such as the former bandit Master Croc (Jean-Claude Van Damme), and Soothsayer (Michelle Yeoh), Shen's fortune-telling goat.



Part of Shen's strategy is to bring up traumatic secrets buried in Po's past, including the revelation that Po was adopted by noodle shop owner Mr. Ping (James Hong). Po's kung-fu master, Shifu (Dustin Hoffman), feels that anger issues are interfering with his disciple's martial arts ability, so the panda must find inner peace. Directed by Jennifer Yuh, this awesome, action-packed sequel also tells a character-driven, emotionally resonant story, tackling thorny issues like abandonment, nontraditional families, and self-discovery. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)

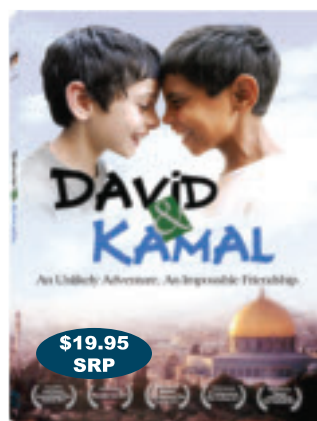
Little Sparrows ★★★

Film Movement, 89 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Three daughters deal with the death of their mother in Yu-Hsiu Camille Chen's *Little Sparrows*. After family matriarch Susan (Nicola Bartlett) finds out she has terminal cancer, she makes plans to enjoy one final Christmas in Perth with Nina (Nina Deasley), a widow; Anna (Melanie Munt), an actress married to a director; and Christine (Arielle Gray), a medical student who lives at home with her husband, James (James Hagan), an actor. Chen, a Taiwanese-born filmmaker based in Australia, gives each of the offspring a separate chapter



"'David and Kamal' was by far the best of the International Children's Film Festival"
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in which they spend one pivotal moment with Susan. It turns out that Anna has been having an affair with a co-star; Christine, who is gay, starts to see someone new and considers getting her own place; and Nina connects with an old friend with whom she feels a spark. Each development comments on the others, since the three have all absorbed aspects of Susan's life and personality, including her regrets. A fine character study, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Love Crime ★★★1/2

MPI, 106 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98

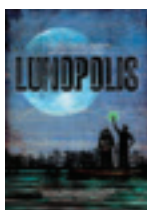
Office rivalry leads to nasty games of one-upmanship and worse in Alain Corneau's nifty psychological thriller—a cerebral, twisty cat-and-mouse concoction that keeps viewers guessing all the way to a neat denouement. Kristin Scott Thomas stars as Christine, an ambitious, imperious executive in the Paris offices of an agribusiness corporation, who takes advantage of her skilled but mousy assistant, Isabelle (Ludivine Sagnier), whom she treats with barely concealed contempt. When Isabelle finally tires of Christine's manipulation and sabotages her boss's expected promotion, Christine retaliates with public humiliation, leading to an escalating confrontation in which both women play on each other's amorous inclinations. The competition ultimately ends in murder, but what follows is no whodunit; instead, the film serves up a *Columbo*-like scenario in which the question is whether the killer will get away with the crime (and if so, how). Although both slow-moving and complicated, *Love Crime* is a winner, boasting cool, understated tension. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



Lunopolis ★★★1/2

Virgil, 98 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Lunopolis serves up an ambitious but flawed combination of *Blair Witch Project* mockumentary, *X-Files* paranormal paranoia, time travel, and hokey intellectual pretension. When dunderheaded filmmakers Matt (Matthew Avant, also the writer-director) and Sonny (Hal Maynor) decide to check out claims that humans have lived on the moon for years and are manipulating events on Earth, their investigation leads them to a fishing shack in a Louisiana swamp where they discover a vast underwater storehouse and a mysterious electronic contraption that resembles a grade-school science project gone awry (in one genuinely creepy moment, the crew is chased briefly by a shadowy figure but manages to escape with the device intact). Eventually the weird object—which



turns out to be an honest-to-goodness time machine—is traced to a sinister organization called the Church of Lunology, and the meddlesome camera-toters find themselves confronted by Lunology guardians who want it back. But it's not until they visit a seemingly harmless old retiree, David James (Dave Potter), that they begin to realize the true power Lunology has over the future. Where *Avant* really runs into complications is in the overabundance of corny mock-interviews with fictional experts who interrupt the central action, adding unnecessary white noise to an already static-heavy narrative that struggles to link UFOs, the moon, time travel, world history, dimensional theory, and immortality. Still, on the basis of chutzpah alone, *Lunopolis* should be considered a strong optional purchase. (M. Sandlin)

Magic Beyond Words: The JK Rowling Story

★★★1/2

New Video, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95

Based on the unauthorized *J.K. Rowling—A Biography* by Sean Smith, this 2011 Lifetime TV movie tells the story of the titular *Harry Potter* author. Chronicling her childhood—which included playing fantasy games in the Forest of Dean, being bullied, and being encouraged and read to by her multiple sclerosis-afflicted mother—the film also explores her Hermione-esque braininess and rebellion while attending Wydean School as Head Girl, her disappointment at not getting into Oxford (and later graduation in languages from the University of Exeter), and subsequent multiple jobs. *Magic Beyond Words* serves up glaring symbolic examples of Rowling's inspiration for the *Harry Potter* series (a trolley lady on the train, floating candles, a building that morphs into a Gringotts-like establishment). Although we see her working constantly on the first book, the film ups the drama by focusing on Rowling's stint as an English teacher in Portugal, her brief marriage to a TV journalist (who here drunkenly abuses her), and her issues with government assistance before she ultimately rockets to fame and fortune. Rowling is played here by the 10-years-younger Australian actress Poppy Montgomery. While this melodramatic rags-to-riches tale is unsanctioned by the Rowling camp, the overwhelming popularity of the author's beloved fantasy series makes this a strong optional purchase. (J. Williams-Wood)

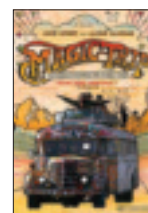


Magic Trip ★★★

Magnolia, 107 min., R, DVD: \$26.99

This revelatory documentary from filmmakers Alex Gibney and Alison Ellwood chronicles the legendary 1964 road trip from California to New York undertaken by author

Ken Kesey and his LSD-loving cohorts, the “Merry Pranksters,” in a psychedelically painted bus driven by Neal Cassady, who was Jack Kerouac's inspiration for *On the Road*. The ostensible goals were to visit the World's Fair in New York and meet Timothy Leary, Kerouac, and the East Coast Beats, but the journey itself became more of the point, and it's enshrined here as the true dawn of the 1960s era of hippie “happenings” via excerpts from hours of 16mm home-movie footage and sound taped en route by Kesey and his crew. Made in association with Kesey's family, this assemblage of the original rare celluloid/audio material is supplemented with contemporary and archival interviews and a brief re-enactment of Kesey's participation in a 1959 government study of LSD, along with sparse narration from actor Stanley Tucci. The film serves as a brief bio of Kesey, with the author (best known for his novels *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*), hallucinogen enthusiast, and family man portrayed as a calm center in the dawning Aquarian Age, especially compared to the appealingly manic but rootless Cassady, who would die soon afterwards. Bringing to life a cultural milestone, this is recommended. (C. Cassady)



Margin Call ★★★1/2

Lionsgate, 91 min., R, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Filmmaker J.C. Chandor's intriguing, topical thriller about the global economic meltdown unfolds in 2008 over the course of roughly 24 hours, detailing how one large financial firm (very similar to Lehman Brothers) dumped worthless assets on unsuspecting customers. The film opens with a round of downsizing at the prestigious company high atop Manhattan's financial district, where departing senior risk analyst Eric Dale (Stanley Tucci) passes a computer file to junior colleague Peter Sullivan (Zachary Quinto), whispering an ominous warning, “Be careful.” When Peter peeks at the numbers, his face blanches in utter horror—unless someone can stop it, an economic Armageddon is imminent. Peter alerts his boss, Will (Paul Bettany), who, in turn, summons his superior, Sam (Kevin Spacey), a man who recognizes the moral dimensions of the dilemma. Dire peril is confirmed by head risk honchos Sarah and Jared (Demi Moore, Simon Baker), and panic mounts as they meet with their ruthless CEO, John Tuld (Jeremy Irons). With tense executives gathered around a conference table, Tuld turns to 28-year-old Peter, demanding, “Explain this to me in simple terms, as you would a young child or a golden retriever.” Then, in a shrewd move to separate “the fat



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cats from the starving dogs," the firm's highly paid analysts are offered exorbitant bonuses to liquidate inventory immediately—at any cost—as the debacle spirals out of control. First-time writer-director Chandor learned Wall Street fundamentals from his father, who worked for Merrill Lynch for almost 40 years—and the experience shows in the persuasive, cutthroat dialogue of this excellent film. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)

'Master Harold'...and the Boys ★★

Image, 83 min., PG-13, DVD: \$27.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Athol Fugard's acclaimed play (previously produced as a 1985 made-for-TV movie) is now an almost straight-to-DVD feature by director Lonny Price, who starred in the original 1982 Broadway production. Set in South Africa in 1950, the story focuses on the fraying relationship between white 17-year-old Hally (Freddie Highmore) and Sam and Willie (Ving Rhames, Patrick Mofokeng), two middle-aged black men employed in his family's tea room business. The emotionally isolated Hally is upset that his racist, alcoholic father is returning home after being hospitalized for complications related to a wartime injury that cost him a leg, and the young man takes his anxiety out on Sam and Willie, who have long held affection for the lad. Price expands on Fugard's text with a harshly effective opening sequence outlining the apartheid-era indignities and injustices facing Sam and Willie in their daily lives, including a brutal confrontation in which a white policeman forces them to produce their identity papers. 'Master Harold'...and the Boys is also peppered with multiple flashbacks that provide in-depth detail about Hally's difficult childhood. Unfortunately, this version never quite clicks, mainly because of a lack of chemistry between its three stars. Highmore's Hally is much too shrill to earn any degree of audience empathy, while Rhames (with an unconvincing wig and accent) and Mofokeng fail to elevate their characters above the level of one-dimensional clichés. Optional. (P. Hall)

Midnight in Paris ★★½

Sony, 94 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99



In this fanciful, time-travel fable, writer-director Woody Allen ruminates on the concept of nostalgia: that bittersweet longing for idealized things, persons, or situations in the past. Successful but insecure Hollywood screenwriter Gil (Owen Wilson) is in Paris, working on his first novel. His protagonist runs a memorabilia shop and, like Gil, wishes he'd lived in the 1920s, the unabashedly romantic era

reflected in Cole Porter's music. One night, as Gil walks back to the hotel after dining with shrill fiancée Inez (Rachel McAdams) and her bourgeois parents (Mimi Kennedy, Kurt Fuller), an extraordinary thing happens: as the clock strikes midnight, a vintage Peugeot pulls up carrying a festive young couple: Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald (Alison Pill, Tom Hiddleston), who invite him to a party. This magical realism twist leads to the most amazing evening of Gil's life, as he hobnobs with cultural and artistic giants, along with lovely damsel Adriana (Marion Cotillard), who herself yearns for the Belle Époque. Eager to repeat the incredible experience, Gil returns to the same street night after night. Charming, shaggy Wilson epitomizes Allen's idealistic, self-absorbed sensibilities, and the illusion-versus-reality concept evokes the filmmaker's earlier *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. The rest of the cast is also superb, particularly Kathy Bates as Gertrude Stein, Corey Stoll as Ernest Hemingway, and Adrien Brody as Salvador Dali (also look for a cameo by France's first lady, Carla Bruni, as a Rodin Museum tour guide). Highly recommended. (S. Granger)

Moneyball ★★★★★

Sony, 133 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99, Jan. 10



Adapted from Michael Lewis's nonfiction bestseller *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*, this inspiring underdog movie is about far more than baseball. As a hotshot high school athlete, young Billy Beane faced a difficult choice: taking a Stanford scholarship or following a chance to play for the New York Mets. In rueful recollection, Billy regards signing with the Mets as the only decision he'd ever made for money's sake. After his playing career prematurely fizzled, Billy (Brad Pitt) worked his way up from scout to general manager of the Oakland Athletics, only to relinquish his three top players (Jason Giambi, Johnny Damon, Jason Iiringhausen) to the big-bucks franchises of New York and Boston after losing the American League division series. Unable to compete for high-priced athletes, Billy hooks up with Peter Brand (Jonah Hill), a nerdy numbers-cruncher. Convinced that conventional wisdom is wrong, Brand devises a quantitative approach to scouting, and Billy signs various undervalued players, assembling what Brand calls "an island of misfit toys." Defying his development people—including surly team manager Art Howe (Philip Seymour Hoffman)—and risking his career, Billy ends up reinventing professional baseball. Directed by Bennett Miller, *Moneyball* finds Pitt delivering an astonishing performance as the brooding Billy—a divorced dad devoted to his teenage daughter, Casey (Kerris Dorsey)—while Hill

is brilliantly understated as the geeky Brand. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (S. Granger)

Mozart's Sister ★★★

Music Box, 120 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$38.99, Jan. 24



René Féret's period drama finds mischievous 11-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (David Moreau) being carted around Europe by his father, Léopold (Marc Barbé) to show off the boy's prodigious talent. Actually the focus here is not on little Wolfgang, but rather his older sister Nannerl (Marie Féret, the director's daughter), whose opportunities to express her own talent were constrained by the social conventions of the time. A heavily-fictionalized story told with elegance and grace, the film portrays the Mozarts as a happy, supportive clan with a patriarch who, while stern, is obviously also loving—even though he insists that his daughter accept her place as a woman and cease her efforts to become a composer in her own right. The centerpiece of the narrative is the leg of the Mozarts' odyssey that took them to the French court, during which—according to the screenplay—Nannerl developed a close friendship with the king's youngest daughter (real-life sister Lisa Féret) and the recently-widowed Dauphin (Clovis Fouin), who admires her musical ability (although Nannerl must dress as a young man in order to spend time with him). *Mozart's Sister* paints a portrait of a young girl's struggle to become a musician at a time when even male artists were completely dependent on powerful patrons. Deliberately paced but elegantly produced, this is a lovely, quietly affecting film. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Mr. Nice ★★½

MPI, 121 min., not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99



Bernard Rose directs this rambling biopic about notorious drug trafficker Howard Marks (Rhys Ifans). Raised in Wales, Howard's good grades lead him to Oxford, where he discovers hashish. After obtaining his degree, Howard marries, moves to London, and becomes a teacher. But then a friend (Jack Huston) persuades him to make a drug run. Says Howard in his voiceover, "I didn't set out to be a dope dealer. It isn't something I'm proud of." Worse yet, he admits, "I tried to smoke it all." Just as his marriage is coming to an end, he meets Judy (Chloë Sevigny), a shopkeeper, and Jim (David Thewlis), an IRA gun runner, who become his allies. Soon, his globe-trotting between Europe and the Middle East captures the attention of an Oxford chum (Christian McKay) who recruits him to spy

for M16; but when an American deal goes bad, Howard and Judy hit the road with their baby girl, and he adopts the pseudonym Mr. Nice. While it's an engaging story and Ifans is solid in the title role, *Mr. Nice* ultimately feels strangely stagnant, as if Rose were dutifully ticking off boxes along Marks's journey from respectability to notoriety. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (K. Femmessy)

Mysteries of Lisbon

★★★★1/2

Music Box, 257 min., in Portuguese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$34.95, Blu-ray: \$43.95, Jan. 17

This four-and-a-half-hour historical drama based on a classic Portuguese novel by Camilo Castelo Branco (as yet untranslated into English) is one of the last films from Chilean-born director Raúl Ruiz, who died in 2011. Set in the 19th century, *Mysteries of Lisbon* tells the story of João, an orphan boy in a Catholic boarding school searching for his true identity, serving up a magnificent tapestry of flashbacks that slowly weave a portrait out of dozens of stories and characters, all tied in some way to João (João Luis Arrais portrays the teenager, and Afonso Pimentel stars as the adult). Among the notables in this cinematic panoply are a countess (Maria João Bastos) who turns out to be João's mother; Father Dinis (Adriano Luz), the kindly but blunt school director; and Alberto (Ricardo Pereira), a scar-faced pirate. Ruiz's love of storytelling and narrative playfulness shine here in a film that combines graceful camerawork with an unerring eye for images. Widely acclaimed, this exquisite production feels like a foreign version of a great *Masterpiece Theatre* adaptation. Highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

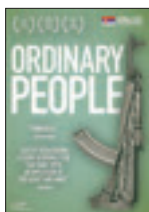


Ordinary People

★★★★1/2

Global Film Initiative, 79 min., in Serbian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Although the storyline for this grimly realist Serbian film could be written on a matchbook, the simplicity is deceptive, making *Ordinary People* a fertile film for interpretation. Early on, a squad of newly recruited soldiers in some godforsaken part of the war-torn Balkans is transported by bus to a rural location for what seems to be just another banal set of military maneuvers. Writer-director Vladimir Perisic keeps up an almost trancelike pace in which events seem to be unfolding in real time with minimal dialogue, eventually honing in on Dzoni (Relja Popovic), who may possibly be the youngest of the recruits. Soon the mission of Dzoni and his glum, ragtag squad is revealed: it's their duty to summarily execute terror suspects with a quick bullet in

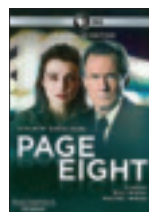


the back. Dzoni is the only one who flinches at such a routine disposing of civilians; but by the end of the day, he has hardened into a remorseless, conscienceless killing machine ... or has he? Viewers are left to sort out the psychological fallout from these legitimized killings for themselves. Highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Page Eight

★★★★1/2
PBS, 105 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Broadcast on PBS's *Masterpiece Contemporary* series, this crackerjack British spy tale stars Bill Nighy as Johnny Worricker, a world-weary M15 analyst whose boss (Michael Gambon) shows him a secret file that suggests the slippery prime minister (Ralph Fiennes) was apparently aware of the American torture of prisoners—a practice his government claimed to be in the dark about. The revelation threatens a political firestorm that could engulf M15. Meanwhile, Johnny is approached by his beautiful neighbor, Nancy (Rachel Weisz), a Syrian-born woman who asks for his help in investigating the death of her brother in Israel, the circumstances of which have been covered up. And his estranged daughter, Julianne (Felicity Jones)—an artist who paints distinctly dark canvases—is being stalked by a mysterious young man named Ralph (Tom Hughes). Written and directed by David Hare, *Page Eight* (the title refers to the section of the report that reveals the PM's duplicity) runs along several narrative tracks simultaneously but cleverly ties them together. Nighy, usually relegated to supporting parts, shines here in a role perfectly tailored to his gift for knowing glances and irritated shrugs, while the strong supporting cast includes some of the royalty of British acting. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

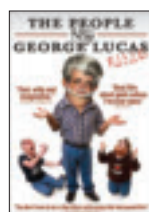


The People vs. George Lucas

★★★1/2

Lionsgate, 133 min., not rated, DVD: \$27.98

"I love/hate George Lucas," proclaims one individual at the beginning of Alexandre O. Philippe's documentary, which explores the complicated relationship between *Star Wars* fans and creator Lucas, particularly in the wake of disappointing sequels and constant revising of his original productions. Along the way, Philippe offers a glimpse into the more obsessive dimensions of fan culture. In addition to cinema historians, critics, and pop-culture commentators, many of the most extreme fanatics are interviewed or glimpsed in clips from Internet rants. While Philippe doesn't take sides in the debate (although he certainly provides a podium for both viewpoints), he also doesn't really scratch much beyond the



surface of the strange symbiotic relationship between filmmaker and fans. Most interesting and illuminating is Philippe's presentation of a great array of fan-produced films, songs, and other artistic tributes, which wind up saying more about their devotion to and love for *Star Wars* than any raging commentary. More entertaining than insightful, this sure-to-be-popular title is a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

Point Blank

★★★

Magnolia, 84 min., in French w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

French director Fred Cavayé's *Point Blank* is neither a remake of the same-named 1967 John Boorman classic nor the 1998 straight-to-video Mickey Rourke vehicle, but rather an original (if not entirely plausible) thriller. Hospital nurse Samuel (Gilles Lellouche) saves the life of a patient named Hugo Sartet (Roschdy Zem) after the latter's oxygen supply is intentionally cut. Arriving home later, Samuel is attacked by invaders who beat him unconscious and kidnap his nine-months-pregnant wife, Nadia (Elena Anaya). When he regains consciousness, Samuel receives a phone call from a criminal organization that threatens to murder Nadia unless he goes back to the hospital and springs Sartet—a dangerous gangster. Samuel and the miscreant Sartet ultimately wind up dodging the police and rival gangs in a seemingly nonstop chase. Although the concept is borderline ridiculous (Samuel's reticence about going straight to the police is explained by having a constabulary who is more vicious than the thugs), Lellouche is a charismatic everyman-turned-superhero, and Cavayé manages to keep the action full-throttle while adopting an entertainingly wicked visual style. Recommended. (P. Hall)



Prince of Broadway

★★★★1/2

New Video, 100 min., not rated, DVD: \$26.95

Writer-director Sean Baker's *Prince of Broadway* serves up an unglamorous urban NYC drama set amidst the city's ethnic crazy quilt, focusing in particular on the seedy underground of the garment district. Lucky (Prince Adu) is an illegal African immigrant who makes a meager living as an under-the-table employee of Levon (Karen Karaulian), an Armenian-Lebanese immigrant running a small storefront boutique that sells counterfeit fashion accessories in Manhattan's Flatiron neighborhood. Lucky's life is turned upside down when former fling Linda (Kat Sanchez) materializes with a child she claims is his. Left with the toddler (Aiden Noesi), the reluctant father embarks on a crash course in single-daddyhood. Mean-



while Levon's marriage to young club-hopper Nadia (Victoria Tate) disintegrates. The baby crisis turns into something of a catalyst and a turning point for both men seeking the elusive American dream. The story is told with streetwise dialogue (heavily improvised by the novice cast), while the handheld camera lends the film a sense of intimate docu-drama realism. A gritty slice-of-life piece, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassady)

Project Nim ★★½

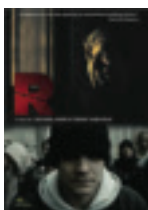
Lionsgate, 93 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.99, Feb. 7



Inspired by Elizabeth Hess's provocative nonfiction book, *Nim Chimpsky: The Chim Who Would Be Human*, filmmaker James Marsh's documentary begins in 1973, when Columbia University psychologist Herbert Terrace theorized that if an infant chimpanzee was nurtured like a human child and taught American Sign Language, it could communicate with researchers. His student, Stephanie LaFarge, offered to raise a two-week-old simian named Nim Chimpsky (after famous MIT linguist/cognitive scientist Noam Chomsky) alongside her seven children. But, as happens with most primates, Nim's docile disposition changed when he turned 2, and he became violent with his caretakers. "To be fair to Stephanie, there was no textbook on what she could and couldn't do," says Marsh; in fact, LaFarge not only breast-fed and diapered Nim but also introduced him to smoking marijuana. Marsh, whose convincing scene re-enactments are intermixed with archival footage and present-day interviews, postulates that it's ultimately impossible for humans and chimpanzees to cohabit, noting that apes don't have sufficient intelligence to comprehend and modify their superior strength. Eventually, after spending time with various teachers, Nim was returned to the research center where he was born, and for the next 20 years lived in assorted wildlife facilities, where he could barely communicate with others of his kind. Although saved from euthanasia by an animal-rights activist, Nim died of a heart attack at the age of 26 (significantly younger than the average lifespan of 45–50 years). An extraordinary tale with disturbing ethical overtones, this is highly recommended. (S. Granger)

R ★★½

Olive, 99 min., in Danish & Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99



In *R*, Tobias Lindholm and Michael Noer present a rough side of Danish society rarely seen in Denmark's art house exports. After young blonde punk Rune (Johan Philip Asbæk) winds up in prison, he becomes the target of tattooed skinheads

who run the facility's underground narcotics economy. Rune's unusually inventive drug-carrier skills offer him some degree of protection, but he faces another threat from a rival clan of Arab inmates who are aware of his activities. Rune finds a counterpart in Rashid (Dulfi Al-Jabouri), and while the pair aren't exactly friends, they do share the grief and anguish related to their drug-transport activities. Asbæk and Jabouri create a compelling synergy, while Omar Shargawi as Bazhir, the leader of the Arab gang, is excellent as the ultimate prisoner from hell. Ultimately, however, *R* doesn't break much new ground as prison dramas go, presenting the genre's claustrophobia, constant threat of violence, and inevitable bursts of brutality in a graphic but predictable manner. Still, while not in the same league as Jacques Audiard's similarly-themed Oscar-nominated *A Prophet*, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (P. Hall)

Rapt ★★★

Kino Lorber, 123 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.95



This French thriller from Lucas Belvaux stars Yvan Attal as Stanislas Graff, a famous corporate bigwig whose previously secret private life of adultery, gambling addiction (with millions in IOUs), and jet-setting excess is revealed after he's kidnapped and ransomed for more than, it turns out, he's worth (at least in practical terms). What's most interesting about *Rapt* is the upending of expectations; the film is in some ways less a thriller than an intimate and detailed portrait of the ordeals suffered by Graff as he's terrorized, threatened, kept in isolation, and moved from one hiding place to another while terms are negotiated and money drops are disrupted by police surveillance. But *Rapt* also follows Graff's wife, Françoise (Anne Consigny), and family, who try to keep up a supportive public face amidst personal revelations that humiliate them every day in the press and on TV, fueling a tabloid culture that feeds ravenously on damning details. Ultimately serving up a defiantly impassive portrait of privilege and entitlement unbowed in the face of public disgrace, *Rapt* is a far cry from the classic tale of arrogance humbled during a journey of contrition...and is all the more interesting for it. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Recipe ★★★

Pathfinder, 107 min., in Korean w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Korean filmmaker Lee Seo-Goon (aka Anna Lee) serves up a strange but interesting mix of mystery, drama, and culinary eccentricity in *The Recipe*. When notorious mass murderer Kim Hyun-soo (Lee Dong-wook)

is allowed to request a last meal before his execution, he calls for a bowl of *doen-jang jjigae* (bean curd stew). Television producer Choi Yu-jin (Ryoo Seung-ryong) suspects there's a story in this odd request, and he discovers that Kim was arrested at a small restaurant outside of Seoul while enjoying this dish. Choi travels to the eatery, where he learns that a lovely young woman named Jang Hye-jin (Lee Yo-won) created the culinary concoction, which was a favorite of the fearsome Kim; however, she was killed in an automobile accident after Kim's capture. While Choi tries to piece together the mystery of Jang's life (which included a doomed love affair), he also discovers the unique qualities that she brought to the meal that captivated Kim and helped lead to his capture. Although *The Recipe* often feels like a shaggy dog story, to the point that the original focus—Kim's death row request—gets put on the proverbial back burner, the enchanting cinematography and subtle performances by the wonderful ensemble make this a nicely palatable foreign film. Recommended. (P. Hall)



Restless ★★½

Sony, 92 min., PG-13, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$45.99, Jan. 24



Gus Van Sant's latest, a romantic drama built on the theme of grief over the death of loved ones, stars Henry Hopper as Enoch, a quirky teen loner. Mourning the death of his parents in an auto crash, Henry randomly attends funerals, searching for closure. Henry is accompanied by a spectral companion, the ghost of a Japanese kamikaze pilot (Ryo Kase) with whom he often plays the board game *Battleship*. On one outing, Enoch bumps into Annabel (Mia Wasikowska), an effervescent young woman who also happens to be terminally ill. Before long the pair are hanging out together, taking risks and engaging in made-up death scenes, with Annabel the doomed innocent who enables Enoch to move beyond his emotional paralysis. While this scenario might have been played for soap operatic pathos, Van Sant opts for a gentler vibe, resulting in a moderately engaging film that avoids being labeled a maudlin movie-of-the-week, but also isn't particularly touching or insightful. Optional. (F. Swietek)

Rise of the Planet of the Apes ★★★

Fox, 105 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

In this cautionary tale inspired by the sci-fi simian mythology created by Pierre Boulle in his bestselling 1963 novel *Planet of the Apes*, James Franco stars as hotshot research scientist Will Rodman—working



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at San Francisco's Gen-Sys laboratory—who is determined to find a cure for Alzheimer's, which afflicts his father (John Lithgow). Will's new drug, ALZ 112, looks incredibly promising, but when the chimp receiving the experimental treatment goes berserk, he's told to abandon the project. After Will discovers that the animal was just protecting her newborn, he scoops the infant up and takes it home. Years pass, during which the DNA-altered offspring—named Caesar (played by Andy Serkis in a nuanced, motion-captured performance)—demonstrates remarkable intelligence and communication skills to Will and his veterinarian girlfriend, Caroline (Freida Pinto). But Will's even stronger, brainpower-increasing serum, ALZ 113, eventually has an adverse effect on Caesar, who resents being treated as a quasi-pet and must be remanded to a primate facility run by John Landon (Brian Cox) and his son, Dodge (Tom Felton). Brutal mistreatment there leads to rebellion, as Caesar shrewdly unites his fellow prisoners for a primate uprising, ultimately battling atop the Golden Gate Bridge. Director Rupert Wyatt effectively delivers action-packed entertainment here with a pinch of social commentary. Recommended. (S. Granger)



The Robber ★★1/2
Kino Lorber, 101 min., in German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95



Adapted from the same-titled novel by Martin Prinz (which was based on a real-life story), this German film from director Benjamin Heisenberg stars Andreas Lust as world-class long-distance runner Johann Rettenberger, who can't seem to generate enough excitement in his life by competing in marathons, so when he isn't winning races, he's out robbing banks in Vienna—a treacherous recreational addiction requiring a macabre mask, a gun, and formidable endurance. Rettenberger is also an ex-con and rather obvious sociopath who skulks around like a zombie when he's not indulging in adrenaline-spiking activities. His double life seems foolproof until he meets a social worker named Erika (Franziska Weisz), with whom he forms an awkwardly intimate bond—although getting close to a woman turns out to be his fatal mistake. Unfortunately, *The Robber* fails to truly delineate Rettenberger's obvious psychological complexities, and the absence of at least a few quasi-warm-blooded qualities in this blank-faced automaton of a thief ultimately leaves viewers feeling somewhat indifferent. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (M. Sandlin)

Romeos ★★★
Strand, 94 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Jan. 17



A hit on the film festival circuit, writer-director Sabine Bernardi's German romantic comedy stars Rick Okon in an impressive performance as a pre-op, transgender woman-to-man named Lukas (originally Miri). When young Lukas reports for his civilian national service, he finds he's been booked into a women's dormitory, a red-tape complication reflecting one of several ways the world has not caught up with his gender switch. Although he injects himself daily with testosterone, bulks up with free weights, and looks very much the strapping young man, parts of Lukas's anatomy are still female, which he tries to disguise while building a new social life as a guy. But the physical issues are nothing compared to the emotional entanglements. Best friend Ine (Liv Lisa Fries) misses Miri and finds Lukas selfish, while the handsome Fabio (Maximilian Befort) is drawn to Lukas but flips out when he learns the truth. *Romeos* is a fairly light, enjoyable film with little twists and turns that keep the narrative moving along. In the end, this is a story of love triumphing over plumbing. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

A Serbian Film ★★★
Invincible, 103 min., in Serbian w/English subtitles, NC-17, DVD or Blu-ray: \$19.95



Already notorious among devotees of extreme cinema, this blandly titled movie from writer-director Srdjan Spasojevic easily lives up—or down—to its reputation as one of the most unsettling pictures ever made. Srdjan Todorovic stars as Milos, a heavy-drinking retired porn star with a loving wife and darling 6-year-old son. In need of funds, Milos accepts an offer to take the lead in a film being shot by a mysterious director named Vukmir (Sergej Trifunovic), who insists that Milos know nothing about the content. The shoot turns out to involve not only graphic sex, but also torture and even killing. At one point, Vukmir devises a bit of grotesquerie involving a doctor and a just-delivered infant—which, in a burst of inspiration, he terms “newborn porn.” The scenario moves further into extremes of violence and sexual abuse as Milos is forced into performing even more lurid acts (and hallucinates about worse horrors), and his spouse and child are also drawn into the nightmare. While it's easy to dismiss *A Serbian Film* as nothing more than loathsome torture porn, one has to admit that in its own absolutely perverse way it's well made. And some dialogue indicates that Spasojevic intends it as a scathing commentary on the national character of his country, whose recent his-

tory has been marked by hatred, slaughter, war, and ethnic cleansing. But just because it wants to be taken seriously doesn't mean that it's an easy or even worthwhile watch. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

Seven Days in Utopia ★★
Arc, 100 min., G, DVD: \$28.99



Golf is served up with a hearty helping of corn plus religion in this curious hybrid adapted from David Cook's novel *Golf's Sacred Journey*. Set in Utopia, TX, the story opens with young Luke Chisholm (Lucas Black) choking on the last hole of an important amateur tournament, after which he drives off mad and crashes in a cornfield, where he's rescued by Johnny Crawford (Robert Duvall). Crawford turns out to be a retired pro with an almost Zen-like attitude toward golf, although it turns out that the spirit guiding him is fundamentalist Christianity rather than Eastern meditation. After teaching Luke to patiently “see” and “feel” his shots by engaging in activities such as fly fishing, painting, and piloting, Johnny encourages him to “trust” in the power that will direct his strokes and swings. Luke ultimately puts the see-feel-trust advice to use when he joins his first pro competition, which comes off like the final Death Star assault in *Star Wars*. And what is the “force” that Crawford is selling and Luke is feeling? Given the church scenes and biblical references, it sure appears to be divine providence. Although Duvall is always fun to watch, Matt Russell's heavy-handed and sanctimonious direction makes this an often tedious and disappointing watch. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Shaft ★★★
Global Film Initiative, 98 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



A brooding, pessimistic film more laudable for its visual rather than narrative aspects, this atmospheric look into the uphill struggles of the rural underclass in China nevertheless offers a convincing, if uneven, portrayal of a miner's family shaken to its core by the uncertain future of its youngest members. In a western Chinese mining province's beleaguered industrial center—surrounded by majestic mountain peaks—class mobility is nearly nonexistent, and the urban prosperity of Beijing seems as distant as the moon. Family patriarch Baogen (Luo Deyuan), who is set in his workaday ways in an administrative post for the local mining company, is nearing retirement. His wife has left mysteriously; his daughter, Jingshui (Zheng Luqian), stands accused of an extramarital affair at work; and his

son, Jingsheng (Huang Xuan), harbors pipe dreams of becoming a singer, but he can't afford to take lessons at the local conservatory. A future career spent down in the mines is the sword of Damocles hanging over Jingsheng's head, as well as those of many of his peers. While writer-director Zhang Chi's *The Shaft* occasionally displays flashes of romanticized lost-youth sentiment and takes a few ill-advised leaps into soap-operatic territory, it also successfully puts a human face on the very real social, occupational, and economic anxieties plaguing a Chinese working class who are forever gazing out across the seemingly unbridgeable chasm of an economic divide. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)

The Sleeping Beauty

★★★1/2
Strand, 82 min., in French
w/English subtitles, not rated,
DVD: \$27.99

As with 2009's *Bluebeard*, French auteur Catherine Breillat once again puts her indelible stamp on another classic fairy tale, which begins with the birth of princess Anastasia—entering the world under the curse of the evil Carabosse (Rosine Favey), who declares that at age 16, Anastasia will pierce her hand on a spindle and die. But the child's three fairy godmothers hear of the scheme and change the plan so that she'll sleep for 100 years instead. Young Anastasia (Carla Besnainou) becomes a tomboy who'd prefer to live as a prince (at one point she sighs, "A little girl's life is really boring"), and she runs off to the country, where a widow and son welcome her into their household. After an encounter with the Snow Queen (Romane Portail), Anastasia's surrogate brother Peter (Kérian Mayan) disappears, leading her on a search. En route she encounters a diminutive station manager, an albino prince and princess, and a Roma girl who suggests she travel to Lapland to seek out a mystic who may be able to break the looming spell. After that, the account skips ahead a century as 16-year-old Anastasia (Julia Artamonov) reconnects with the gypsy and attracts a suitor (David Chausse). While Breillat's adherence to dream logic makes it hard to predict what will happen here, she doesn't seem to be saying anything especially profound through her post-modern tweaks to this well-worn story. Still, given Breillat's notoriety as a controversial director, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Snowmen

★★★1/2
Arc, 86 min., PG, DVD: \$26.99

A semi-autobiographical story written and directed by Robert Kirbyson, *Snowmen* revolves around cancer-stricken Billy (Bobby Coleman), a young Colorado schoolboy who decides he wants to accomplish something

of worldwide importance before he dies. With his best friends—wimpy but likable Howard (Christian Martyn) and Jamaican transplant Lucas (Bobb'e J. Thompson)—at his side, Billy aims to break a couple Guinness World Records, including building thousands of snowmen with the help of volunteers; but an ongoing war with the school's nastiest bully (Josh Flitter) presents an obstacle to attaining his dream. A chance encounter with a cemetery caretaker (Christopher Lloyd) deepens Billy's perspective on life and death, while Billy's father (Ray Liotta) struggles with the knowledge of his son's illness. *Snowmen* initially seems peculiarly lightweight considering the heavy subject matter, but eventually develops more moral complexity as it moves toward a powerful climax. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

Spy Kids: All the Time in the World

★★★1/2
Anchor Bay, 88 min., PG,
DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.98

Unofficially known as *Spy Kids 4* (and, perhaps wisely, not screened for critics during its original theatrical run), the latest entry in director Robert Rodriguez's family film series introduces new secret agents: closeted spy and new mom Marissa Cortez Wilson (Jessica Alba); her unaware husband, Wilbur (Joel McHale), who is—ironically—the star of a reality TV series called *Wilbur Wilson: Spy Hunter*; and Wilbur's kids (their mother died), Rebecca (Rowan Blanchard) and Cecil (Mason Cook). When the evil Timekeeper (whose identity is only revealed late in the film, but is blatantly printed right on the back cover) and his henchman Tick Tock move forward with plans to launch Project Armageddon (a fuzzily explained doomsday scenario tied to the ability to manipulate time), Marissa—who owns a necklace encasing the Chronos Sapphire (the only item capable of stopping the Timekeeper)—and her extended family find themselves racing against (you guessed it!) time to thwart the villains. Original *Spy Kids* Carmen (Alexa Vega) and Juni (Daryl Sabara) make a third-act return here to help the Wilsons save the world. Adults will be worn down by the never-ending puns about time, not to mention the plethora of poop, puke, and fart jokes (although I did laugh at the helium-voiced Tick Tock's verdict on a Wilson baby fart: "That smells like lentils and desperation."). But kids will likely enjoy the pint-sized antics, modest array of gadgets, and the scene-stealing robot dog Argonaut (voiced by Ricky Gervais). A strong optional purchase. (R. Pitman)

The Stool Pigeon

★★★
Well Go, 113 min., in
Cantonese w/English subtitles,
not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-
ray: \$29.98

Hong Kong-based filmmaker Dante Lam helms this visceral crime thriller about an undercover informant facing severe pressures from both sides of the law. Kowloon detective Don Lee (Nick Cheung) is looking at an investigative slowdown when his prized source of information has his cover blown. The snitch does manage to escape from a crime mob, but the experience leaves him emotionally damaged. Desperate to pursue his case, Lee finds a replacement in ex-con street racer Ghost Jr. (Nicholas Tse), offering him a hefty reward to infiltrate a gang of armed robbers. Ghost Jr. wants to use the money to save his sister, who's been working as a prostitute during his incarceration, but the situation grows tricky when he winds up falling in love with Dee (Kwai Lunmei), the girlfriend of the gang's brutal leader, Barbarian (Lu Yi). *The Stool Pigeon* is sometimes a bit flabby around the edges—an extra plotline involving Lee's amnesiac and suicidal wife could easily have been cut—but its raw action sequences, combined with Tse and Cheung's full-throttle performances, and Lam's often breathtaking direction, more than compensate. Recommended. (P. Hall)

The Strange Case of Angelica

★★★1/2
Cinema Guild, 97 min., in
Portuguese w/English subtitles,
not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-
ray: \$34.95

The latest from Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira, who has been making films for eight decades, was filmed when he was 100. *The Strange Case of Angelica* joins previous movies about men who fall in love with the images of dead women—like *Portrait of Jennie* (1948) and *Laura* (1944)—but this offering is much more poetic and evocative. Isaac (Ricardo Trêpa), a reclusive young man documenting the life of local field workers, is summoned one rainy night to photograph the corpse of a beautiful bride who died shortly after her marriage ceremony. Isaac is startled by the sight of the woman laid out in her wedding finery, but even more so when she opens her eyes and smiles at him when he focuses the lens. As he later studies the pictures he's shot, she still seems alive, and he repeatedly dreams of literally flying off with her into the clouds, suffering a physical collapse as his obsession grows increasingly stronger. A literal-minded viewer might consider this nothing more than a curious ghost tale, but Oliveira's artistry transforms it into a haunting reverie on isolation, love, religion,



science, and death. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Strangers ★★½

Zeitgeist, 85 min., in English, Arabic, French & Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99



At first glance *Strangers* has all the trappings of a cheesy Hollywood rom-com: a handsome man and a beautiful young woman meet and fall in love as the result of a mistaken-identity gimmick. But in this case, the setting is not Beverly Hills or New York but the backstreets of Berlin and Paris, and the two people at the center of the story are Eyal (Liron Levo), a working-class Israeli soccer enthusiast visiting Germany to watch the 2006 World Cup, and Rana (Lubna Azabal), a French-Palestinian ostensibly there for the same reason. On a Berlin subway, Eyal mistakes Rana's backpack for his own and makes off with it; later Rana realizes what's happened and is able to contact Eyal via cell phone. After an oddly touching scene in which each rummages through the other's belongings, the pair meet and exchange bags, after which an almost instant chemistry leads to a night of soccer and one-night-stand sex. But then Rana unceremoniously rushes back to Paris, telling Eyal not to call her again. Eyal decides to seek her out in the City of Light anyway, and his role in Rana's life changes in unexpected and uncomfortable ways. Despite the film's initial reliance on gimmicky plot devices, co-writers/directors Erez Tadmor and Guy Nattiv deftly use these deceptively simplistic mechanisms as an entry point into an exploration of more complex personal issues and political allegiances that inevitably influence these two passionate but dangling souls. Highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Submarino ★★★

eOne, 110 min., in Danish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98



Probably one of the least likely candidates for global feel-good film of the year, director Thomas Vinterberg's *Submarino* delivers a cold, harsh slice of Danish life that follows the downward spiral of two long-estranged brothers whose unfortunate choices finally reunite them at the bottom of society. Things seem destined to go wrong from the beginning: raised by a dysfunctional alcoholic mother who's eventually killed in a car accident, both boys wind up looking death, criminality, and squalor square in the face at a young age. As an adult, Nick (Jakob Cedergrén) lives in a bleak half-way house in Copenhagen where he drinks beer, threatens his neighbors, and treats casual girlfriend Sofie (Patrician Schumann) with indifference. His only real connection

to the outside world is a corpulent pervert who accidentally murders Sofie after friendly charity sex. Meanwhile, Nick's unnamed sibling (Peter Plaugborg) is a semi-functional heroin addict and father who manages to care for his son, Martin (Gustav Fischer Kjaerulff), in between smack-induced nod-outs. When a substantial inheritance is passed down to the brothers, what should have been their saving grace ends up being a catalyst for life-changing chaos. Vinterberg's relentlessly bleak tale is enhanced by the uninviting grayness of Copenhagen's working-class districts that provide the film's backdrop. *Submarino* offers no moralistic life lessons regarding the protagonists' misfortunes; the two are simply square pegs unsuccessfully attempting to fit into society's round holes. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Super 8 ★★★

Paramount, 112 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



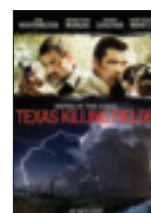
With this nifty, nostalgic sci-fi fantasy-adventure, writer-director J.J. Abrams creates a charming homage to the innocence and wonder epitomized by his mentor/producer, Steven Spielberg, cleverly incorporating nods to *E.T.*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *The Goonies*, and even the "Walking Distance" episode of *Twilight Zone*. Set in suburban Ohio in 1979, *Super 8* centers on a group of geeky middle school students, including chubby Charles (Riley Griffiths), who's making a Super 8 zombie movie to enter into a competition. Charles has enlisted the help of friends Joe (Joel Courtney), who does makeup/special effects, and slightly older "leading lady" Alice (Elle Fanning), who lives with her lout of a father (Ron Eldard). Joe's dad, on the other hand, is a disciplinarian deputy sheriff dad (Kyle Chandler); and, in memory of his loving mother—recently killed in a steel mill accident—still-grieving Joe wears her locket around his neck. Late one night, while the kids are filming near the railroad station, Joe sees his biology teacher (Glynn Turman) deliberately drive his pickup truck onto the tracks into the path of an oncoming train. But this is just the start of inexplicable occurrences, as the military suddenly arrives and people begin to disappear. A winning throwback to the small-town creature features—with a dash of military paranoia—of the '50s, this is recommended. (S. Granger)

Texas Killing Fields ★★½

Anchor Bay, 105 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99, Jan. 31

Directed by Ami Canaan Mann (Michael Mann's daughter), *Texas Killing Fields* focuses on two cops—transplanted New Yorker Brian Heigh (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) and brash young local Mike Souder (Sam Worthing-

ton)—who are partners in Texas City, a small burg in the south of the state near a desolate area notorious as a dumping-ground for murder victims' bodies. The plot revolves around several interconnected events: the killing of a prostitute, the disappearance of a young woman, and the truancy of Annie Sliger (Chloë Grace Moretz), a preteen living in a dingy hovel with her alcoholic drug addict mother (Sheryl Lee), as well as a strung-out uncle and his intense, quietly sinister buddy. Also implicated in the homicide are a pimp and his colleague, the latter a tattooed brute who coasts around in a souped-up car. Although the film eventually answers questions about the murder, it does so in a shambling, elliptical way that leaves conspicuous loose ends at the close. Ultimately, the strong cast is left playing clichéd roles in a film that feels like a glorified TV movie. Optional. (F. Swietek)



There Be Dragons ★1½

Fox, 122 min., PG-13, DVD: \$22.98, Blu-ray: \$29.99, Jan. 10



When London-based investigative journalist Robert Torres (Dougray Scott) researches a book about canonized priest Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer (Charlie Cox)—controversial founder of the Catholic brotherhood Opus Dei—he discovers that his primary source regarding the saint's past is his estranged, now regretful father, Manolo (Wes Bentley). Manolo was not only born in the same Spanish town as Josemaria, but they were childhood chums and attended the same seminary; although, as adults, their lives went in different directions. While spiritual Josemaria preached the gospel, Manolo became embroiled in the Spanish Civil War, falling in love with fellow revolutionary Ildiko (Olga Kurylenko), who adored their daring leader, Oriol (Rodrigo Santoro). Unfortunately, the interweaving of these two turbulent storylines comes across as both fragmented and contrived, revealing little about the mysterious and unorthodox Opus Dei (which was vilified in *The Da Vinci Code*). Writer-director Roland Joffé misfires not only in his attempt to explain the relevant political ideology but also in exploring the men's relationships. And while the film features the trappings of a historical political drama—loyalty and duplicity, conspirators and traitors—the characters are never fully developed, so it's hard to care much about any of them (except for a perceptive chocolate-factory owner played by Derek Jacobi), so unless you're a devout Catholic well-versed in Spanish history, watching this epic parable of forgiveness will feel like doing penance. Not a necessary purchase. (S. Granger)



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The Thing ★★

Universal, 103 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98, Jan. 31

Neither a sequel nor a remake, this *Thing* is a prequel to John Carpenter's same-titled 1982 horror thriller, based on 1951's *The Thing From Another World*, which was inspired by John W. Campbell Jr.'s classic 1938 novella *Who Goes There?* Set in Antarctica, circa 1982, the story follows a group of Norwegian explorers who discover a deep crevasse containing a huge spacecraft piloted by an alien, encased in a block of ice. Arrogant scientist Sander Halvorson (Ulrich Thomsen) recruits paleontologist Kate Lloyd (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) to help with defrosting in order to examine tissue samples, and a bizarre killing rampage ensues. The survivors eventually realize that the extraterrestrial is a shape-shifter, attacking human prey and absorbing their DNA, before replicating the victim's appearance—until the next mutation. Predictably, this leads to serious anxiety and paranoia since no one really knows who among them is the morphed monster. Adding to the panic over the mounting carnage is confusion caused by a blinding snowstorm. Directed by Matthijs van Heijningen Jr., *The Thing* serves up creepy, claustrophobic, and even comedic elements, but as the film moves along it also grows increasingly more inconsistent and incoherent. Optional. (S. Granger)



opts for affectation, treating its characters as caricatures, so while the cinematography is lovely and the period detail impressive, the film itself is emotionally dry. Optional. (F. Swietek)

The Tree ★★★

Zeitgeist, 100 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99

A family lives happily in rural Queensland until tragedy strikes in Julie Bertuccelli's understated drama, adapted from Judy Pascoe's novel, *Our Father Who Art in the Tree*. One day, truck driver Peter (Aden Young) suffers a stroke and dies, crashing into the massive fig tree that overhangs his house. Afterward, Peter's French-born widow Dawn (Charlotte Gainsbourg) sinks into depression, while 8-year-old daughter Simone (Morgana Davies) believes that Peter is speaking to her through the tree (the rustling leaves sound like whispering). As Simone tells a friend, "You have a choice to be happy or sad, and I chose to be happy." But nature starts to encroach on their living quarters in the form of errant bats, clusters of frogs, and other strange phenomena, so Dawn seeks assistance from George (Marton Csokas), a plumbing supply salesman, which leads to a job as his bookkeeper—and potential love interest. While clearing out the critters, George notices roots growing into the building's foundation. Further damage turns the property into a danger zone, leading to a showdown between Dawn, who wants to cut down the tree, and Simone, who clings to it for emotional support. Serving up an interesting and mysterious parable, *The Tree* is recommended. (K. Fennesy)



Toast ★★1/2

Image, 96 min., not rated, DVD: \$27.97, Jan. 17

Director S.J. Clarkson serves up plenty of luscious-looking food in this highly stylized adaptation of celebrity chef Nigel Slater's titular memoir about his unhappy childhood. Most of the story centers on Slater as a 9-year old boy, played by pensive Oscar Kennedy, whose mother (Victoria Hamilton) is a lovely, loving person but also a physically fragile woman and a terrible cook. When she succumbs to weak lungs, Nigel's father (Ken Stott) hires as housekeeper an earthy woman named Mrs. Potter (Helena Bonham Carter), whom Nigel despises—for "replacing" his mother, yes, but even more because she's low-class and crude. But Potter is a fabulous cook, and his father marries her. The last third of the film jumps ahead some years, with Nigel now played by stiff, inexpressive Freddie Highmore. Still loathing his stepmother, Nigel decides to learn to out-cook her, taking home economics in school and excelling at the stove. She, in turn, sees Nigel's move as a threat and redoubles her own culinary efforts. Nigel will ultimately find liberation after he accepts his homosexuality and leaves home to seek a restaurant job in London. Unfortunately, *Toast*



Trespass ★

Millennium, 90 min., R, DVD: \$28.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Adding nothing to the home-invasion subgenre, this wannabe thriller revolves around an affluent suburban couple. Kyle Miller (Nicolas Cage) is a fast-talking, double-dealing diamond salesman who evades taxes and pays little attention to his beautiful trophy wife, Sarah (Nicole Kidman), or their rebellious teenage daughter, Avery (Liana Liberato). One night, two police officers call from the security gate that blocks the Millers' secluded driveway, ordering Kyle to assemble all family members in the living room. As he opens the door, Kyle discovers the cops are actually a gang of intruders, who take the Millers hostage. The quartet of masked burglars is led by Elias (Ben Mendelsohn), a money-hungry ex-con. Jonah (Cam Gigandet), Elias's delusional younger brother, has been casing the Miller house and is recognized by Sarah as one of their security guards, much to the dismay of his crack-addicted stripper-girlfriend, Petal



(Jordana Spiro), who's ransacking Sarah's closet, while ruthless Ty (Dash Mihok) is on hand to make sure nothing goes awry. Director Joel Schumacher's melodramatic *Trespass* is far too formulaic to create tension, and suffers from dialogue that ranges from banal to ludicrous—as when Kyle, with a gun pointed at his head, inquires, "Do you know anything about the etymology of the word 'diamond'?" Not recommended. (S. Granger)

Tucker & Dale vs. Evil

★★★

Magnolia, 88 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

This horror comedy takes a classic genre trope—good-looking city kids tormented by grimy rednecks in the backwoods—and turns it inside out. Drawing buddies Tucker (Alan Tudyk), the "smart" one, and Dale (Tyler Labine), a sweetly stupid idiot savant, are the proud owners of a vacation home: a rotting cabin that apparently once belonged to a disciple of notorious murderer and body snatcher Ed Gein. Their idyllic life is interrupted by a group of frat boys and sorority girls who see a potential psycho lurking within every hillbilly cliché they encounter during their wilderness holiday. Think of it as a comedy of errors with a body count: these arrogant, sneering kids act like they're in a horror film, but wind up inadvertently killing themselves in their ill-advised "pre-emptive" strikes and hysterical flights of panic. Director Eli Craig delivers exaggerated comic violence and over-the-top bloody humor (including a hilarious twist on the *Fargo* wood-chipper scene), and the great chemistry between Labine and Tudyk helps ground the outrageousness (their gob-smacked reaction to the unprovoked attacks is perfect). Meanwhile, Katrina Bowden shines as Allison, the one sensitive soul who sees the harmlessness behind the titular twosome's rough exteriors. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Part 1

★★1/2

Summit, 117 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.49, Blu-ray: \$33.99, Feb. 11

Stephenie Meyer's fourth and final book in the best-selling *Twilight* YA franchise has been adapted (like the last *Harry Potter* novel) into a two-part film, directed by Bill Condon. In this opener, Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart) marries vampire Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson), much to the dismay of shape-shifting werewolf Jacob Black (Taylor Lautner). After a lavish woodland ceremony, the newlyweds depart for a honeymoon on a secluded island near Rio de Janeiro, where—after a tempestuous night of lovemaking—Bella awakens with



bruises on her body and soon discovers she's pregnant. Having a half-vampire/half-human baby is fraught with dire complications, but Bella is determined to deliver the child at any cost, even if it means her own life. Following a particularly gruesome blood-sipping and birthing sequence, Renesmee is born. To avert a fatal battle between werewolves and vampires, Jacob spiritually "imprints" the baby, becoming her lifelong protector. Feminists have criticized Meyer's socially conservative portrayal of teen sexuality, marriage, and pregnancy, but what's vividly conveyed here is the message of taking responsibility for one's choices—even strange ones like mating with the undead and transitioning into a vampire. Emaciated Stewart, brooding Pattinson, and hunky Lautner have acquired confidence, but they still lack the acting chops necessary to truly enliven this far-fetched melodramatic fantasy. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

War Eagle, Arkansas

★★★1/2
Monarch, 93 min., PG-13,
DVD or Blu-ray: \$14.95

Based on a true story, *War Eagle, Arkansas* reminds viewers that sometimes smaller dreams are more worth pursuing than the grander ambitions that other people might urge on their behalf. Enoch (Luke Grimes), a talented pitcher on a small-town baseball team, is also a bundle of contradictions: good at the sport, but his heart isn't really in it. Enoch loves to stargaze and read poetry, but he also counts on a weeknight ritual of watching professional wrestling with his best friend, Wheels (Dan McCabe). Both young men have disabilities: Enoch stutters, isolating him from peers, while Wheels is confined to a wheelchair with cerebral palsy. Both characters are also at a crossroads: Enoch can easily land a baseball scholarship and go to a big university, but he's deeply ambivalent about leaving his roots and is newly in love with a terrific girl named Abby (Misti Traya). Wheels wants a life and is angry he might be forever stuck at home with his mom (Mary Kay Place). Brian Dennehy is wonderful as Enoch's grizzled grandfather, who's perhaps living too much through the boy's potential, and Mare Winningham and James McDaniel bring a soulful authenticity to their small supporting roles. But Graham Gordy's screenplay is a little too pat in defining characters through their respective likes and dislikes (Enoch, in particular, doesn't feel entirely three-dimensional). Still, Grimes and McCabe's strong performances, coupled with Robert Milazzo's solid direction make this a strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

Warrior ★★★

Lionsgate, 140 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Gavin O'Connor's family drama/underdog

sports saga begins as Iraq War veteran Tommy Rordan (Tom Hardy) returns to his working-class neighborhood in Pittsburgh after a 14-year absence, paying a surprise visit to his dad, Paddy Conlon (Nick Nolte), a once-abusive but now recovering alcoholic who's anxiously approaching his thousandth day of sobriety. A former wrestling prodigy who decided to adopt his late mother's maiden name, scornful, sarcastic Tommy is determined to enlist his alienated father's help to train for the biggest winner-take-all event in mixed martial arts history. But that choice inadvertently puts him on a collision course with his older brother, Brendan (Joel Edgerton), an ex-fighter-turned-teacher who, despite the protests of his devoted wife, Tess (Jennifer Morrison), has decided to return to the ring to save his family from financial disaster. Brendan's coach is a former MMA trainer (Frank Grillo) who uses Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for practice sessions. Hardy and Edgerton are compelling as the estranged siblings who will ultimately face off in the gritty, two-day tournament, slugging it out for the \$5 million purse. Both viscerally brutal and heart-wrenching, the *Rocky*-like crowd-pleaser *Warrior* surprisingly delivers a knockout punch. Recommended. (S. Granger)



What's Your Number? ★

Fox, 106 min., R, DVD: \$29.98,
Blu-ray: \$39.99, Jan. 10

In a rash of raunchy female comedies following in the successful wake of *Bridesmaids*, this adaptation of Karyn Bosnak's novel *20 Times a Lady* has gals comparing how many men they've slept with to determine their own marriageability quotient—or something like that. In Boston, on the eve of the wedding of her younger sister, Daisy (Ari Graynor), Ally Darling (Anna Faris) reads a scientific study in a magazine alleging that a woman who's had sex with 20 or more men has serious self-esteem issues and, therefore, little chance of ever getting married. Having already slept with 19, Ally vows to revisit all her past boyfriends to see if she could perhaps rekindle a flame before Number 20 dooms her to eternal spinsterhood. To help her track down the guys, Ally enlists the aid of her promiscuous neighbor, Colin (Chris Evans), a struggling musician who's taken refuge in her apartment to escape his own romantic entanglements. Ally's exes include Martin Freeman, Anthony Mackie, Joel McHale, Thomas Lennon, Andy Samberg, Zachary Quinto, and Faris's real-life husband, Chris Pratt. Awash in gender clichés and blandly directed by Mark Mylod, this



lame and predictable farce's only redeeming graces are ditzy Faris (a brilliantly talented comedienne), and Blythe Danner and Ed Begley Jr. as Ally's divorced parents. Not recommended. (S. Granger)

The Whistleblower

★★★

Fox, 112 min., R, DVD: \$22.99,
Blu-ray: \$29.99, Jan. 24

This tension-filled political thriller based on actual events revolves around a U.N. peacekeeper who discovers that friends and colleagues are involved in sex-trafficking in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina. The story begins in 1999, when struggling Nebraska cop/single mother Kathryn Bolkovac (Rachel Weisz) is lured by the promise of \$100,000 (tax-free) for a six-month tour of duty with Democra Security, a private contractor that hires U.S. police officers and dispatches them around the world. Working at the U.N.'s Women's Rights and Gender Office, Bolkovac discovers two Ukrainian girls who were duped into traveling to Bosnia—ostensibly to work in a Swiss hotel—and subsequently forced into a brothel. One terrified teen (Roxana Condurache) agrees to testify against her kidnappers and dishonest U.N. workers who are complicit in the criminal atrocities, but she's abducted a second time, leaving Bolkovac alone to assemble documented evidence against fellow employees. Despite the support of Human Rights Commission diplomat Madeleine Rees (Vanessa Redgrave) and Internal Affairs agent Peter Ward (David Strathairn), Bolkovac's crusading investigation of the male-dominated U.S. State Department cover-up is blocked by Democra and sneering U.N. officials who treat females as second-class citizens. Director Larysa Kondracki doesn't flinch from depicting brutal authenticity, and Weisz is terrific as Bolkovac (who now lives in the Netherlands with her husband, a U.N. investigator she met in Bosnia). 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 *Abduction* (starring *Twilight* hunk Taylor Lautner), *All's Faire in Love*, *Apollo 18*, *Contagion*, the remake of *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*, *I Melt With You*, George Clooney's *The Ides of March*, *Killer Elite*, *Real Steel*, *Shark Night*, *Take Shelter*, the indie charmer *Turkey Bowl*, and much more!

30 Rock: Season 5

★★★1/2

Universal, 3 discs, 489 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.98



30 Rock has long since strayed from its original premise of detailing the chaotic personal and professional lives of a female head-writer for an NBC sketch-comedy show; now it's much more animated with flash-cut gags and over-the-top characters. But the loony plotlines, brilliant wordplay, and peerless ensemble cast remain strong. This season sees Kable-Town taking over NBC; neurotic star Tracy Jordan (Tracy Morgan) vying for, and then trying to shed, his newfound respectability; network exec and master of the universe Jack Donaghy (Alec Baldwin) becoming a husband and father, and trying to find his place in the new corporate hierarchy (coming up against a most unlikely nemesis); Liz Lemon (Tina Fey) attempting to navigate her long-distance relationship with a pilot (Matt Damon); and narcissistic diva Jenna (Jane Krakowski) trying to help Kenneth (Jack McBrayer) get back into the NBC page program. This is also the season with the brilliantly executed live episode (with both East Coast and West Coast versions). Every chapter is crammed with off-center verbal and visual pranks, and the guest-star wattage is particularly high, with appearances by Kelsey Grammer, Paul Giamatti, Ken Howard, Alan Alda, and Robert De Niro. Compiling all 22 episodes from the 2010–11 fifth season, DVD extras include audio commentaries (some bizarre, such as the pairing of *MacGruber* costars Will Forte and Val Kilmer, who have nothing to do with the particular episode they're commenting on), behind-the-scenes featurettes, and deleted scenes. Highly recommended. (D. Liebenow)

The Adventures of Tintin: Season One ★★★

Shout! Factory, 2 discs, 300 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95



Coinciding with the arrival of Steven Spielberg's motion-capture Hollywood feature film *The Adventures of Tintin*, this release of the first season of the same-titled early '90s animated series is based on Belgian author Hergé's beloved graphic novels about the globetrotting adventures of a boy journalist and his faithful dog, Snowy. A co-production of French and Canadian studios, broadcast in the U.S. on HBO, this series represents the most faithful screen version of the sprawling epics (which were much longer and more novelistic than traditional comic books), right down to reproducing some of the original panels. Despite lackluster performances by the English-language voice actors (including Colin O'Meara as Tintin and David Fox as Capt. Haddock) and the

obvious limitations of the era's TV animation, the show's first year offers good adaptations of seven original stories—"The Crab with the Golden Claws," "The Secret of the Unicorn," "Red Rackham's Treasure," "Cigars of the Pharaoh," "The Blue Lotus," "The Black Island," and "The Calculus Affair"—most of which are presented in double half-hour episodes. Compiling all 13 segments of the 1991 debut season, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Being Human: The Complete First Season

★★★

eOne, 4 discs, 572 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.98, Blu-ray: \$49.98



The American incarnation of the British TV series about a vampire, a werewolf, and a ghost who become roommates turns out to be a worthy remake, moving the story to Boston (although actually shot in Montreal), but otherwise remaining remarkably faithful to the storylines of the original while adding some new threads. Sam Witwer has the requisite bad-boy edge and malevolent smile as Aidan, the reformed (but still tempted) vamp; Meaghan Rath is suitably cute as Sally, the spirit; and Sam Huntington is very likable as nerdy sad-sack werewolf Josh, whose problems multiply when he impregnates a human. This *Being Human* doesn't shy away from the more feral qualities of the original, but it's not just about bloodlust and temptation—the show also deals with remorse and guilt (the human part of the monster mash), offering up characters worth investing time in. And the debut season of the American version turns out to be sturdier than the original series, which lost its way after the first six episodes. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2011, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and interviews with the actors. One of the better horror TV shows of the post-*Buffy* era, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Birth of a Nation

★★★1/2

Kino, 3 discs, 192 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95



D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was the longest and most ambitious American feature film ever made upon its release in 1915, and went on to become a blockbuster and a landmark. Griffith, who spent years experimenting with storytelling techniques, brought his considerable narrative ingenuity to this drama of the Civil War and Reconstruction, captured through the eyes of two families—the Stonemans of the North and the Camerons of the South—whose members are intertwined through various relationships. Much of what was highly sophisticated at the time looks quaint now, but the film's

tintype aura (modeled on the photographs of Matthew Brady and including epic battle scenes) still impresses, as does Griffith's poetic handling of intimate moments, and the performances are graceful, especially Lillian Gish's turn as young Elsie Stoneman, the daughter of an abolitionist Congressman. But *The Birth of the Nation* is also highly controversial because of its rampant racism, demeaning caricatures of African-American characters (all played by actors in blackface), grotesque distortions of history, and portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan as the savior of white culture in the face of emancipation. Although plagued by these contradictions between aesthetics and ethics, the film is an essential part of American cinema history, re-released on DVD and bowing on Blu-ray in definitive editions. Presented here in a newly remastered version from archival 35mm elements, extras include the earlier 1993 restoration edition, seven Civil War shorts directed by Griffith, and a "making-of" featurette. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Boccaccio '70 ★★★

Lorber, 204 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray: \$34.99



Anthology films were all the rage in the 1960s, and this one from 1962—featuring modern tales of love and intrigue reminiscent of the hundred fables that 14th-century author and poet Boccaccio spun in his *Decameron*—is among the most memorable, featuring works focusing on women made by some of the most notable Italian directors of the time. *The Temptation of Dr. Antonio* is a typically extravagant fantasy by Federico Fellini in which a prudish activist (Peppino De Filippo) more than meets his match when a 50-foot Anita Ekberg climbs down from the billboard he's been railing against to seduce him. Luchino Visconti's *The Job* is an elegant talkfest in which a philandering count (Tomas Milian) tries to dissuade his rich wife (Romy Schneider) from divorcing him, while in Vittorio De Sica's ebullient *The Raffle*, Sophia Loren plays a sexy carnival barker who offers a night in her bed as a prize in order to raise money for her friends, only to then find true love. As a bonus the beautifully restored widescreen transfer adds a fourth entry: Mario Monicelli's *Renzo and Luciana*, which was edited out of the original American release. Although lacking similar star power, Monicelli's film tells a pleasant tale of two young office workers who secretly marry against company policy. *Boccaccio '70* doesn't equal the best full-length features of any of the four helmsmen, but it's a fine divertissement. Blu-ray extras include stills galleries. Recommended. [Note: *Boccaccio '70* is also available on DVD in the boxed set *Great Italian Directors Collection*—which includes Monicelli's *Casanova '70* and



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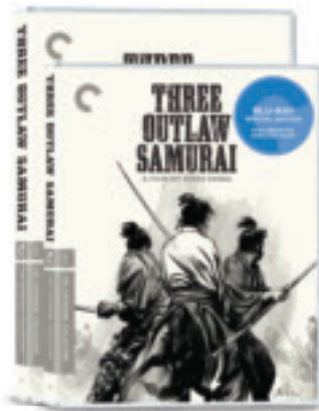
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Casper the Friendly Ghost: The Complete Collection 1945-1963

★★★

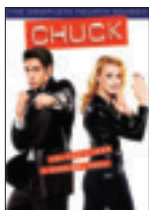
Shout! Factory, 3 discs, 486 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.93



This three-disc set scares up all 55 theatrical animated shorts exhibited between 1945 and 1959, as well as 26 pieces from *The New Casper Cartoon Show* aired in 1963. Casper was a uniquely gentle character, a ghost who only wanted to make friends instead of scare people. In one cartoon after another, Casper is shunned as a spectral outcast, until his (to some) fearsome appearance winds up saving the day and he's accepted for who he is. The first three Casper cartoons are included as stand-apart bonus features, probably because of unsettling scenes of attempted suicide (really!) and death. In "A-Haunting We Will Go," for example, a fox friend of Casper's is shot and killed but is revived in spirit form for the happy ending. Some entries break with formula, including "Ghost of the Town," with Ed Sullivan; "Which Is Witch?" featuring the screen debut of Wendy the Good Witch; and "Boo Moon," which was originally produced in 3D. Casper is not just for boomers only; these cartoons endear and endure because the lonely Casper's search for friendship and his wish to be accepted will resonate with any child. DVD extras include audio commentaries, interviews, and a booklet charting Casper's many lives. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)

Chuck: The Complete Fourth Season ★★★

Warner, 1,032 min., not rated, DVD: 5 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$69.98



The fourth season of *Chuck*—the tongue-in-cheek series featuring amiable-nerd-turned-super-spy Chuck Bartowski (Zachary Levi) and his beautiful handler, bodyguard, and paramour, Sarah (Yvonne Strahovski)—follows our hero as he searches for his mother (Linda Hamilton), who also happens to be an espionage agent and may be working for international criminal mastermind Alexei Volkoff (a perfectly droll Timothy Dalton). Along the way, Chuck keeps trying to pop the question to Sarah, but bad guys keep getting in the way. The roll call of guest stars here include genre figures Dolph Lundgren, Lou Ferrigno, Steve Austin, Robert Englund, and Summer Glau, not to mention Richard Chamberlain and Harry Dean Stanton. Although the season ends with a wedding that goes just as smoothly as one would expect (i.e., not), the final minutes set

up a game-changing scenario for the ensuing fifth and final season. While never a ratings giant, *Chuck* has enjoyed a loyal fan base. Compiling all 24 episodes of the 2010-11 season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Conversation

★★★★1/2

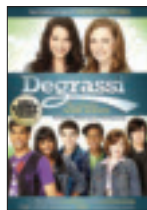
Lionsgate, 113 min., PG, Blu-ray: \$24.99



Although *The Conversation* is the least well known of Francis Ford Coppola's films of the 1970s—overshadowed by the dramatic sweep of *The Godfather* and the sensory overload of *Apocalypse Now*—this 1974 production was arguably his most accomplished piece of filmmaking, and it ranks as one of the best movies of the era. Gene Hackman is brilliant as Harry Caul, a private surveillance expert who keeps himself removed from the implications of his work by obsessing over recording quality and disregarding the content of the conversations...until he captures something on his equipment that may have fatal consequences. John Cazale plays Harry's garrulous co-worker, Stan; and Frederic Forrest, Cindy Williams, Teri Garr, and Allen Garfield co-star, along with a pre-*Star Wars* Harrison Ford. Coppola's original script—which steers clear of specific politics, but serves up a heady mix of conspiracy, distrust, and personal responsibility—comes to life beautifully under his subtle direction. Bill Butler's camerawork and Walter Murch's richly textured sound design and dense editing further add to the overwhelming atmosphere of paranoia and isolation here. The Blu-ray debut features two superb and illuminating commentary tracks (one by Coppola, the other from Murch), along with new and archival featurettes. A haunting, harrowing classic, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Degrassi: The Complete Tenth Season ★★★

Echo Bridge, 4 discs, 1,102 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99



This 2010-11 10th season of the popular Canadian Gemini Award-winning series—a continuation of the iconic '80s show—follows the interconnected ups and downs of a group of students at Degrassi Community School. The first two-part episode, "What a Girl Wants," follows senior mean girl Holly J. (Charlotte Arnold), who leaves her boyfriend Declan (Landon Liboiron) with his intense sister Fiona (Annie Clark) in NYC to return back home to school in Toronto. All is not well for the golden girl, however: Holly J.'s folks' financial ruin dashes her hopes of attending Yale the next year, and she finds herself up

against the popular Sav (Raymond Ablack) in the running for student council prez. While some things stay the same (including Stefan Brogren as the principal...although longtime fans will remember him as Zit Remedy guitarist "Snake" from the original series), this year adds new cast members, including Munro Chambers as bipolar punker Eli, Luke Bilyk as alpha-on-the-horizon Drew, and Jordan Todosey as Drew's "stepbrother" Adam, a FTM transgender teen (the first in TV history) who is featured in various story arcs. From abuse to coming out, from studying to seduction, the drama never ends at Degrassi. In "Drop the World," the final two-parter of this 44-episode set, two classmates wind up in the hospital: one whose water broke at the school dance, and another who deliberately crashed his car so his girlfriend would come see him. Sure to be popular, this is recommended. (J. Williams-Wood)

Desperate Housewives: The Complete Seventh Season ★★★

Buena Vista, 5 discs, 989 min., TV-PG, DVD: \$45.99



With the departure of Nicollette Sheridan's Edie, this darkly comic soap needed another imperious lady to spice things up, so Vanessa Williams comes aboard in the penultimate season as Lynette's college friend, Renée, a divorcée who moves to Wisteria Lane but neglects to tell Lynette (Felicity Huffman) about the fling she once had with Lynette's husband, Tom (Doug Savant). And because every year needs a nemesis, Paul Young (Mark Moses) returns after a stint in the pokey for a murder he didn't commit (no one's happy to see him, largely because of the one he *did* commit), and begins plotting his revenge; but the deranged Felicia (Harriet Sansom Harris) has a devious plan of her own. Meanwhile, Bree (Marcia Cross) takes up with her contractor (Brian Austin Green), Susan (Teri Hatcher) turns to the Internet to make money, and Gaby (Eva Longoria) finds out the truth about her daughter. In the inevitable big "sweeps" episode, Susan suffers an injury that puts her on the waiting list for a kidney. Other storylines involve Tom's mother (Lois Smith), who's losing her grip on reality; and Susan's mom (Leslie Ann Warren), who faces a health scare of her own. And as always, neighbors Lee (Kevin Rahm) and Karen (Kathryn Joosten) live things up whenever the proceedings veer toward the sentimental. Compiling all 23 episodes from 2010-11, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and bloopers. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

The Four Feathers ★★★

Criterion, 115 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95

While it wasn't the first adaptation of

A.E.W. Mason's titular classic novel of British imperial heroism and stiff-upper-lip loyalty, this 1939 Technicolor adventure from the Korda siblings—producer Alexander and director Zoltán—is the most famous and is still considered the definitive version (a 2002 production starring Heath Ledger tried to add a modern sensibility that felt shoehorned into the 19th-century attitudes of the characters). Set mostly in the years 1895-98 during the Sudan uprising, *The Four Feathers* celebrates the heroism of young poet Harry Faversham (John Clements), who's accused of cowardice (symbolized by white feathers) by his closest comrades after he resigns his army commission on the eve of a mission. Later, Faversham redeems himself by risking his life to sneak into Sudan disguised as an Arab and rescue the three friends who shunned him. Ralph Richardson is especially good as Capt. John Durrance, a quietly suffering colleague, and C. Aubrey Smith represents the old empire with blustery dignity as Gen. Burroughs, whose daughter, Ethne (June Duprez), is Harry's fiancée. Grandly mounted (much of it was shot on location in Sudan), gorgeously photographed, and backed by a dramatic score by Miklós Rózsa, this is a rousing if also decidedly colonialist-minded adventure, celebrating the ideals of the British Empire and the superiority of "civilized" Europeans as they battle the "bloodthirsty" African enemy. Re-released on DVD and bowing on Blu-ray, extras include audio commentary by film historian Charles Drazin, an interview with David Korda (Zoltán's son), and archival behind-the-scenes footage. A thrilling, old-fashioned epic, this is recommended. (S. Axmayer)



Happy Endings: The Complete First Season

★★★★

Sony, 2 discs, 276 min., not rated, DVD: \$35.99

After several years as Jack Bauer's daughter on 24, Elisha Cuthbert seems like an unlikely casting choice for a sitcom, but this ABC series was able to find an audience by freshening up the *Friends* formula. The story begins with Alex (Cuthbert), who runs a Chicago boutique, leaving her less ambitious fiancé, Dave (Zachary Knighton), at the altar because she isn't ready for marriage. But they continue to hang out, having been together for 10 years. The rest of the gang includes Alex's tightly wound sister, Jane (Eliza Coupe), and Jane's more laidback husband, Brad (Damon Wayans Jr.); plus two singles, Max (Adam Pally) and Penny (Casey Wilson). After the wedding fiasco, Dave moves in with Max, a gay slacker, and resumes life as a bachelor. Unfortunately, the pilot is a mess,



and the characters come across as shallow and hypocritical (there's nothing funny, for instance, about the way everyone makes fun of Max's weight—and outside of Hollywood's stringent standards, he's hardly fat). But during subsequent segments, in which Alex looks for a roommate and Dave dates again, the crew becomes more likable, while also finding creative ways to show their support (like the plan Brad and Max hatch to get Penny's manipulative assistant to quit). Because *Happy Endings* began as a midseason replacement, this set consists of only 13 episodes, aired in 2011. DVD extras include deleted scenes, outtakes, and an irreverent interview with Pally and Wilson. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

How to Make It in America: The Complete First Season

★★★1/2
HBO, 2 discs, 240 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$39.98, Blu-ray: \$49.99

The theme song for HBO's half-hour dramedy celebrating entrepreneurial spirit in New York City opens with the plea "I need a dollar," which could serve as the mantra for the guys at the center of the action here. Struggling to hit the jackpot and attain the American dream, Ben (Bryan Greenburg), an aspiring clothing designer and hipster fashion maven from the hood, and his boyhood buddy, Cam (Victor Rasuk), want to skip over the hard part and jump right into the big time. It's not a matter of laziness—the pair are constantly on the hustle as they try to put together their own hip line of jeans—but rather simply driving ambition. Ben and Cam skate through life on wits, talent, and smooth talk, navigating the margins between art and commerce. Eddie Kaye Thomas is gullible bankroller David, a young broker who gladly invests in return for being part of the hipster New York scene; Lake Bell is Ben's ex-girlfriend, Rachel; and Luis Guzmán is Cam's ex-con cousin, Rene. Scott "Kid Cudi" Mescudi and Shannyn Sossamon also costar. Unfortunately, despite the show's attempts at street-smart storylines and Big Apple atmosphere—with characters bouncing between living large and going broke—*How to Make It in America* still feels somewhat lightweight. Compiling all eight episodes of the 2010 debut season, extras include cast and crew episode commentaries, featurettes, and deleted scenes. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)



Island of Lost Souls

★★★★1/2

Criterion, 70 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95

Director Erle C. Kenton's 1932 film adaptation of H.G. Wells's novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is possibly the least appreciated and most transgressive



horror classic of the early 1930s, a period that also gave us the original *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Freaks*, *The Mummy*, *The Black Cat*, and many more. Charles Laughton stars as Dr. Moreau, who conducts sadistic experiments in his secret tropical island laboratory (called "The House of Pain"), turning animals into human-like beings. Bela Lugosi (under wolfish makeup) co-stars as the Sayer of the Law ("Are we not men?" he chants). When castaway guest Edward Parker (Richard Arlen) washes ashore, Moreau plots to pair him off with his most successful experiment—"Panther Woman" Lota (Kathleen Burke)—essentially conducting an experiment in bestiality, which explains why the movie was censored in the U.S. and banned in Britain for decades. The original negative was lost and most existing versions are incomplete, so Criterion has pieced together this restored edition from multiple sources (some quite worn and damaged)—the first complete offering on home video. While not pristine, it's probably the best the film has looked since its initial release. DVD and Blu-ray extras include audio commentary by film historian Gregory Mank, bonus interviews with critics and filmmakers, and a 1976 short film by the band Devo (whose debut LP was titled *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!*). Highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Kojak: Season Two

★★★★

Shout! Factory, 6 discs, 1,200 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.99

No sophomore slump for *Kojak*, which was nominated for four Emmys in its second season and took home TV's top prize for Telly Savalas's iconic role as New York detective Theo Kojak. Cop shows were plentiful in the '70s, but this series had its own distinctive beat, with the sharply dressed, bald, lollipop-sucking Kojak epitomizing a gruff, no-nonsense guy who barks orders and smart-mouths his superior ("Did you know your lips move when you read?"). In one memorable episode, he does not mince words with grieving parents whose dead son—Kojak all but tells them—was involved in a rape. Although grittier than similar fare, the show was also a class act, created by Abby Mann (*Judgment at Nuremberg*) and featuring incisive writing and naturalistic direction. And it was pure procedural. Forget Kojak's private life; it was the heinous crimes that made him tick—and ticked him off. In this season, Kojak grapples with the usual gangs and crooks as well as a bank-robbing gypsy, a mad bomber, and a scheming, homicidal wife (not his). Some great guest stars make appearances here, including Leslie Nielsen, Paul Anka, Emmy-winning Zohra Lampert as the thieving vagabond, and the indefatigable Ruth Gordon as a psychic. *TV Guide* ranked Kojak No. 18 on its list of the "50 Greatest TV



Characters of All Time," and this set contains ample evidence of why. Who loves ya, baby? We do. Compiling all 25 episodes from the 1974–75 second season, this is recommended. (D. Liebenson)

Landmarks of Early Soviet Film ★★★

Flicker Alley, 4 discs, \$95 min., not rated, DVD: \$69.95



This eight-film silent Soviet cinema collection offers a revelatory diversity of entries, from dynamic dramas to witty comedies to striking documentaries. The historical highlights are the pro-collective propaganda drama *Old and New* (1929), which was Sergei Eisenstein's final silent feature (co-directed with Grigori Aleksandrov); and the first feature-length documentary from newsreel pioneer Dziga Vertov, *Stride, Soviet!* (1926). But the lesser known productions are equally interesting and often more entertaining for modern audiences. For example, film theorist turned director Lev Kuleshov's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924) is a political cartoon of a satire that knowingly spoofs stereotypes of "Bolshevik revolutionaries" while embracing equally absurd American clichés. Kuleshov's *By the Law* (1926), based on a Jack London story, is a harrowing survival narrative about gold prospectors in the Yukon. Boris Barnet's *The House on Trubnaya Square* (1928) uses slapstick comedy to slip a lesson about unionization into a very funny, fast-paced tale of a naïve peasant in the big city. On the documentary side, there's Esfir Shub's influential *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927); Victor Turin's *Turksib* (1930), a compelling piece about the construction of the railroad linking Turkestan and Siberia; and Mikhail Kalatozov's *Salt for Svanetia* (1930), a stylistically adventurous account of an isolated village in the Georgian Soviet Republic. A couple productions are culled from old video editions, but the majority benefit from excellent, high-quality remastering, and all feature solid musical scores. DVD extras include a booklet with scholarly notes. A well-curated set, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Les Cousins ★★★1/2

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



Claude Chabrol's 1959 second feature, set in the decadent bohemian society of Paris, stars Gérard Blain as Charles, a studious boy come to live with his sophisticated bon vivant cousin, Paul (Jean-Claude Brialy), in the lavish apartment of his absent uncle. Shy, earnest, and naïve, Charles is an idealist in a society of reckless hedonists—alienated by Paul's friends' social

games and offhanded cruelties, but smitten with a young woman named Florence (Juliette Mayniel). Strange undercurrents of obsession and decadence bubble through the party scenes, yet what's most impressive is the anxiety underlying the relationships, including the mix of affection and jealousy between the cousins, and the spell that an insolent creep named Clovis (Claude Cervel) holds over Paul. Chabrol's black-and-white sophomore effort boasts a quietly evocative style that foreshadows the themes and sensibility of his later murder mysteries and psychological thrillers. Extras on the DVD re-release and Blu-ray debut include audio commentary by film scholar Adrian Martin, and a booklet. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Lie to Me: The Complete Third and Final Season

★★★1/2

Fox, 4 discs, 549 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.98



Tim Roth stars in this Fox network-aired twist on the forensic crime show as Dr. Cal Lightman, a brilliant psychologist and head of a private company of "deception experts" (who can spot when a person lies by examining body language and behavior) that provides services to various clients (including government agencies). The third season stirs up internal conflicts, setting Cal, who sports a bit of Dr. House-type social antagonism, against his partner, Dr. Gillian Foster (Kelli Williams), the friendlier face of the Lightman Group—leading to shenanigans that put the entire company at risk. On the personal front, Lightman's loving relationship with his teenage daughter, Emily (Hayley McFarland), remains a recurring thread, particularly in terms of her interactions with boyfriend Liam (Brandon Jones). Otherwise, *Lie to Me* offers the same formula of other crime procedurals, albeit with its own unique scientific explanations. The series got off to a slow start but grew more interesting in year two, when it eased up on the forensic techno-babble and focused more on character drama. A winner of the 2010 People's Choice award for Favorite TV Crime Drama, the series was nevertheless cancelled after this 13-episode 2010–11 third season. DVD extras include deleted scenes and a promotional featurette with Roth. Optional. (S. Axmaker)

Ma & Pa Kettle: Complete Comedy Collection ★★★

Universal, 5 discs, 823 min., G/not rated, DVD: \$19.98

The titular corny backwoods couple played by Marjorie Main and Percy Kilbride made their debut as supporting players in *The Egg and I* (1947), a comedy about city girl Claudette Colbert's adventures in rural Amer-

ica after her husband (Fred MacMurray) indulges in his dream: chicken farming. Directed by Chester Erskine, the film was a good-natured effort with amiable leads, but it was Ma and Pa Kettle who went on to star in a series of low-budget movies, kicking off with *Ma and Pa Kettle* (1949), directed by Charles Lamont and co-starring Richard Long as Tom, the unusually responsible eldest Kettle son in an otherwise out-of-control brood of 15 kids. This is basically hick humor, but Main and Kilbride know how to sell it: she's loud and loving as an unpretentious mother hen, and he's a pleasantly irresponsible loafer who devises audacious schemes to get out of working for a living. The series, which ultimately numbered 10 productions (including *The Egg and I*)—all compiled here—continued with Lamont helming 1950's *Ma and Pa Kettle Go to Town* (which turns out to be Manhattan); *Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm* (1951), directed by Edward Sedgwick and involving, among other things, a search for uranium; *Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair* (1952), directed by Charles Barton, with the Kettles trying to raise money to send a daughter to college; Lamont's *Ma and Pa Kettle on Vacation* (1953), featuring a trip to Paris; *Ma and Pa Kettle at Home* (1954), another Lamont effort, concerning a college scholarship competition; and *Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki* (1955), the final film with Kilbride as Pa, directed by Lee Sholem. Arthur Hunnicutt stepped in as Pa for *The Kettles in the Ozarks* (1956), Lamont's last stint in the director's chair; and Parker Fennelly took on the role in *The Kettles on Old MacDonald's Farm* (1957), a romp from filmmaker Virgil W. Vogel involving matchmaking efforts. But with Kilbride gone and the franchise running out of ideas, the series ended. In the larger scheme of Hollywood history, the Kettle films are a footnote at best, but they still have fans among older viewers and this set offers an excellent bargain. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Modern Family: The Complete Second Season ★★★1/2

Fox, 3 discs, 528 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$49.99



The second season of this hit sitcom was the reigning champ at the 2011 Emmy Awards, nabbing five wins, including Outstanding Comedy Series. A warm and witty updating of the classic sitcom formula, *Modern Family's* extended brood includes working dad Phil (Ty Burrell), soccer mom Claire (Julie Bowen), and their three kids (Nolan Gould, Sarah Hyland, Ariel Winter); gay partners Mitchell and Cameron (Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Eric Stonestreet), who have an adopted baby daughter;

and patriarch Jay (Ed O'Neill), who's on his second marriage to a lively (and hot!) younger woman, Gloria (Sofia Vergara), whose school-age son Manny (Rico Rodriguez) hails from a previous marriage. The three households are connected through Jay, who is the father of Claire and Mitchell. The format combines the mockumentary approach of *The Office* (with interview-style character commentary added for both punch lines and tender observations) and classic comic situations, all springing from the stresses and responsibilities of modern life. The sophomore season—which includes Halloween antics, a coitus interruptus incident, and a backyard construction project gone awry—ends with a graduation and a birthday for Jay, and manages to come up with happy endings for all. Compiling all 24 episodes from the 2010–11 second season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Mutiny on the Bounty

★★★1/2

Warner, 185 min., not rated,
Blu-ray: \$19.98

Starring Marlon Brando as Fletcher Christian and Trevor Howard as Captain Bligh, this is the 1962 second feature-length version (after the 1935 classic starring Clark Gable and Charles Laughton) of the real-life story of the most famous mutiny in British naval history, dramatized by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall in their titular novel. Opting for an epic style, this handsome three-hours-plus production is a bloated piece of storytelling, recounting the escalating conflict between Bligh and First Mate Christian during the *Bounty's* voyage to and from Tahiti, as the callous commander demands increasingly unreasonable sacrifices from his crew. Brando's ego famously ran amok during the shooting, causing delays and breaking the budget, and he clashed so violently with original director Carol Reed that Reed dropped out and was replaced by Lewis Milestone. Ultimately, the film is swamped by its arch dramatics, insistent "grand" imagery (displaying all that location money in every shot), and Brando's eccentric, fascinatingly foppish interpretation of his character. Still, this lavish 70mm video postcard of the South Seas looks gorgeous, and Richard Harris is very good as John Mills, a sailor who supports Christian's rebellion. Bowing on Blu-ray in the original, uncut roadshow version, extras include alternate prologue and epilogue sequences and archival featurettes. Of interest largely to fans of Brando and the source material, this Oscar nominee is a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

Pee-Wee's Big Adventure ★★★

Warner, 91 min., PG, Blu-ray: \$19.98

Pee-Wee's Big Adventure marked the 1985

big-screen debut both for Paul Reubens's titular alter-ego (a children's TV show character Reubens originally created in an improvisational comedy revue) and director Tim Burton: a perfect melding of sensibilities.

Pee-Wee is a lunatic man-child wearing an out-of-date suit and frolicking in a funhouse brought to life with Burton's surreal imagery and candy-colored sets. All of it hangs on a wispy plot concerning a neighborhood bully, a stolen red bicycle, and a cross-country quest to reunite Pee-Wee and his bike—an adventure that brings him in contact with a motorcycle gang, escaped convicts, rodeo clowns, Japanese monsters, and all sorts of other scary folks. Co-written by Reubens with improv buddy and future *SNL* star Phil Hartman, and Michael Varhol, the screenplay is full of playground puns and clever cartoonish gags. Pee-Wee evokes a little kid playing grown-up in an adult world without losing his sense of wonder in this epic road movie featuring some of the strangest characters (like Large Marge, a ghostlike female trucker) to ever grace the silver screen. Making a welcome debut on Blu-ray, extras include audio commentary by Burton and Reubens, deleted scenes, an isolated music score (with additional comments by composer Danny Elfman), and production sketches and storyboards. Recommended. (S. Axmayer)



Raising Hope: The Complete First Season

★★★

Fox, 3 discs, 506 min., not rated,
DVD: \$39.98

In Fox's heartwarming working-class comedy *Raising Hope*, Jimmy (Lucas Neff) lives at home with his mother, Virginia (Martha Plimpton), a maid; his father, Burt (Garret Dillahunt), a lawn and pool man; and his delusional great-grandmother, Maw Maw (Cloris Leachman). After a one-night stand, 22-year-old Jimmy finds himself a father, much like his parents before him. Since the mom (Bijou Phillips) was a serial killer, she gets the electric chair and Jimmy gets the titular baby. Over the course of the season, Jimmy navigates the rapids of parenthood, lands a job at a grocery store, and falls for fellow clerk Sabrina (Shannon Woodward), only she has a boyfriend. Other recurring characters are daycare operator Shelley (Kate Micucci) and store manager Barney (Gregg Binkley), while guest stars include Jason Lee as a has-been rocker, Amy Sedaris as Virginia's competitive cousin, and J.K. Simmons as Burt's judgmental brother. While the actors are game, the show sometimes crosses the line between creative and creepy with jokes about topics like senility and capital punishment. Fortunately, the feel-good moments



hit the spot, the flashbacks are funny, and the season finale successfully grapples with the show's thorniest issues. Compiling all 11 episodes from the 2010–11 debut, DVD extras include the unaired pilot, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and deleted scenes. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Treasures 5: The West, 1898-1938 ★★★

Image, 3 discs, 596 min., not rated, DVD: \$59.98

The fifth box set of archival offerings from the National Film Preservation Foundation focuses on the American West, but that doesn't mean it's all about vintage westerns. As in the previous *Treasures* collections, the 40-film compilation spans features, shorts, documentaries, newsreels, travelogues, and fragments from the silent and early sound eras, serving up a record of the American West as it was transforming from frontier to modern world. The fictional works here are generally (but not exclusively) westerns, from Broncho Billy and Tom Mix shorts, to the earliest surviving narrative shot in Yosemite National Park (1910's *The Sergeant*, from filmmaker Francis Boggs), as well as comedies ranging from a Clara Bow vehicle (yes, the "It" girl brings her sexy, seductive ways to the Yukon in 1926's delightful *Mantrap*) to director Gregory La Cava's 1925 role-reversal laffer *Womanhandled*. But the nonfiction pieces also exhibit marvelous scope, from newsreels of the Native Americans of the Southwest reservations to early documentaries and docudrama re-creations of real-life exploits of frontier lawmen. As a whole, this set perhaps offers more archival than entertainment value, but the wide span of works presented here makes the case for film preservation better than any lecture. And this is not just cinematic history, but also American history, and should therefore appeal to a wider audience. DVD extras include audio commentaries, background notes, and an extensive booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmayer)



Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during January and February, including: *American Restoration: Volume One*, *Bones: The Complete Sixth Season*, *Bored to Death: The Complete Second Season*, *Grey's Anatomy: The Complete Seventh Season*, *Kuroneko*, *Le Beau Serge*, *Lies My Father Told Me*, *Mister Magoo: The Television Collection: 1960-1977*, *A Passionate Woman*, *V: The Complete Second Season*, *Way Down East*, 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 2011. Unless otherwise noted, titles are available from most distributors.

9000 Needles (Bigfoot Ascendant [www.bigfoot-ascendant.com], 83 min., DVD: \$16.99). After filmmaker Doug Dearth's brother Devin—a champion body-builder—suffered a stroke, his physical therapy was cut short by his insurance company. Disillusioned, Dearth's family made arrangements to take Devin to China for a relatively low-cost alternative treatment involving acupuncture and herbal remedies. This powerful, uplifting documentary captures Devin's emotionally moving experience. (VL-7/11)



The Battle for Marjah (Athena, 84 min., Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99). With the U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan passing a 10th anniversary, this HBO-aired documentary—from embedded British journalist filmmaker Ben Anderson—illustrates why a clear-cut victory remains elusive, focusing on the Marines' efforts to win the titular Taliban-held town. (VL-11/11)



Buck (MPI, 89 min., DVD: \$24.98). Winner of an Audience Award at Sundance, director Cindy Meehl's documentary serves up an amiable profile of charismatic cowboy Buck Brannaman, the real-life "horse whisperer" who inspired Nicholas Evans's 1995 novel. (VL Online-9/11)

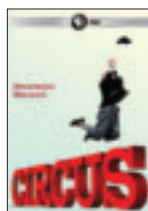


Catfish (Universal, 88 min., DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$26.98). Exploring a bizarre Facebook encounter, directors Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost's controversial documentary tells a tangled tale involving Schulman's

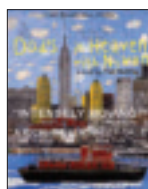


younger brother Nev, a New York City photographer contacted by an 8-year-old Michigan artistic prodigy who supposedly created a remarkable oil painting inspired by one of Nev's striking photos. (VL Online-1/11)

Circus (PBS, 3 discs, 360 min., DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99 [\$44.95 w/PPR from www.pbs.org]). Aired on PBS, director Maro Chermayeff's excellent behind-the-scenes documentary series explores the fascinating characters working for the Big Apple Circus, a traditional one-ring revue that performs for several months in Manhattan. (VL-3/11)



Dad's in Heaven with Nixon (Two Sons Productions [www.amazon.com], 86 min., DVD: \$19.99 [\$179.95 w/PPR from Films Media Group, www.films.com]). Filmmaker Tom Murray's poignant documentary details his family's up-and-down history as descendants of prolific inventor T.E. Murray, ultimately focusing on his autistic brother Chris, who might have languished in institutions but instead became a critical and financial success as an artist known for his colorful Manhattan landscapes. (VL-9/11)



Dive! (First Run, 53 min., DVD: \$24.95). Examining the urban phenomenon of dumpster diving outside grocery stores in order to retrieve perfectly edible food, director Jeremy Seifert's documentary follows the filmmaker and his friends on several midnight raids in Los Angeles, while also reflecting on broader issues related to waste amidst growing poverty. (VL-9/11)



Family Affair (C-Line Films [www.c-linefilms.com], 82 min., DVD: \$20: individuals; \$295 (w/PPR: institutions). Filmed over five years, director Chico Colvard's dysfunctional family portrait grips the viewer at the outset by recounting a childhood day in Kentucky in 1978 when Chico accidentally shot and badly wounded his sister Paula with an automatic rifle owned by his Vietnam-vet father, Elijah—an event that would lead to the exposure of Elijah's incestuous abuse of his three daughters. Colvard visits his sisters—now adults—who break bread with their father during Thanksgiving but are estranged from their mother. (VL-3/11)



Forbidden Lie\$ (IndiePix, 104 min., DVD: \$24.95). Anna Broinowski's controversial and fascinating documentary follows Norma Khouri, a Jordanian-born writer whose 2003 bestseller *Forbidden Love*—detailing a tragic honor killing in her native country—was later declared to be a literary fraud. (VL-1/11)



Forks Over Knives (Virgil, 96 min., DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99). Lee Fulkerson's illuminating documentary takes a critical look at the consequences of Western dietary habits, offering compelling evidence supporting the benefits of a plant-based diet (VL-9/11).



Gasland (Docurama, 106 min., DVD: \$29.95). Josh Fox's fascinating and frightening Oscar-nominated documentary questions the claim that natural gas is the answer to America's energy crisis, examining the controversial extraction process called hydraulic fracturing—or "fracking"—which involves pumping toxic chemicals into wells to release the gas. Fox discovers that major sources of drinking water are being contaminated (some folks can even use a lighter to set their tap water on fire), and that the air around well sites is becoming polluted. (VL-11/11)



Hey, Boo: Harper Lee & To Kill a Mockingbird (First Run, 82 min., DVD: \$24.95). Mary McDonagh Murphy's touching documentary looks at the stunning success of Harper Lee's semiautobiographical Pulitzer Prize-winning 1960 novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and discusses the life of the reclusive Alabama writer who would never pen another book. (VL-9/11)



If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise (HBO, 2 discs, 240 min., DVD: \$24.98). Spike Lee's HBO-aired two-part documentary sequel revisits the city of New Orleans five years after his 2006 *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, which explored the human impact of the devastating Hurricane Katrina. (VL-5/11)





"A charmer.... [with] a visual style and a deadpan humor that owes an obvious debt to the Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki."

—Manohla Dargis, THE NEW YORK TIMES

"A breath of Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy*."

—Carlos Reygadas (filmmaker, *Silent Light*)

"A distinctive regional dish [with] an unexpectedly haunting aftertaste... well worth savoring."

—Stuart Klawans, THE NATION

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- **Best Iberoamerican Film** — Mar Del Plata Film Festival
- **Best Feature Film** — Cinema Tropical

DVD SPECIAL FEATURES

- Interview with co-director Daniel Vega
- Theatrical trailer
- The Vega brothers' award-winning short film, *Inside Down Basement*
- Optional 5.1 soundtrack
- Downloadable press kit PDF

octubre

a film by Daniel and Diego Vega

2011 Theatrical Release

Peru's entry for the Foreign Language Film Oscar

Pre-Book: January 11 | **Street:** February 7

It is October, the "purple month" in Lima. Sofia spends her days as a worshipper in the processions celebrating the Lord of Miracles, but her nights still ache with loneliness. One day, her neighbor, Clemente, a small-time loan shark with a penchant for reckless hooks, grave solitude, money lending and nothing else, is left with a baby. While he searches for the child's prostitute mother, Sofia joyfully starts taking care of the infant in Clemente's house. Clemente will thus discover emotional attachments he never thought he had.

DVD Cat. #: NYD 114512

UPC: 7-17119-11454-1

ISBN: 1-56730-501-6

Peru, 2010, 83 min., Color, Aspect ratio: 2.35:1, In Spanish with optional English subtitles



"Unprecedented... likely to become a classic."

—Dennis West, CINEASTE



THE SKY TURNS

A FILM BY MERCEDES ÁLVAREZ

"A work of... semi-magical realism. Instead of expressing sorrow for a vanishing way of life, *The Sky Turns* exudes a clear and weightless joy."

—Ty Burr, The Boston Globe

"A fastidious tone poem, meticulously composed and deliberately paced."

—Mike Hale, The New York Times

"A documentary marvel."

—Michael Joshua Rowin, THE L MAGAZINE

DVD SPECIAL FEATURES

- Video essay by the filmmaker
- Photo gallery
- Theatrical trailer
- Downloadable press kit PDF

2011 Theatrical Release

PRE-BOOK: JANUARY 18

STREET: FEBRUARY 14

After 35 years, director Mercedes Álvarez returns to her native village of Aldealseñor in remote northwest Spain. She was the last child born there; now only 14 aged inhabitants remain — the last generation of a people that have carried on more than 1000 years of village life. Álvarez yields the spotlight to the dwindling but tenacious villagers. Álvarez's proxy within the film is her friend, the painter Pello Azketa. The villagers and Azketa share something in common: things have begun to disappear before their eyes. Azketa's encroaching blindness mirrors the film's theme of dimming memory, and his nebulous landscapes offer a key to the region's austere beauty.

Spain, 2005, 106 min., Color,

Aspect ratio: 1.33:1,

In Spanish with English subtitles

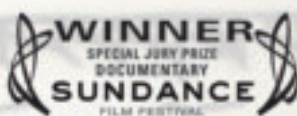
DVD Cat. #: NYD 110712

UPC: 7-17119-11074-1

ISBN: 1-56730-502-4



CRITICS' PICK
The New York Times
Nylon
The Washington Post



A film by Ngawang Choephel

TIBET IN SONG

Never forget the music in your heart

DVD SPECIAL FEATURES

- Additional Tibetan Folk Songs
- Scene Selections
- Theatrical Trailer

tibetinsong.com newyorkerfilms.com

U.S.A., 2010, 86 min., Color, In English and Tibetan with English subtitles

DVD CAT. #: NYD 115511 UPC: 7-17119-11554-8 ISBN: 1-56730-500-8



"I URGE EVERYONE TO SEE THIS FILM."

—Lobsang Nyandak, The Representative of His Holiness THE DALAI LAMA

"AN INCREDIBLE ACHIEVEMENT."

—Annie Lennox



Inside Job (Sony, 108 min., DVD: \$28.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95). Narrated by Matt Damon, filmmaker Charles Ferguson's Oscar-winning documentary offers a penetrating look at the financial industry's culpability in setting off the 2008 global economic crisis, featuring interviews with authors, bank managers, and government ministers. (VL-3/11)



Lucky (Docurama, 82 min., DVD: \$29.95). Director Jeffrey Blitz's insightful documentary looks at how the lottery changes people's lives in unexpected ways, examining the various consequences—good and bad—on winners, ranging from a carnival-ride operator whose \$16 million jackpot almost got him killed (by his own greedy family members) to a Vietnamese-American man who was able to provide luxury living quarters for relatives in his native homeland. (VL-7/11)



Marwencol (Cinema Guild, 84 min., DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95). Director

Jeff Malmberg's engaging documentary explores the life of eccentric protagonist Mark Hogancamp, whose severe beating outside a bar in 2000 left him brain-damaged and comatose. Recuperating, Hogancamp would create the titular multifaceted WWII Belgian model village with plastic dolls, and take photographs that would eventually attract the notice of the art world. (VL-3/11)



Orgasm Inc. (First Run, 80 min., DVD: \$27.95). Director Liz Canner's funny and provocative documentary looks at the search for a cure for Female Sexual Dysfunction, a nebulous condition dismissed as an excuse for drug profiteering by some experts, including New York University psychiatry professor Dr. Leonore Tiefer and *British Medical Journal* editor Ray Moynihan. (VL-9/11)



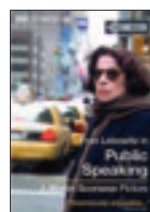
Page One: Inside the New York Times (Magnolia, 92 min., DVD: \$26.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98). Andrew Rossi's insightful documentary selectively covers 12 months in the life of the nation's newspaper of record, focusing on stories at the *New York Times'* media desk, while also examining broader difficulties facing all traditional print media from online competition. (VL-10/11)



The Parking Lot Movie (Passion River, 71 min., DVD: \$19.99 [\$129 w/PPR from www.passionriver.com]). Aired on *Independent Lens*, Meghan Eckman's documentary explores 21st-century class-war through the microcosm of a pay parking lot in Charlottesville, VA—chronicling the daily trials and triumphs of over-educated part-timers working as car-park attendants. (VL-9/11)



Public Speaking (HBO, 82 min., DVD: \$19.98). Railing against contemporary celebrity culture, Jewish lesbian author Fran Lebowitz is the subject of Martin Scorsese's wonderfully entertaining documentary, in which the outspoken author sits down in a booth at NYC's Waverly Inn and riffs on a wide variety of subjects. (VL-7/11)



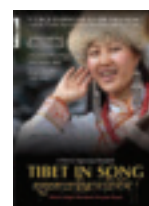
Stonewall Uprising (PBS, 90 min., DVD: \$24.99 [\$49.99 w/PPR from www.pbs.org]). Originally broadcast on PBS's *American Experience* series, this powerful documentary by Kate Davis and David Heilbroner—based on David Carter's book *Stonewall*—offers an extraordinary in-depth history of the events that led to the Stonewall riots in 1969, which marked the beginning of the gay rights movement. (VL-7/11)



Tabloid (MPI, 88 min., DVD: \$24.98). Famed documentarian Errol Morris returns to the lighter side with this documentary on media sensationalism, focusing on Joyce McKinney, who became a celebrity in the British press in 1977 when she pursued a Salt Lake City man to England and either kidnapped or rescued him from Mormon missionary duty—an odd-enough event that still turned out to be only the beginning of her life in the tabloids. (VL-11/11)



Tibet in Song (New Yorker, 86 min., in Tibetan & English w/English subtitles, DVD: \$29.95). Part autobiographical essay, part history lesson, this thought-provoking documentary by Ngawang Choephel—who escaped Tibet as a child but returned to film native folk-singing, and was jailed—celebrates traditional Tibetan culture while also voicing protest over its suppression by the Chinese government. (VL-11/11)





Waiting for Superman (Paramount, 111 min., DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99). Filmmaker Davis Guggenheim's documentary offers an eye-opening overview of America's ailing educational system, serving up portraits of five children attending schools in D.C., the Bronx, East Los Angeles, and Silicon Valley that are uniformly inadequate to their needs. (VL-3/11)



Waking Sleeping Beauty (Buena Vista, 86 min., DVD: \$19.99). Don Hahn's documentary chronicles the amazing transition in Disney animation from a low point in the mid-1980s through the following decade, when a near-miraculous burst of corporate leadership and artistic genius spawned *The Little Mermaid* and other classics. (VL-3/11)



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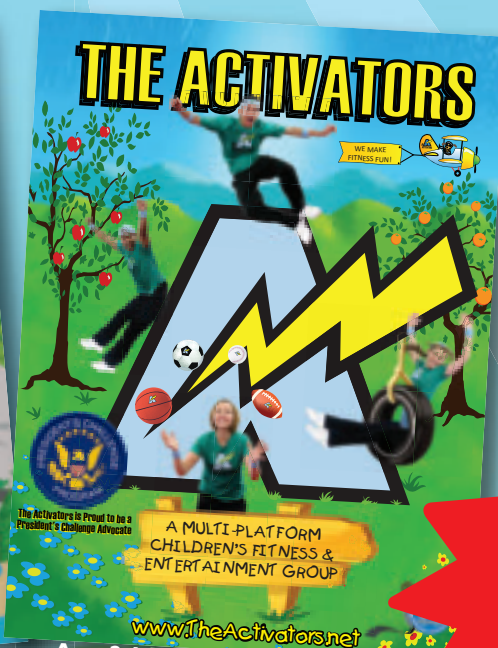


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Ordering information for the videos reviewed in this section can be found in the "Distributor Addresses" listings at the back of the magazine.

★★★★★ = 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

Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late!

★★★

(2011) 6 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-545-32610-9.

The latest animated adaptation from author, illustrator, and narrator Mo Willems (*Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* [VL-1/10] and *The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!* [VL-3/11]), *Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late!* is based on the 2006 picture book. Incorporating elements from the earlier titles, the program features a giggling chorus of schoolchildren (from Philip G. Coburn Elementary in West Springfield, MA, and Marvin Elementary in Norwalk, CT) interacting with the mischievous protagonist, who doesn't want to go to sleep (he's "not even tired!"). Pigeon uses every ploy he can to distract from bedtime, including asking about "your" day, mentioning that it's the middle of the day in China, and voicing the ever-classic request "How about five more minutes?"—before eventually wearing himself out. Featuring music by Scotty Huff and Robert Reynolds, this silly tale also includes an interview with Willems, and a read-along option. Recommended. Aud: K, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Elmo's Music Magic ★★★

(2011) 45 min. DVD: \$14.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

This latest addition to the *Sesame Street*

series boasts a cute premise. Taking books back to the library, Abby Cadabby forgets her magical fairy wand, which little red monster best pal Elmo picks up and waves around—causing the entire neighborhood to do everything in rhyming bursts of song. It's fun at first—from the café to the laundromat—but eventually the gang is worn out from the singing spell and need Abby to set things right. Sprinkled throughout the story are vignettes demonstrating low and high pitch, the alphabet song, as well as a tune by Bert and Ernie about soft v. loud, and segments featuring John Legend, Garth Brooks, Diana Krall, Jennifer Nettles and Kristian Bush of Sugarland, plus a silly Elmo-centric number by Adam Sandler. Also including "Come Back Cookie" with the Cookie Monster, and "One Small Voice" with Elmo (who—for a near-four-year-old—seems to be inappropriately out after dark), bonus features include a sing-along segment, a "What I Am" music video featuring will.i.am, and coloring pages. Recommended. Aud: K, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

The Essential Daffy Duck ★★★

(2011) 2 discs. 169 min. DVD: \$26.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-7806-6439-6.

This new two-disc set collects many of the best of the Daffy Duck classic cartoons, including his debut in "Porky's Duck Hunt," featuring Porky Pig and directed by Tex Avery, as well as "The Great Piggy Bank Robbery," with Daffy as Duck Twacy; "Deduce, You Say," in which he's Dorlock Holmes and Porky is his Watkins; "Robin Daffy," with Porky as Friar Tuck; "Ali Baba Bunny," with Bugs Bunny joining the celebrated band of thieves; "Duck Dodgers in the 24 ½ Century," featuring our hero as space ace; and "Duck Amuck," one of the most ingenious animated shorts of all time, in which an unseen artist teases Daffy. The last of the great pieces compiled here are directed by Chuck Jones, who helped the

character evolve from a "woo-hoo!" madman bouncing around the screen to a splenetic con man driven by greed, jealousy, and ego. Not surprisingly, the newer (post-1985) entries included—such as "The Duxorcist" and "The Night of the Living Duck"—don't hold a candle to the older stuff in this 20-plus 'toon set. DVD extras include a new "career profile" titled "Daffy Duck: Ridicule Is the Burden of Genius," and Easter and Thanksgiving TV specials. Recommended. Aud: P. (S. Axmaker)

From Trash to Tunes ★★1/2

(2010) 296 min. DVD: \$20. Waring Music (dist. by The AV Cafe). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-4507-1170-8.

Geared primarily towards younger viewers, this instructional program features Connecticut craftsman and ethnomusicologist Dennis Waring, who discusses several musical instruments and explains how to make them. In the first part, Waring speaks more to a classroom of kids than to the camera, with onscreen graphics illustrating his points. Waring talks about string, wind, and percussion instruments, detailing relevant history, parts and concepts (vibrations, resonance, frets, etc.), while also demonstrating sounds, and incorporating science and music theory. At the close, Waring invites a few youngsters to join him for a jug band-style song. Although materials include readily available items like cardboard and blocks of wood, an untrained individual would find it difficult to duplicate Waring's efforts with the same degree of success, not counting the spoons and washboards. In addition, the employment of hammers, nails, and staple guns necessitate adult supervision, which Waring addresses in the second half, speaking from a workroom setting, where he provides more detailed instructions for projects that include a two-string banjo, a pipe recorder, and a xylophone. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)



Castle Farm: Volume 1 ★★1/2

(2009) 59 min. DVD: \$14.95. Organa Kids (avail. from most distributors). PPR.

This sweet and lively British animation series for preschool children has the appearance of chalk drawings come to life, its short stories set—as the show's title implies—on a farm surrounding a friendly-looking castle. Here, a handful of human and animal characters keep the working operation running with daily chores, which are frequently interrupted by such charming (and often silly) distractions as a big wind that carries Piggy away just as she's bringing in the laundry with Farm Girl. In "Snails," confusion about the silvery sheen left by the slithery creatures leads chief cowhand Leonard to believe there must be valuable treasure all around—a mistake he frequently makes in *Castle Farm*'s vignettes. "The Carrot Thief" finds Farm Girl and Piggy investigating the disappearance of carrots freshly pulled from a garden, while "Ball Games" sees boss Farmer (a female character) creating a bit of havoc with her tennis racket. Serving up gentle lessons in friendship, responsibility, and problem-solving couched in delightful tales backed with pleasing visuals, this is highly recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (T. Keogh)

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Happily Ever Moey: A Fairy Tale Lark in Central Park ★★

(2011) 56 min. DVD: \$19.95. Lemonade Productions (avail. from www.moeymusicparty.com). PPR.

Sporting 14 tunes, this song-and-dance-filled program features singer/guitarist Melissa "Moey" Levis, who adds hip music and lyrics to retellings of classic fairy tales. Backed by musicians "Princess" Adriane Palikat and "Captain" Ari Jacobson, Moey dresses up in costume along with 65 youngsters play-acting scenes in Central Park on tunes including "Leave the Bears Alone" (about hard-on-the-furniture Goldilocks), "You Can't Blow Me Down" (the tale of the Three Little Pigs), "20 Mattresses" for the Princess and the Pea ("...the girls who are royals are spoiled through and through"), hippity-hoppity "Slow & Steady" (Tortoise and the Hare), "Sing Little Mermaid," and the Ugly Duckling tale "You're Different" ("you're a cutie patootie, shake your booty"). Also including an audio music CD, plus behind-the-scenes featurettes, this title from a self-proclaimed "mommy rocker" is easily recommended. Aud: K, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

The Looney Tunes Show: Season 1, Volume 1 ★★1/2

(2011) 88 min. DVD: \$14.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-7806-6678-X.

Cool and confident Bugs Bunny shares a suburban home with clueless and narcissistic Daffy Duck, and chaos ensues in this reboot featuring Warner Bros. stable of iconic animated characters. Not nearly as inspired as *Tiny Toons* or *Animaniacs*, this Cartoon Network series is nonetheless amusing enough overall to at least not denigrate the legacy of Termite Terrace, the ramshackle building where the original Looney Tunes cartoons were created by such legendary animators as Tex Avery and Bob Clampett.

Compiling four episodes (each with a bonus computer-animated Road Runner segment), the storylines here find Bugs and Daffy competing on a game show, landing in jail after being caught littering, feigning membership in an exclusive country club, and dealing with a power outage. As an added attraction, there are catchy new Merrie Melodies, such as Elmer Fudd's rapturous ode to a grilled cheese sandwich and Yosemite Sam's anger-management ditty, "Blow My Stack." Mel Blanc is irreplaceable, but Jeff Bergman does a serviceable voiceover as Bugs and Daffy; Maurice LaMarche is a suitably bombastic Yosemite Sam; René Auberjonois turns on the Gallic charm as Pepé Le Pew; and Kristen Wiig brings sufficient craziness to Lola Bunny. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (D. Liebenson)

Stone Soup ★★1/2

(2011) 12 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-545-32714-8.

A retelling of the classic fable with a cultural twist, this iconographic-animated adaptation of the 2003 picture book by author and illustrator Jon J. Muth features narration by B.D. Wong. Following three Zen monks on a quest for inner happiness, *Stone Soup* finds the trio stopping at a seemingly barren village, where the people—including a farmer, merchant, scholar, seamstress, and doctor—are weary and suspicious of each other (and, naturally, newcomers). When the monks set up a campfire midtown, a brave young girl asks what they're up to, and when told they are making the titular broth, she offers up a much larger pot for cooking. Little by little, other villagers grow curious and put forward other additions to the soup, such as vegetables and spices, resulting in an eventual feast. Backed by Ernest Troost's music—coupled with sound effects including birds chirping and the crackling fire—this

lesson in social interaction and teamwork also includes an interview with Muth and a read-along option. Highly recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Yogiños—Yoga for Youth: Vishnu's OHMazing Journeys ★★1/2

(2011) 90 min. DVD: \$15.95. Yogiños: Yoga for Youth (dist. by The AV Cafe). PPR.

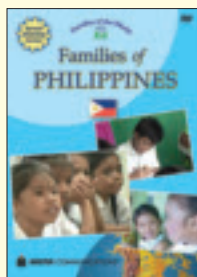
Presenting yoga instruction for children aged 5 to 11, Elizabeth Reese joins up with 11 kids at Dallas's Crow Collection of Asian Art museum. Proceeding to explain the meaning behind each movement—such as "honor ourselves" and "honor others"—Reese delivers her instruction in English combined with Sanskrit and Spanish words and phrases, like "toco el sol" ("touch the sun"), as she incorporates movements into the overarching narrative about Vishnu, a shape shifter, and Lakshmi, his paramour (the museum features sculptures of both characters). In terms of activity, the instruction includes stretching, breathing exercises, and chants designed to bond the students to their bodies, to each other, and to the Earth. *Yogiños* also features three musicians, an Indian dancer who tells the story of Krishna and Kaliya, and a pre-taped sequence in which another yogi works with one of the children on a particular pose. Reese's commentary makes clear that *Yogiños* is as much about spirituality as exercise. References to one's "compassionate fingertips" might seem pretty hippie-dippy, and the way Reese says "OHMazing" for "amazing" quickly grows old, but it's hard to quarrel with her good intentions. DVD extras include additional poses. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

PSYCHOLOGY & SELF-HELP

Into the Mind: Mind Control ★★

(2010) 49 min. DVD: \$169.95. Films Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-61733-538-9.

Michael Mosely, host of the BBC series *Into the Mind*, volunteers here as a human experimental subject—being dosed with psilocybin under carefully monitored conditions that briefly turn him into an excited nonstop talker. Although Mosely was a willing participant in chemically hotwiring his own neural circuitry, others were not so lucky, as viewers will learn in this thought-provoking documentary chronicling 20th-century attempts at mind control and behavior modification. The reasons for conducting mind control vary—from instilling societal conformity to creating weapons of war; even, in one notable case, to break up a romantic relationship of which the patient's parents disapproved (the effort failed). Gruesome old Russian footage shows Ivan Pavlov's famous



Families of Philippines ★★1/2

(2011) 30 min. DVD: \$29.95 (teacher's guide included). Master Communications. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60480-112-5.

The acclaimed and affordable series *Families of the World* (reviewed most recently in VL-7/11) is back, and this time it takes viewers to the Philippines, with the tried-and-true formula of showing a day-in-the-life from the point of view of two children—a boy and a girl; one rural, one urban. The familiar format stays fresh with an interesting script that manages to pack quite a bit of national culture, history, religion, and other facts into the everyday lives of typical families. Khim, 13, lives on the island

of Cebu in a rural area with his extended family. Although he sleeps on the floor in his small, raised bamboo house, and cooks outside with gathered wood, Khim is also shown navigating the Internet at a local arcade, working with a microscope at school, and labeling a DVD. Shahani, 7, lives in Bulacan, north of the capital city of Manila. Although her life is definitely urban—with big malls, a computer at home, and competitions at a dancing class—she takes non-motorized transport to school, doesn't seem to have running water at home, and resides in a simply furnished cement dwelling. A winning addition to an excellent series, this is highly recommended. Aud: E, I, P. (E. Gieschen)

demonstrations in mental conditioning on dogs and children (both species surgically altered for the purpose). B.F. Skinner's controversial theories denying the existence of free will are rather sketchily discussed, along with North Korean "brainwashing" of captured POWs and assorted techniques applied on the unwilling, poor, or socially marginalized—even by "legitimate" researchers. Glossed over in this survey are the DIY brainwashing practiced by cults and criminal gangs (a legal defense in the Patricia Hearst case) and multitudinous conspiracy theories à la *The Manchurian Candidate* that have arisen from this disturbing corner of science. Although Mosely concludes that the human brain is too complex for modern technology to reprogram, there's no reassurance that attempts will cease. Also newly available in the *Into the Mind* series are *Broken Brains* and *Emotions*. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Over My Dad's Body ★★

(2007) 70 min. In Hebrew, Russian & Ukrainian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24. Taliya Finkel Productions. PPR.

Israeli filmmaker Taliya Finkel helmed this strange personal documentary exploring the difficult-to-define boundary between sanity and madness, focusing on

a bizarre feud that tore her family apart. Finkel's father, Shmuel, who was born in the Ukraine and emigrated to Israel in 1973, passed away in 2001 after years of poor health. Diagnosed as being schizophrenic, he nevertheless insisted for years that the man who claimed to be his brother, Sterik, was actually a KGB agent (the fact that Sterik refused Shmuel's demand to take a DNA test only added to the confusion). Accompanied by an Israeli private investigator, Finkel tries—unsuccessfully—to uncover evidence in Israel that her uncle is a spy, followed by an equally fruitless trip to Ukraine to attempt to confirm her dad's insistence that his real sibling died in a Ukrainian prison and was replaced by a look-alike imposter. *Over My Dad's Body* goes out of its way to give Shmuel the benefit of a doubt, even though there's ample evidence that he was an obstreperous man with a frayed grip on reality (a great deal of footage shows Finkel's parents arguing about Shmuel's bad manners—the couple divorced, but Shmuel would visit several times a day seeking food and money). The enigmatic Sterik refused to participate in the making of this film—his face is digitally obscured—so it's hard to imagine how he felt, being at the center of this fairly weird endeavor. Optional. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Not in God's Name ★★★

(2009) 57 min. DVD: \$169.95. Films Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Paula Fouce undertook this documentary after finding herself trapped in a riot between Hindu and Moslem mobs in India. Hoping to understand how religious belief could lead to—and be used to justify—such violence, Fouce begins *Not in God's Name* with news reports of the 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai, coupled with archival footage of historical atrocities from the region, including the assassinations of Mohandas Gandhi and Indira Gandhi (the latter coming after Indira's order to storm the Sikh Golden Temple). But the bulk of the film follows Fouce's visits to religious centers of various faiths—including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism, and Christianity—and her subsequent interviews with leaders who argue that tolerance is an integral part of their beliefs. The most notable interviewee here is the Dalai Lama, who emphasizes that furthering the spiritual well-being of mankind is not only a basic tenet of Buddhism but also a purpose common to all religions. While Fouce's cinematic essay confirms the

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melancholy truth of the statement she quotes from Pascal—i.e., that men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when it's done from religious conviction—the film also shows that people of good will from many traditions maintain that tolerance of different beliefs is a necessary element of any true religion. DVD extras include additional segments on subjects such as Zoroastrianism and Islamic madrasas. Recommended. [Note: this is also being sold on home video for \$19.99 by Paradise Filmworks at www.paradisefilmworks.com.] Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Praying the Mass Today: The Revised Roman Missal ★★★

(2011) 20 min. DVD: \$24.99. Oblate Media (dist. by Videos With Values). PPR. ISBN: 978-932142789-5.

This brief instructional program covers revisions in the language used during celebrations of the Catholic Mass—changes that took effect on November 27, 2011. Recorded with a congregation at Christ the King Chapel at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, IL, *Praying the Mass Today* points out that liturgical changes are always a matter of balancing preservation of the historical and spiritual authenticity of the Mass with continuing relevance to the communities in which it is celebrated. The program assures viewers that nothing is lost and much is gained in allowing priests and parishes to select from various options when it comes to call-and-response exchanges during the Penitential Act, the prayer following a homily, and the ritual of ending a Mass. In addition, there are updates on the protocol before readings from the Gospels, as well as the Eucharistic Prayer and the multipart Communion rite. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Raw Faith ★★★

(2010) 92 min. DVD: \$149 (\$249 w/PPR). Kino Lorber Edu.

Documentaries about contemporary religious figures often tend to focus on scandal—think of Jim Bakker, Ted Haggard, and Jimmy Swaggart—so it's refreshing to watch filmmaker Peter Wiedensmith's portrait of Marilyn Sewell, the chief minister at a Unitarian community in Portland, OR, where membership tripled during her tenure. Wiedensmith shows Sewell preparing and delivering homilies in a down-to-earth style before appreciative congregants, but the emphasis here remains on the personal side, serving up clips from Sewell's video diary—in which she acknowledges her own feelings of stress and inadequacy as she considers leaving her position to study and write—along with brief segments from her therapy sessions. In scenes illustrated with family stills and home movie footage, Sewell also tries to come to terms with her unhappy childhood involving a mentally disturbed mother and alcoholic

father, while another sequence finds her visiting the Southern town where she was raised by her paternal grandparents. An additional narrative thread revolves around her feelings of loneliness after a marriage ended in divorce (although she maintains a good relationship with the two sons she reared, her demanding job leaves her little time to spend with them). Happily, she finds companionship—and a late-blooming romance—with a parishioner. Sewell may not be a major national religious leader, but this modest and unpretentious documentary nicely celebrates the dedication and honesty she has in common with many other clerics who serve quietly and selflessly. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Rejoice & Shout ★★★

(2011) 115 min. DVD: \$26.98. Magnolia Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Musicians talk about their faith while religious figures discuss the importance of music in director Don McGlynn's celebration of the gospel tradition. Some speakers hail from the secular world, like Motown legend Smokey Robinson, while others established their careers in conjunction with the church, such as Thomas A. Dorsey and Mavis Staples. McGlynn also differentiates between traits and practices associated with various denominations, like Baptists and Pentecostals. Scholars, disc jockeys, and authors, such as Bill Carpenter (*Uncloudy Days: The Gospel Music Encyclopedia*) and Anthony Heilbut (*The Gospel Sound*), provide historical context for the extensive archival and contemporary performance footage. To Staples, gospel lifts people up when they're down, while others cite the thin line that divides performers and audiences—everyone feels like they're on an equal footing. Just as Chuck D of Public Enemy once quipped that rap is "the CNN for black America," Carpenter describes Depression-era

gospel in similar terms, noting that the songs provided a means to talk about poverty and racial inequality, among other issues. Many artists are featured here, but the spotlight shines brightest on the Dixie Hummingbirds, who thrilled audiences at the Newport Folk Festival; Sister Rosetta Tharpe, whose singles sold in the millions; Mahalia Jackson, who headlined Carnegie Hall; and the Blind Boys of Alabama, who won a Grammy Award for *The Gospel at Colonus*. Others include the Swan Silvertones, the Edwin Hawkins Singers, and singer/pastor Andraé Crouch, who delivers the best line: "If we really heard the voice of God, we would be reduced to juice." Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Road to Emmaus ★★★1/2

(2011) 30 min. DVD: \$14.99. Boettcher/Trinklein Television (dist. by Vision Video).

What happened in the days after Jesus Christ was crucified? *Road to Emmaus* offers a dramatized told in Luke 24:13-35 (in English or Spanish) version of the story depicting the interactions of two first-century travelers—shaken by news of the Crucifixion—and a mysterious stranger who joined them, someone particularly knowledgeable about the Old (at that point, only) Testament of the Bible and the implications of the Hebrew prophecies for contemporaneous events. As they walk, the men explore the value of Jesus's life—and death—putting historical events into context and emphasizing the personal ramifications of faith for the two men. Of course, Christians believe that the stranger was actually Christ—risen from the dead to fulfill biblical prophecy while making some last visits to the faithful before ascending into Heaven. Directed by Steve Boettcher, the film depicts Jesus (Bruce Marchiano) as a gentle, wise, and patient teacher, sharing thoughts about his mission and role in the grand scheme, including the spiritual concepts



Patrick ★★★1/2

(2011) 45 min. DVD: \$14.99. Gary Wilkinson (dist. by Vision Video).

In this docudrama, filmmaker Gary Wilkinson goes far beyond the modern traditions associated with Saint Patrick—such as parades and wearing green—to explore the real man behind the myths, an effort that's getting renewed attention through an examination of his writings. One of the best-documented leaders of the early Christian church, Patrick is also the subject of a new work by playwright David Kidd, who's among those interviewed here. Kidd says the legends surrounding Patrick (including driving the snakes out of Ireland) hide the truth, obscuring the essential

character of the man and his message. Dramatic re-enactments are supplemented with input from scholars and church officials—including Alan Harper, Archbishop and Primate of All Ireland—who recount Patrick's life. We learn that at the age of 16, Patrick was sold into slavery in Ireland; he later escaped, but after converting to Christianity he was inspired to return to spread the gospel in a land full of pagan beliefs, including those of the Druids. One scholar interviewed here says that Patrick's story is ultimately one of a former slave who took a risk, walked a narrow path, and responded to a higher calling—hearing the voice of God and acting on what he heard. Informative and inspirational, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

Sons of Perdition ★★★

(2010) 86 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors).

Warren Jeffs, leader and self-styled prophet of the polygamous Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), was recently convicted of child sexual assault and sentenced to life in prison. But his influence persists, as evidenced in this BBC-aired documentary by filmmakers Tyler Measom and Jennilyn Merten, which follows over a three-year period the struggles of a trio of teenagers who escaped from "The Crick," an FLDS community in Utah, to try to fashion lives in the outside world. While Joe, Bruce, and Sam may be free of the authoritarian rule of their fathers, their time in the cult haunts them—symbolized here by periodic excerpts of sermons by Jeffs, speaking in a smooth, Mr. Rogers-style voice. Cut off from their families, without any support system apart from other "exiles" and some kind outsiders—and ignorant of virtually everything but the manual skills they were taught—the teens find themselves searching to find their place in an unfamiliar world, whether it be a job, a surrogate family, school, or the military. Yet they persist, even trying to rebuild bridges to their dads or engineer the escape of their mothers and siblings. Told largely through footage documenting the subjects' post-Crick lives and their own recollections, *Sons of Perdition* is a deeply affecting portrait of the malignant effect such religious cults can have on children, while also holding out hope that they can ultimately overcome it. DVD extras include audio commentaries by the directors and the teens. Recommended. [Note: this is also available for \$99 w/PPR for high schools and public libraries, and \$250 w/PPR for colleges and universities from Collective Eye (www.collectiveeye.org).] Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



of sacrificial love and dying to live. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

The Welsh Revivals: 1859 & 1904

★★★1/2

(2011) 30 min. DVD: \$14.99. Gary Wilkinson (dist. by Vision Video).

This fascinating documentary traces the rise of Revivalism, or passionate Christian reawakening, in 19th- and 20th-century Wales. Where churchgoing had been a matter of dry orthodoxy, attended by people who often faced hard lives characterized by toil, drunkenness, and dark emotions, a handful of Revivalist ministers (including Dafydd Morgan and Thomas Charles Edwards) and charismatic, non-ordained leaders slowly sparked a brushfire of life-changing faith in small parishes across the land. This half-hour program from filmmaker Gary Wilkinson combines archival photos with interviews of contemporary historians to tell the tale of religious fervor crossing traditional lines of denomination, of antisocial behavior giving way to hours of prayer and song, and of press and political attention riveted to a nation's sea change. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES

Back to the Garden ★★★

(2009) 70 min. DVD: \$49: public libraries & high schools; \$139: colleges & universities. Green Planet Films. PPR.

In 1988, documentarian Kevin Tomlinson

filmed a "healing circle" gathering of aging hippies in rural Washington state, thinking he was preserving a dying lifestyle hailing from an outdated, obsolete 1960s social climate. Twenty years later, Tomlinson returns to those now senior-citizen nonconformists and finds them not only unchanged and unapologetic, but also notes that some of their formerly fringe concepts—such as sustainability and organic farming—are now mainstream. Other lifestyle choices, like marijuana smoking as practically the only form of religion they endorse, remain hippie-centric. While a percentage of the wizened interviewees have suburban homes and one even works for Microsoft (although she says her heart is with Apple), none have abandoned their utopian back-to-the-land ideals, and some have passed on their values and drum circles to their adult children (although one son, we're told, won't visit and has never brought the grandkids). The only note of regret comes from one mother of four children by four different fathers, who found that "free love" was not for her the liberating concept that it was for the footloose males. Overall, however, *Back to the Garden* offers a decidedly passionate endorsement of the much-maligned American counterculture whose core character has endured beyond Woodstock and *Alice's Restaurant*. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Children of Haiti ★★★1/2

(2010) 52 min. In Haitian Creole w/English subtitles. DVD: \$99: high schools & public libraries; \$250: colleges & universities. Collective Eye. PPR.

Filmmaker Alexandria Hammond's fear-



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lessly probing documentary—aired on PBS's *Independent Lens* series—winds its way around Cap-Haitien and Haiti's northern coast, focusing on a group of adolescent boys who scrounge and scrape for a living by day and sleep in the city streets at night. *Children of Haiti* lets these often intelligent, preternaturally streetwise kids tell their own tale, thereby illuminating the broader unfortunate story of contemporary Haiti, a crumbling island nation where 90 percent of the schools are private (and serve only the offspring of the most privileged residents), some 12,000 U.N. troops remain stationed to maintain the peace, and the most desirable tourist beaches are closed to locals during the week. Although the featured subjects don't engage in unlawful behavior, they are treated like criminals by the police and local gangs. Often, these kids are simply coping with a bad family situation—trying to hunt down odd jobs to help their mother make up for an absent (or dead) father. *Children of Haiti* not only offers insights into what makes these young people tick but also presents a broader panorama of Haitian life, with its corrupt politicians, extreme income gap between rich and poor, and sadly neglected economic infrastructure. Despite all the negative aspects, the film takes an upswing toward the end, suggesting that there may actually be hope among the ruins for these brave youngsters. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Sandlin)

Facebook's "Adorno Changed My Life" ★★

(2011) 28 min. DVD: \$248. Icarus Films. PPR.

Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) was a German sociologist of the so-called Frankfurt school who spent the war years in the U.S. before returning to Germany, where he would become an important figure in the intellectual life of the nation as it struggled to come to terms with its fascist past. But more than his ideas—basically a dense, allusive critique of modern culture—the subject of this brief documentary is his almost mystical influence over some readers, who voice their near-adoration on the titular page of the social-networking website Facebook. Georg Boch's film takes the form of a "participatory documentary" in which "friends" on the page use videos and chat to articulate how Adorno's ideas have affected their lives. Unfortunately, their comments don't amount to any sort of coherent overview of what those ideas are; instead, they present a kind of pictorial mosaic in which the varied parts offer a glimpse of how powerful—but distinctive—an impact Adorno has had on very different people, including an art historian, a digital culture critic, and an Australian intellectual. And by using Facebook as a springboard, the filmmaker also demonstrates how individuals of disparate background can be brought together online to share a common



Food Stamped ★★★1/2

(2011) 62 min. DVD: \$19.99 (\$200 w/PPR). Passion River.

In this engaging documentary, a young Berkeley couple—nutritionist Shira Potash and her filmmaker husband, Yoav—set out to see whether they can survive and eat healthfully (and, ideally, organically) for a week on \$75—the maximum amount two people would be entitled to under the federal food stamp program (the average is \$40 to \$50). The pair succeed—barely—making labor-intensive meals with fresh produce, beans, brown rice, lentils, eggs, and oatmeal. The point they effectively make is that their achievement took a lot of knowledge, time, and effort.

Interspersed with shots of the Potashes buying and cooking food, dumpster-diving at a bakery outlet store, and serving friends a frittata made with bargain sweet potatoes and free cheese samples from the market, are interviews with food stamp clients, agency officials, and school lunch administrators. The Potashes travel with one recipient some 40 miles to the nearest discount grocer, where the man spends his entire monthly allotment in one trip; knowledgeable about nutrition, he nevertheless fills his cart with ramen, bacon, and cheap carbohydrates because those are what he can afford. Sadly, less nutritious processed food is cheaper than fresh fruits and vegetables, thanks to factors such as Congress's farm legislation, which subsidizes starches like soy, corn, wheat, and rice while ignoring produce and organic farming. DVD extras include bonus interview footage of four members of Congress who tried the same shop-and-eat project. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

enthusiasm—or obsession. Boch's concept is intriguing, but ultimately the fragmentary approach here proves more suggestive than satisfying, although it may encourage viewers to pick up Adorno's *Minima Moralia* for themselves. Optional. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Girls on the Wall ★★★1/2

(2009) 62 min. DVD: \$39 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Sincerely Films (dist. by Collective Eye). ISBN: 978-0-615-52128-2.

Filmmaker Heather Ross's documentary *Girls on the Wall*—focusing on a program designed to change young lives through musical theater—notes that 50 percent of the inmates at the State Juvenile Justice Facility for Girls in Warrenville, IL, return after their release. In an attempt to reduce the recidivism rate, the institution brings in Music Theater Workshop founder Meade Palidofsky, who helps the charismatic but troubled teens put on a show, with some assistance from a choreographer and a music director. "Ms. P." aims to encourage communication and self-expression so that her charges can channel their frustration into performance, let it go, and move forward. The participants start by writing short biographies, which feed into a multipart narrative; some go all out, but others, like Whitney, find it hard to open up (Whitney eventually lets down her guard and becomes the star of the film). Although she doesn't interview any other relatives, Ross makes an exception for Whitney's father, who talks about the violent assault that led to his daughter's incarceration. Other primary subjects include Christina, a habitual runaway, who discusses her mother's crack addiction, and Rosa, a talented rapper, who reveals a history of sexual molestation. As

rehearsals continue, morale plummets, but Ms. P. doesn't give up and the troupe eventually gets their act together. During the course of the seven-month program, two of the girls make parole, and the film ends with an upbeat epilogue. DVD extras include deleted scenes and a "making-of" featurette. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

The Last Mountain ★★★1/2

(2011) 95 min. DVD: \$29.95. Docurama (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-7151-1.

The Last Mountain uses a formidable combination of striking images and irrefutable facts to bring attention to the issue of mountaintop removal (MTR) in America's Appalachian heartland. The central focus is on the Coal River Valley in West Virginia, where a small, scrappy community struggles to save the last remaining untainted mountain in their area from being blasted away for its coal resources. Filmmaker Bill Haney's camera contrasts the natural beauty of unspoiled areas with landscapes devastated by MTR, and he draws insights from assorted experts and citizens, who describe the negative effects on the ecosystem and the increasing incidence of people getting sick and dying from toxic runoff. The documentary highlights the involvement of high-pedigree environmentalist Robert Kennedy Jr., who attends activist meetings and makes speeches at anti-coal rallies. Viewers also get an insider's view of Massey Energy and how its union-busting honcho, Don Blankenship, dupes the locals into thinking that activism poses a threat to their jobs. Along the way, the film also describes how the railroads and fossil-fuel energy companies dodge EPA rules and solidify their barely legal operations (hint: campaign contribu-

tions to coal-friendly politicians). *The Last Mountain* wields its facts like weapons—not only to undermine the phony altruism of the coal mining industry but also to make an economically sound case for pursuing sustainable wind energy. DVD extras include deleted scenes, a Q&A with Kennedy, and celebrity PSAs. Highly recommended. [Note: this is also available for \$100 w/PPR for high schools and public libraries, and \$250 w/PPR for colleges and universities from Uncommon Productions (www.uncommonproductions.com).] Aud: C, P. (M. Sandlin)

Life in a Day ★★ ★

(2011) 80 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors).

Life in a Day, a collaboration between National Geographic and YouTube, was born from a mix of high-concept ambition, low-fidelity tools, and the networking possibilities of the web's global community. Officially directed by Kevin Macdonald, the film is, in fact, shot and performed by nonprofessionals from around the world using everything from high-end video equipment to flip cameras to smartphones. What unifies the footage is that it was all created on July 24, 2010, and each piece used in the final film relates to the way we live our lives. Macdonald and editor Joe Walker sorted through 4,500 hours of video received from more than 80,000 people from 192 countries to get down to about 300 clips (totaling about 90 minutes) from 80 contributors, organized by both time (moving through a 24-hour cycle that begins at midnight) and theme ("What do you love?" "What frightens you?"). What emerges is not so much a documentary as an impressionistic montage of images seen through the lenses of folks with cameras and a desire to share their experience and express themselves. And while there are moments of sadness and emotional trials (as well as minor profanity and brief scenes of animals being butchered), it's mostly an upbeat portrait of humanity and the global village. DVD extras include deleted scenes (a mere sampling of footage that wasn't used) and a "making-of" featurette. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Axmaker)

Mother: Caring for 7 Billion ★★ ★

(2011) 60 min. DVD: \$24.95; individuals: \$39.95 (\$134.95 w/PPR); public libraries: \$74.95 (\$145 w/PPR); high schools: \$145 w/PPR; colleges & universities. Tirol A Films Productions.

Mother makes the argument that overpopulation is the underlying cause of most threats to the global environment, while also noting that activists have allowed the topic to fade from public consciousness since the "population explosion" movement of the 1960s. The documentary introduces Dr. Beth Osnes of the children's rights organization Mothers Acting Up, who tells her personal story of growing up in a large family (with 10 kids) and coming to terms with the idea of limit-

ing her own. Director Christophe Fauchère follows Osnes to Ethiopia, where she meets women who've been inspired by an activist radio drama to reject arranged marriages and limit their number of offspring. Back in the U.S., several experts, including noted author and population guru Paul Ehrlich, report statistics on unsafe abortion, unintended pregnancies, and teen pregnancy rates, and look at the reasons why people have large families, including religious beliefs, social pressure, the stigma attached to being childless, and the cultural status achieved through having big families (in particular, sons). Osnes also admits that being part of a large clan can simply feel good. The important messages conveyed here are that the U.S. cannot expect other countries to address overpopulation if Americans do not do so first, and empowering women with information is the key to stemming a worldwide crisis. Combining animation, vintage film, and documentary footage interwoven with interviews, *Mother* is a sobering and thought-provoking look at the population issue, especially timely given the recent milestone of 7 billion people on Earth. Recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

A New Kind of Listening ★★ ★ 1/2

(2009) 57 min. DVD: \$19.95; individuals: \$89; high schools & public libraries: \$199; colleges & universities. The Groove Productions. PPR.

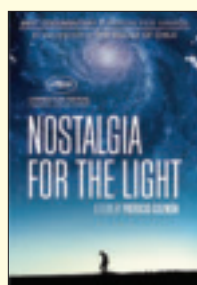
Filmmaker Kenny Dalsheimer documents a 2005 project spearheaded by the North Carolina-based Community Inclusive Theater Group, who created an original collaborative piece involving amateur performers and young people with developmental disabilities. The project employed drama class exercises to achieve a cohesive performing style and then adapted original poetic text penned by the company's disabled mem-

bers, including some with autism. The most remarkable participant is Chris, a young man who was mislabeled as profoundly mentally retarded before being diagnosed with cerebral palsy. After years of having no means of communication, Chris is given the tools that enable his thoughts to be heard—and his insight is so dramatic that project organizer and director Richard Reho elevates him to the position of co-director. In a heartbreaking sequence, Reho liberates Chris from his wheelchair and carefully cradles him on the ground, evoking a poignant reaction from Chris (one of the most beautiful moments I've ever seen in a nonfiction film). Dalsheimer incorporates home movies from Chris's childhood and footage of other participants during the project's evolution, backed with commentary from many involved, including Chris's mother. Serving up a wonderful glimpse of this daring attempt to address—and correct—harsh stereotypes regarding the developmentally disabled, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

No Dinosaurs in Heaven ★★ ★

(2010) 53 min. DVD: \$99; high schools & public libraries: \$289; colleges & universities. Jezebel Productions (dist. by New Day Films). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-57448-297-3.

Veteran filmmaker and science buff Greta Schiller goes back to school late in life only to discover that the Gospel-based "creation science" of religious fundamentalists has infiltrated secular American education, even up to the college level in cosmopolitan New York City. Schiller joins a raft expedition in the Grand Canyon—led by Dr. Eugenie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education—that points out the absurdity of creationism's view that the 4,000 feet of bedrock geological history is the work of Noah's flood, and also notes some of the rhe-



Nostalgia for the Light ★★ ★ 1/2

(2010) 90 min. In Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98. Icarus Films Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

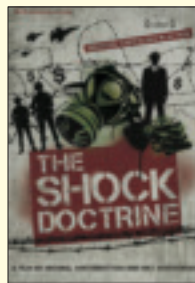
Combining politics and science in a stirring visual essay, filmmaker Patricio Guzmán (*The Battle of Chile*) visits the high-altitude Atacama Desert in Chile, which serves as a springboard for philosophical ruminations. Featuring one of the driest climates in the world (the site of archaeological digs for pre-Columbian mummies and other bodies preserved through desiccation), the region offers optimum conditions for the use of deep-space telescopes, while also inspiring generations of amateur stargazers. But the area also

has a darker history, both as a harsh 19th-century mining camp where laborers died in virtual slavery and as a brutal 20th-century prison compound and interrogation center for the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, whose junta tortured, executed, and later exhumed and reburied thousands of dissidents. Guzmán segues lyrically between these different layers of time and memory, from the Big Bang to the human lifespan, as scientists and survivors of the regime pursue their parallel quests for answers about the mysteries of space or the remains of slain and vanished loved ones. DVD extras include five shorts by Guzmán on astronomy, the cosmos, and the history of Chile. A recent winner of the Best Feature award from the prestigious International Documentary Association, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

The Shock Doctrine ★★ ★

(2009) 78 min. DVD: \$29.99. Zeitgeist Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Ronald Reagan famously called the U.S.S.R. the source of evil in the modern world, but this documentary suggests an alternative culprit: the late, Nobel-winning economist Milton Friedman, whose “Chicago school” brand of laissez-faire capitalism—according to this film based on Naomi Klein’s same-titled bestseller—has been ruinously foisted upon the world in times of crisis. A case in point is a 1973 CIA-backed coup in Chile that deposed/killed President Salvador Allende, who was replaced with a corporate-friendly and murderously repressive military junta that achieved no great economic success, despite a beaming Friedman among the advisors and supporters overseeing the regime change. From the collapse of Soviet communism to 9/11 and the Gulf Wars, Klein’s thesis—presented here by filmmakers Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross—argues that Friedman’s free-market policies have ushered in police states, torture, financial misdeeds, and public chaos in which the very few super-rich get richer while the general population suffers. But viewers should note the selective recitation of facts (for instance, not one Democratic U.S. president is linked to Friedman, but all of the Republicans are) and a tone not unlike homegrown conspiracy efforts, right down to borrowing popular thriller-movie music (Carter Burwell’s evocative *Fargo* theme). Still, even with a POV as one-sided as an AM-radio rant, *The Shock Doctrine* serves up plenty of agit-prop for thought, even though Michael Moore makes many of the same points in *Capitalism: A Love Story* (VL-3/10) using sardonic humor instead of dark hyperbole. Recommended, overall. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)



Bougainville Island—but once there, the displaced have to go from one village to another and beg the not-always-welcoming inhabitants to allocate them a small plot of land on which to begin their new lives. To make matters worse, the Tinputz area was engaged in a civil war in the 1990s and still has a residual criminal element of armed and dangerous soldiers who don’t like outsiders. Viewers will certainly sympathize with the islanders’ plight, but it’s a shame that filmmakers Jennifer Redfearn and Tim Metzger don’t go deeper into the Carterets’ history to offer a more detailed picture of the life these people are reluctantly giving up. Still, the production does capture some poignant observations from villagers, including a woman who says, “Most of our culture will have to live in memory.” Recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Sandlin)

TEEN ISSUES

Breaking the Mold ★★ ★1/2

(2010) 20 min. DVD: \$99; high schools; \$110: public libraries; \$195: colleges & universities. Landmark Media. PPR.

The first of three entries in the *iGeneration: Design Your Future* series, *Breaking the Mold* encourages young people to consider their natural talents and inclinations before deciding where to attend college or choose a career. Students talk about their parents’ jobs and whether their folks are satisfied with the choices they made, while also expressing their hopes both for finding employment in fields ranging from acting to engineering and for following a professional or vocational path that’s meaningful, without fear of what others may think. Along the way, a forensic psychologist and a registered nurse counselor offer comments as well. The program urges kids to follow their dreams but also offers a lot of practical advice for finding academic institutions and jobs that will enable them to be successful in ways important to them, whether personal or financial. Among the tips: don’t put off researching financial aid, schools, or job opportunities; look for internships and volunteer positions; and take aptitude tests to define areas of interest and personality traits. Both informative and inspiring, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)

The Drug and Alcohol Addiction Test

★★ ★

(2011) 24 min. DVD or VHS: \$149.95 (teacher’s guide included). Human Relations Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-55548-935-9 (dvd).

Many young people who drink alcohol or take drugs may think they’re “only experimenting” or “just having a good time,” but they could actually be well on the way

torical tricks perpetrated by biblical-literalist Christians to convince followers that Adam, Eve, and the story of creation in the book of Genesis are worthy of presentation in public schools alongside evolution (why not instruct students in alchemical magic alongside chemistry, the film also asks). Schiller returns to New York, visiting the American Museum of Natural History, as well as actual classrooms, where public school teachers must address the controversy head-on. DVD extras include the short film “Why Study Science?” Similar to the anti-creationist documentary *Flock of Dodos*, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Pink Saris ★★ ★

(2010) 96 min. In Hindi w/English subtitles. DVD: \$89; public libraries & high schools; \$350: colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

British filmmaker Kim Longinotto’s documentary *Pink Saris* tells the story of Sampat Pal, who defies India’s persistent caste system by leading a group called the Gulabi Gang; to advertise her independence, she wears a bright pink sari, as do her followers. Longinotto follows Pal around the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh as she and her disciples help other Untouchable women to live free from shame, domestic abuse, and potential execution. The assertive Pal, who left her village 15 years earlier after disobeying her in-laws, believes that “if girls spoke up, the world would change.” She now lives with an upper-caste man in the same town as the man to whom she remains married. During the course of the film, Pal helps out a pregnant 14-year-old

who can’t marry her boyfriend because of her low social standing, and a 15-year-old who’s been suffering ill treatment from her husband’s family. Longinotto tracks these stories from start to finish as Pal meets with relatives and mediates with authorities; not every case turns out as Pal would like, as the participants can be unpredictable. For passive figures who lack a reliable support system, Pal is a combination mother, lawyer, and social worker—and she knows her worth, stating at one point, “I’m the messiah for women.” The parade of suffering in Longinotto’s film can make *Pink Saris* difficult to watch, but Pal deserves the recognition. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Sun Come Up ★★ ★

(2010) 38 min. In English & Pidgin w/English subtitles. DVD: \$129; high schools & public libraries; \$295: colleges & universities. Big Red Barn Films (dist. by New Day Films). PPR. ISBN: 978-0-615-50955-6.

This brief HBO-aired documentary focuses on the Carteret Islanders, some of the world’s first “climate change refugees.” The Carterets, located in the South Pacific near Papua New Guinea, are being threatened by surging, rising ocean tides that are slowly but surely making the place uninhabitable, as evidenced by the fact that saltwater from the surrounding sea is beginning to flood food crops. Unfortunately, relocation isn’t as simple as packing up a U-Haul and heading for higher ground. Clan leaders decide to start transporting families by boat to the “mainland”—the Tinputz region on nearby

to becoming addicted. How can you tell the difference? *The Drug and Alcohol Addiction Test* asks a series of 12 questions that will help viewers identify red flags indicating addiction, while also educating them about the physical and psychological stages of addictive behavior. Each question—such as “Do you try to hide that you are using drugs or alcohol?” or “Have you ever engaged in illegal activities in order to obtain alcohol or other drugs?”—is followed by answers from recovering teen addicts who describe their experiences. An adult psychologist also offers insights and shares facts. The program concludes by telling viewers how to analyze their answers and suggests resources for getting help if needed. Featuring an in-depth accompanying curriculum that further explores the topic, this is recommended. Aud: J, H, P. (E. Gieschen)

Generation Cyberbully: Bullying without Borders ★★½

(2011) 28 min. DVD: \$149 (downloadable teacher's guide available). Learning Seed. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 1-55740-583-2.

This well-done production addresses the all-too-common myth among young people that the Internet isn't “the real world”—stressing the fact that online postings, videos, texts, and other technologies

used to attack someone will affect a real person—and that such actions can have serious consequences. Exploring the subject of cyberbullying—defined as using technology to be consistently cruel to another individual—the program is divided into two parts, one intended for students, the other for educators. Part one takes a comprehensive look at how and why cyberbullying happens, details ways to avoid becoming a perpetrator, offers advice on what to do if you're a victim or bystander, and serves up practical tips on managing privacy in online identities. *Generation Cyberbully* is very realistic, both in its validation of the pressures and emotional issues common to teenage relationships, and in how it accurately depicts the ways popular social media programs are used. The second part—basically a supplement to the student segment—is designed to help make cyberbullying more apparent to adults who work with teens, as well as educate them on current and popular technology usage and terminology. Finally, the program also features practical and commonsense suggestions on how to develop schoolwide strategies to protect students, recognize potential victims, conduct an investigation, and take disciplinary action. Highly recommended. Aud: J, H, P. (E. Gieschen)

LAW & CRIME

Hot Coffee ★★½

(2011) 86 min. DVD: \$29.95. Docurama (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-7319-0.

The exhaustively informative *Hot Coffee* uses the much-ballyhooed 1990s civil litigation case brought by coffee-spilling grandma Stella Liebeck against fast-food giant McDonald's as a lead-in to deeper issues, including the increasing trend of America's judicial system becoming more anti-people and pro-big business. More broadly, the film examines the dubious roots of corporation-friendly tort reform, along the way pointing out how company PR propaganda has consistently triumphed over objective journalism in the last 15 years. Offering shocking graphic evidence, director Susan Saladoff first puts to rest the notion that Liebeck's lawsuit was a blatant example of “jackpot justice”; in fact, Liebeck not only suffered severe burns but McDonald's had previously shrugged off numerous other incidents of customers being injured by scalding hot beverages. Interviews with politicians, judges, lawyers, and citizens effectively debunk various myths surrounding tort reform, showing how state judicial positions are essentially being bought out

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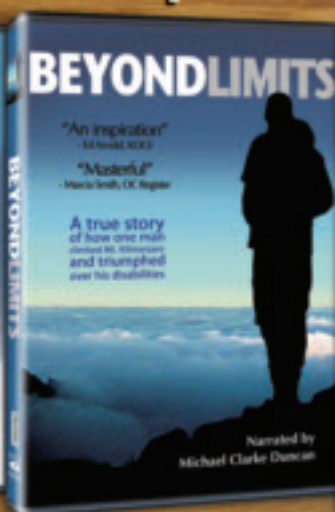
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by business interests, with the rising scourge of corporate arbitration steadily replacing traditional civil courts and jury justice. Although Saladoff, a former public interest attorney, adopts a one-sided stance here, *Hot Coffee* is still a discomfiting look at corporate America's increasing chokehold on the media and the government. DVD extras include an interview with Saladoff, deleted scenes, and a featurette. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Sandlin)

NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Bees and Wasps: An Appreciation

★★★

(2011) 67 min. DVD: \$20. Warren A. Hatch. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-884195-59-4.

Indefatigable natural science teacher and filmmaker Warren Hatch turns his "video microscope" on the fascinating world of bees and wasps in this affordable compendium of nine years' worth of carefully shot footage featuring plenty of magnified views, coupled with live-action film of the insects in their natural habitats. Hatch's narration occasionally rambles, but overall his in-depth knowledge of the creatures' behaviors, physical characteristics, nectar collection, life cycle, and history is quite enlightening. As with his other titles (such as *In One Yard: Views Through a Microscope and Up Close*, reviewed in VL-7/07), *Bees and Wasps* is not meant to be viewed straight through; rather, it's organized into chapters ranging from one to 10 minutes in length, each of which offer an overview of a specific type of bee or wasp (14 varieties in all). Hatch is an acute and thoughtful observer of nature; his *Bees and Wasps* allows science students—or any curious person—to become the same. An accompanying booklet provides a detailed bibliography of books for further study. Recommended. Aud: I, J, H, P. (E. Gieschen)

How to Measure Length ★★★

(2011) 10 min. DVD: \$69.95 (teacher's guide included). Visual Learning Systems. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-59234-699-8.

Defined as the measure of an object from end to end, quantities of "length" also include distance and height, as younger viewers will discover in this short program covering English and metric units of measurement (meter, centimeter, kilometer), as well as the use of different measuring tools, such as rulers, yard/meter sticks, and measuring tapes. Periodic pauses triggered by a "you decide" balloon allow viewers to answer a question relevant to the activity being shown, after which the narrator provides the correct response. Presented with clear visuals, the content is appropriate for a pre-elementary classroom, although the accompanying curriculum requires an



Queen of the Sun: What Are the Bees Telling Us? ★★★

(2011) 82 min. DVD: \$29.95. Music Box Films (avail. from most distributors on Jan. 24). Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Taggart Siegel's documentary explores the disturbing phenomenon of colony collapse disorder in the bee world. Beekeeper Gunther Hauk believes the bees are repaying humans for abusing the environment: "Their crisis," he says, "is our crisis." Agriculture suffers the consequences of any threat to the buzzing insects, which pollinate 40 percent of our produce, according to author Michael Pollan, who also appeared in the similarly-themed 2009 documentary *Vanishing of the Bees*. Along with assorted scientists, Siegel speaks with beekeepers around the world—from city dwellers with rooftop operations to itinerants who feed their imported hives high-fructose corn syrup in order to pollinate hundreds of acres of almond, corn, and soybean crops. While this intensive monoculture approach produces high yields, there are also numerous harmful side effects for the pollinators, especially in regards to pesticides, while genetic modifications cause further problems. Some of Siegel's interviewees believe the tiny creatures have as much to teach us about politics as the environment, since their lives revolve around collective action. In addition to looking at economic and environmental issues, Siegel also shows how bees and honey have been represented throughout history. Overall, the filmmaker gravitates towards striking imagery (including lively animated sequences illustrating the bee mating cycle) and is drawn to quirky professionals, such as Grenoble bee historian Yvon Achard, who likes to rub his bushy mustache against his honeycombs, claiming that the creatures enjoy it (although it seems more like a personal fetish). Recommended. [Note: this is also available for \$125 w/PPR for high schools & public libraries, and \$295 w/PPR for colleges & universities from Collective Eye (www.collectiveeye.org).] Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

elementary-grade reading level. Recommended. Aud: K, E. (E. Gieschen)

One Lucky Elephant ★★★

(2010) 81 min. DVD: \$95; high schools & public libraries; \$295; colleges & universities. Ro*co Films Educational. PPR.

"I had no idea what I was getting into," says modern-day circus ringmaster David Balding about his prized possession, Flora the Elephant—the longtime star of Balding's St. Louis-based Circus Flora. How a person could think that raising, caring for, and training an African elephant would be anything other than a colossal challenge is anyone's guess; but we do learn that ever since Flora was 2, Balding has relied on her to be the center attraction at his old-timey big-top show. With footage shot over the course of nearly 10 years, director Lisa Leeman delves into the rocky relationship between Balding and his seemingly benign beast. After 16 years in the big top, Flora just isn't as excited about performing anymore. But what to do with a huge pachyderm who is past her prime? This becomes the dilemma at the heart of this documentary, told largely through interviews with Balding, his wife, and others. Flora is put into a few different environments, including an elephant sanctuary, but is subject to violent outbursts when she can't adjust. Is her difficulty simply one of missing her trusted trainer, or are there deeper psychological explanations that stem from earlier traumas? Leeman probes further into animal psychology, while also examining the often

harmful results of obsessive (and possessive) human behavior and the ultimate folly of attempting to humanize and civilize potentially destructive creatures. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Sandlin)

Squaresville, Episode 1.001: Sometimes You Have to Round Down ★★1/2

(2011) 30 min. DVD: \$27.95. Popwise Media. PPR.

Welcome to Squaresville, a fictional town where numerals appear everywhere. Young viewers will join a multicultural cast of energetic kids who—in a variety of scenarios developed around math word problems—learn about rounding numbers up and down. Mia, Brooklyn, and Matt embark on a treasure hunt after they find an old letter in their shed; Carlos and Josh pitch in to assist Unlucky Larry with his recycling goals; and Aaliyah and Gracie have to help prove that Malik is the real winner of the Three Square Candy-a-Thon. Dollar amounts, time, baseball statistics, number of candy bars, distance, and even tree circumference are all rounded up or down depending on the situation, with various rules of operations pointed out along the way. While the underlying concept is entertaining, the somewhat amateurish acting and editing coupled with occasionally incoherent storylines are distracting. Featuring downloadable classroom materials, as well as DVD extras that include a behind-the-scenes documentary and a "meet the cast" featurette, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: I, P. (E. Gieschen)

HEALTH & FITNESS

Achoo! Stop the Flu ★★ ★

(2010) 30 min. DVD: \$64.95. TMW Media Group. PPR.

"Ah—choo! What do you do? What do you do to stop the flu?" Viewers will be singing along to the catchy title song and plenty of others in this program that offers tips for kids that are designed to both help prevent common illnesses and encourage healthy living. The simple and fun tunes—which feature a bouncing ball over onscreen lyrics for karaoke-style sing-along learning—are led by the legendary folk group The Kingston Trio, along with children's entertainers Julie and Brownie. Other topics covered here include washing hands, reading nutrition labels, and an introduction to the USDA MyPlate model of good nutrition. While the target audience—ages 4-12—might have appreciated seeing more children practicing the habits sung about rather than watching adult performers, overall this is an enjoyable means of introducing youngsters to basic, lifelong smart choices. DVD extras include "Healthy Living Resources" and links to sheet music. Recommended. Aud: E, I, P. (E. Gieschen)

Back Walking Forward ★★ ★ 1/2

(2011) 40 min. DVD: \$75: public libraries & high schools; \$185: colleges & universities. Transit Media. PPR.

Filmmaker Kavery Kaul's documentary spotlights the struggles of 30-year-old Eric and his Brooklyn family, who are coping with the aftermath of Eric's devastating brain injuries suffered 12 years earlier, when a car collided with his bicycle. Eric is now "Eric Number Two," as he explains in a moment of lucidity. Requiring constant care and quarterly surgical refills of his spinal-fluid reservoir, the formerly quiet and serious young man compulsively spells words, spouts profanity and scatology, and free-associates terms and ideas only distantly related to his former life. On the positive side, he seems superficially happy—or perhaps is no longer subject to despair—as his aging parents-turned-caregivers attempt to wean him from his wheelchair and train him to walk and feed himself. In a particularly painful sidelight, we learn that insurance companies may discontinue their assistance with Eric's costly medical care unless he shows consistent, appreciable improvement. But self-pitying sentiment is in short supply here as the family doggedly forges ahead, although Eric's father, mother, and brother confess they have little idea what's going on inside Eric's jangled mind at any given point. Offering an emotionally powerful look at a terribly challenging situation, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Boomer Be Fit: Strength, Vol. 1 ★★ ★

(2011) 58 min. DVD: \$24.95. Sit and Be Fit. PPR.

From the producers of the *Sit and Be Fit* TV series, *Boomer Be Fit: Strength, Vol. 1* is aimed at people in their 40s, 50s, and 60s—the age range when the body begins to really slow down. The program promises (to the strains of the *Mission: Impossible* theme) to help exercisers achieve more energy, age well, stay independent, feel great, and be less stressed. Gretchen Wilson, daughter of senior fitness guru Mary Ann Wilson (who hosts *Sit and Be Fit*), and personal trainer Scott Totton lead exercises in four categories—floor, step, flexible tubing, and weights—with Totton explaining the moves and Wilson demonstrating while the pair engage in lighthearted banter. The production is minimal—a plain set, a stool for Totton, and a couple of props—but the overall presentation is engaging, and the exercises are clearly described and performed. Sure to appeal to aging boomers, this is recommended. Aud: P. (F. Gardner)

Fit Girl: Kardio Kick ★★ ★

(2010) 30 min. DVD: \$14.99. BayView Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Counselor and personal trainer Gina Guddat provides instruction for this straightforward fitness routine designed for teens. After an introduction that explains attendant benefits—such as good posture and alignment—Guddat and her team of young women march, squat, and stretch for a brisk warm-up. Featuring various elements from boxing, *Kardio Kick* focuses on arms and legs with moves including front and cross punch, upper cut, block, jabs, snap kick, knee lifts, kick outs, and others, joined together in combination segments. Also featuring a cool-down (with Guddat sharing advice about maintaining healthy organs and avoiding fad diets), this program is nicely suited for the target audience (any "booty-shaking" or pole-worthy elements are thankfully absent here). Recommended. [Note: also newly available in the series are: *Fit Girl: Dance Moves* and *Fit Girl: Sports Drills*.] Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

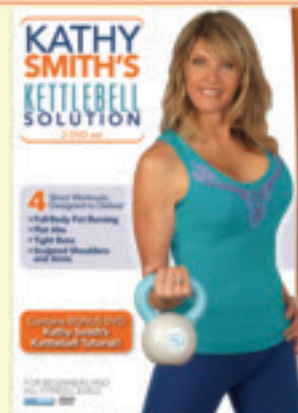
Gentle Yoga for a Healthy Low Back ★★ ★

(2010) 45 min. DVD: \$29.95. YogaJP (dist. by The AV Cafe). PPR.

Written and narrated by Justine Shelton, a follower of Gary Kraftsow's "viniyoga" school, *Gentle Yoga for a Healthy Low Back* features three groups of exercises—back stretches and strengtheners, "hip openers," and twists and bends—that may help alleviate pain associated with arthritis, spinal misalignment, and inter-vertebral disc issues. With her calm demeanor and soothing voice, Shelton is an excellent instructor, nicely explaining the 16 poses (with names like

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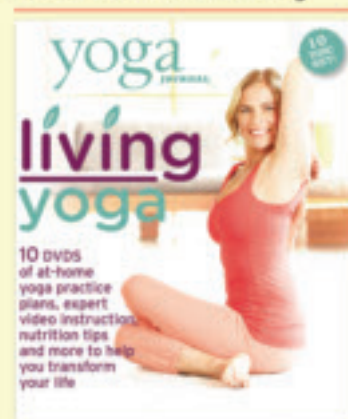
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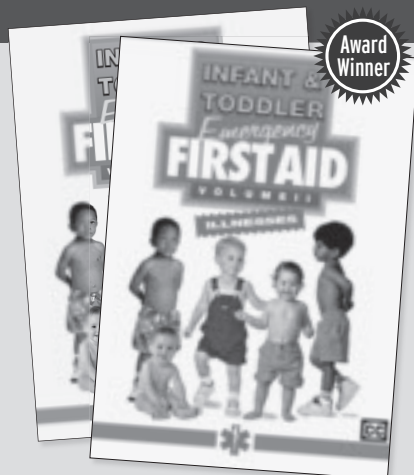
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Fat, Sick & Nearly Dead ★★½

(2010) 97 min. DVD: \$19.99. Reboot Media (avail. from most distributors).
Closed captioned.

Fat, Sick & Nearly Dead follows an audacious experiment by Joe Cross, a burly Australian who once weighed 309 pounds, had high blood pressure, lacked energy, and suffered from urticaria, or chronic hives. When his misery turned to desperation, Cross decided to go on a juice fast, spending 60 days in the U.S. (which has about the same rate of obesity as Australia—i.e., high) subsisting only on daily glasses of juiced vegetables and fruits. After spending a month in New York, Cross tours the country with a juicer in the back of his hatchback, interviewing people on the street about their eating habits and attitudes about food. One man Cross meets at a truck stop also has urticaria and later contacts Cross, who flies from Australia to Iowa to give the trucker tips on how to proceed. Like Cross, the trucker embarks on a long juice fast and makes lifestyle changes, after which his weight drops 202 pounds (from 429 to 227), his urticaria goes into remission, and he's able to go off all his medication. Cross had similar results: 89 pounds lost, no hives, and excellent blood pressure and cholesterol readings. The before and after comparisons are astounding: at the beginning of the documentary Cross sports a drooping belly; at the end, his far fitter self is jogging on the beach. A gentle, good-humored look at how one person inspired others to think about and change their life habits, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (F. Gardner)



cat/cow, twisting triangle, child's pose, and reverse pigeon) that are demonstrated by two women. Along the way, Shelton emphasizes breathing, staying in the present, using the abs to save the back, and practicing 20 to 30 minutes a day. The program also includes a prone meditation. Recommended. [Note: also newly available are *Gentle Chair Yoga: Standing Yoga Series*, *Gentle Chair Yoga: Seated Yoga Series*, and *Gentle Yoga Through Somatic Exploration*.] Aud: P. (F. Gardner)

Rodney Yee's Daily Yoga ★★★

(2011) 103 min. DVD: \$14.99. Gaiam (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7662-5509-8.

Popular yoga expert Rodney Yee is joined by wife/co-instructor Colleen Saidman in this exercise program that compiles five sequences drawn from various contemporary schools of yoga. Broken down into daily segments, the program includes a foundation-building Iyengar, a Vinayasa flow practice with linked postures to energize, a core strengthening routine focusing on constructive rest, a segment on Ashtanga "clean it out" mindfulness with measured breathing and movements, and a restorative integration finale. Mainly filmed in an outdoor setting with overlaid and onscreen narration, the routines feature poses including mountain, child's, plank, up and down facing dog, lightning, cobbler's warrior, bridge, cobra, and much more. Bonus features include a downloadable additional meditation. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Simply Raw: Reversing Diabetes in 30 days ★★★

(2011) 92 min. DVD: \$29.95. Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Can a raw food diet really conquer diabetes? The Tree of Life Rejuvenation Center

recruited six diabetics from all over the country to spend 30 days at its isolated center in Patagonia, AZ—four men and two women who ate a diet of "gourmet" raw foodstuffs and exercised regularly. Under the supervision of Dr. Gabriel Cousens, the group were encouraged to stop medications and reduce or eliminate insulin (blood pressure, blood sugar, and weight were checked daily). The results for the five who finished the program are remarkable: most lost between 20 and 32 pounds, and displayed blood-sugar readings close to normal. "My God, you look like a different person!" exclaims the hometown physician of one participant who lost 26 pounds, reduced her blood pressure, and was off insulin. This reality show-style documentary also includes the testimonials of various raw-food experts and proponents, including actor Woody Harrelson, director Morgan Spurlock (*Super Size Me*), and success coach Tony Robbins, although their enthusiasm is not balanced with any critical commentary questioning the claims regarding the diet's curative powers. Regardless, it's still compelling to watch these individuals discover how good a healthy regimen makes them feel. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Gardner)

Weightless ★★½

(2010) 39 min. DVD: \$50; public libraries & high schools; \$225; colleges & universities. New Day Films. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-57448-074-0.

Filmmaker Faith Pennick's *cinema verité* documentary takes an inside look at Big Adventures, a SCUBA certification and diving program founded by California therapist/social worker Liz Nickels, catering to a specialized clientele—plus-sized women. Although the medical profession would label her "morbidly obese," Nickels leads an active life and declares that her cholesterol readings and

vital signs are normal, while also pointing out that our appearance-obsessed society tends to marginalize and ignore ample females such as herself. The film follows Nickels and three customers (two have never dived before but are hoping to become certified divers) during a Hawaiian training session and excursion. The large ladies in their cumbersome gear are a striking contrast to svelte bikini girls strolling on the beach, but beneath the crystal waters, the subjects' bulk is no longer an issue, but rather a liberating experience. Usually

when a project like this leaves out professionally detached, white-lab-coated observers to expound on the topic at hand, the omission is welcome; but here the material might have been improved by including bariatric physicians or representatives from the mainstream diving community to offer their views on Big Adventures and the function it serves. Nonetheless, this interdisciplinary documentary touching on sports, women's studies, and health is a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

different childhoods while struggling with their disabilities. Originally from Brooklyn, Warren was abandoned by his parents in the 1920s and raised by the members of an African-American church missionary group (Warren is not even aware of his date of birth—no birth certificate has ever been located). Cory grew up on her mother and father's farm in upstate New York, where the local community was actively involved in a rigorous therapy treatment called patterning that ultimately saved her body from paralysis. The title of the documentary stems from Cory's attitudes: she's deeply possessive of Warren and becomes upset if someone else pushes his wheelchair when she's nearby; she even wants to marry Warren—a possibility Warren has not encouraged (not the least because of the age difference and his concern that she would not be able to take proper care of him). Also incorporating commentary from Cory's family and Warren's caregivers to augment the footage of their life together, *Love Limits* offers an interesting portrait of the unique challenges facing the couple and those close to them. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

CHILDBIRTH & PARENTING

Plugged-In Parenting ★★½

(2010) 2 discs. 125 min. DVD: \$29.95. Professional Parenting Canada. PPR. ISBN: 978-0-9780509-1-7.

Judy Arnall, author of *Discipline Without Distress*, wants to help moms and dads build relationships with their kids that allow for positive Internet gaming and social-networking experiences while also keeping children safe and helping them become successful. So while host Arnall here covers the pitfalls of online activities, she also mentions various academic, social, and lifestyle benefits. Parents are offered several cyber-safety tips, such as having a teen keep a junk e-mail account and a "real" one, using pseudonyms on social-networking sites, and "lurking" without posting to keep an eye on a child's account. Arnall says she gave up punishing her own children years ago ("There's no room for punishment in a love relationship") and suggests alternatives. Towards that end, vignettes are used to illustrate (perhaps optimistically) how parents and teens can brainstorm and use problem-solving strategies to resolve conflict. For each of four age levels—from infancy to 19 years—Arnall discusses appropriate computer usage, the adult's role in teaching "digital intelligence," online safety issues, and strategies for reducing kids' screen time. While there's a lot of information presented in this two-hour lecture (illustrated with lists and a handful of scenarios), Arnall's conversational speaking style is entertaining, and most of her ideas are practical and bolstered by research. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (M. Puffer-Rothenberg)



Riot Acts: Flaunting Gender Deviance in Music Performance ★★★

(2009) 72 min. DVD: \$29.99; individuals; \$295; institutions. Outcast Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Transgender and gender-variant performers from across the pop music spectrum discuss their life and art in director Madsen Minax's *Riot Acts*, which features North American musicians in various configurations, from solo acts to groups (Toronto's Clinks are the sole Canadian combo). Washington, D.C.'s Jessica Xavier, one of the older participants, talks about previous trans groups, like All the Pretty Horses with guitarist Venus DeMars, who now performs on her own (surprisingly, there's no mention of pioneers like Wendy Carlos, who originally recorded as Walter). Sarafina Maraschino from San Francisco's Lipstick Conspiracy says her trio doesn't go out of their way to write political material but feels that their trans identity makes them inherently political. Elijah Oberman from Brooklyn's Shondes agrees that their politics come out naturally through their music. Because hormones can affect the voice, several of the male-identified performers avoid testosterone for fear they'll lose their upper range. Others, like Joe Stevens from Coyote Grace and Geo "Novice Theory" Wyeth, have learned to make adjustments (Ryka Aoki points out that the situation is different for trans women, as their voices don't automatically become more feminine). Other topics include the benefits of humor, dealing with the press, the disclosure of gender identity in publicity materials, and performing in live shows—the latter amply illustrated through concert footage. DVD extras include deleted scenes, extended performances, and "Stories

RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY

10 Days = Wife: Love Translated ★★★

(2011) 84 min. DVD: \$75; public libraries; \$150; colleges & universities. Interfilm Productions (dist. by Transit Media). PPR. ISBN: 978-0-9784976-1-3.

Writer-director Julia Ivanova's documentary follows a group of American men seeking brides, traveling to Ukraine on a 10-day search conducted with the help of Anastasia Dating Tours. Some of the men have been previously (married with children), while others have never had a serious relationship, and most cite bad experiences with American women and a desire for a more traditional, family-oriented spouse as the reason to undertake the expensive journey. The would-be wives, some as young as 18 and all scantily clad, complain that Russian men drink too much and aren't romantic. Ivanova follows the potential couples as they size each other up over cocktails and dinners, and embark on tourist outings. Expectations on both

sides gradually deflate, as disagreements and personality clashes emerge, and language proves to be a difficult barrier to overcome. One cynical onlooker says the women are only interested in having lots of money spent on them, although some of the men admit to feeling an ego boost with females fawning over them (one has made the trek 12 times). Almost all the travelers go home without a prospect, but they don't seem to think it was a waste of time. DVD extras include deleted scenes. An interesting documentary—from Russia with love, so to speak—this is recommended. Aud: P. (S. Rees)

Love Limits ★★★

(2010) 41 min. DVD: \$248. Icarus Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Thymaya Payne's documentary focuses on the loving friendship of two adults with cerebral palsy—Warren Barrow, an 83-year-old black man who's able to talk but not walk, and Cory Ann Rudy, a 36-year-old white woman who can walk but not talk. *Love Limits* offers a stark view of their very

Out Late ★★★

(2008) 62 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Co-directors Jennifer Brooke and Beatrice Alda's moving documentary *Out Late* tells the stories of five people who came out of the closet late in life, blaming fear and ignorance—both their own and that of their friends and relations—for their situation. Eighty-one-year-old Elaine, who revealed her sexual preference at 79, knew she was gay early on, but homosexuality wasn't acceptable in her Florida community, so she married, had children, and never learned a trade, thus binding herself to her husband financially. After he died, she claimed her real identity, but she hasn't been able to find a long-term relationship—unlike Walter, a devout Christian who came out at 60 and met his partner in a quilting group. Ken also waited until after the death of his spouse, to whom he'd been married for 47 years; now 75, he's found support in cosmopolitan Toronto. On the other hand, conservative Kansas is home for 59-year-old Cathy, who's had a partner for 24 years but just acknowledged her homosexuality at 57; her state's anti-gay marriage amendment galvanized her to take action. The last subject, 68-year-old Leanna, waited until she was 60 to transition from male to female, fulfilling a wish that she'd long suppressed because the time was never right, particularly while she was serving in the Navy. DVD extras include a directors' statement and a resource guide. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)



from the Road." Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Silver Girls ★★★1/2

(2010) 74 min. In German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$99.95; public libraries: \$295; colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. ISBN: 0-7815-1382-0.

Saara Alia Waasner's *Silver Girls* (*Frauenzimmer* in German) offers a nonjudgmental profile of three older professional sex workers in Berlin, suggesting that times have indeed changed since James Ellroy's Eisenhower-era-set *L.A. Confidential*, in which fictional call girls had to retire at age 30. Fifty-eight-year-old Christel, a divorced mother in a long-term relationship, entered the field at 51, finding "a considerable demand for older women," and says she enjoys sex more now than when she was younger. Karolina, a 64-year-old grandmother with a Bettie Page hairstyle, was 50 when she became a dominatrix and feels that the work suits her assertive nature (like Christel, Karolina didn't find sexual satisfaction until later in life). While Christel and Karolina manage their own careers, 50-year-old Paula runs a bordello with four prostitutes. She's the veteran here, tracing her roots back to pre-unification East Berlin. With "visitors" ranging in age from 19 to 85, Paula can't imagine doing anything else, although she longs to move to a more tropical climate and fears the day her services are no longer requested. Aside from interviews, Waasner—displaying an easy rapport with her subjects—films the women at home, with family members, and at work, but doesn't include clients, with the exception of a submissive seen in a nonsexual context. A surprising epilogue catches up with the three women after some significant life changes. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

FOOD & SPIRITS

Dare to Cook—Chocolate: Colorful & Creative Molding Techniques ★★★

(2011) 2 discs. 154 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$34.95. Bennett-Watt HD Productions. ISBN: 978-1-60490-064-4 (dvd).

"Chocolate Man" Bill Fredericks is the instructor for this primer on techniques for molding chocolate treats. In the first of two discs, viewers will learn how to make coronets (using parchment paper), piping lines, and zigzags; use multifaceted molds; create accents with colored cocoa butter (including red, green, and white detailing for a raspberry-styled mold); and airbrush. The second disc looks at the finished products, from refrigeration to filling and then sealing the candies (including creating a ganache filling of fresh citrus zest). Also offering tips on clean-up (including reusing chocolate so nothing goes to waste and sanitizing the work surface), this should appeal to DIYers with a sweet tooth. Other titles in the series include *Basic Truffles*, *Tempering*, and *Holiday Confections*. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

El Bulli: Cooking in Progress ★★1/2

(2011) 108 min. In Catalan w/English subtitles. DVD: \$149 (\$249 w/PPR). Kino Lorber Edu.

The Catalan restaurant El Bulli—subject of this *cinema verité* documentary by Gereon Wetzel—was recognized as one of the world's best from the time Ferran Adrià took sole control of the kitchen in 1987 to its recent closure prior to being converted into a foundation-funded culinary research center. As a souvenir memento of this famed gastronomic mecca, this film will certainly be welcomed

by other chefs, as well as by gourmets who never got the chance to experience El Bulli firsthand. Under Adrià's direction, the establishment specialized in inventive haute cuisine, fashioning ultra-exotic dishes for its annual 30-course tasting menus. The restaurant was actually open only six months each year, with the chief chefs spending the other six in Madrid preparing items for the coming season using a process of rigorous experimentation involving both scientific analysis and taste-testing. Wetzel's film, shot in 2008–09, is divided into two sections: the first covers the period of creation in Madrid, with Adrià popping in occasionally to sample the fare, and the second moves to the restaurant, capturing the training of the serving staff and the presentation of the dishes to patrons. Given that the food is designed to appeal to so many of the senses, it's odd that much of *El Bulli* has a dry, antiseptic feel. But it does come alive at the end, with beautifully arranged stills of individual dishes like "disappearing ravioli" and tea shrimp with caviar anemones. Unfortunately, samples are not included. Likely to appeal to foodies, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

MyPlate Dietary Guidelines for Elementary Students ★★★

(2011) 23 min. DVD: \$49.95 (downloadable teacher's guide available). Learning Zone Express. PPR. Closed captioned.

Can a taco be healthy? What about a pizza? In this informative program, viewers join registered dietician Melissa Halas-Liang as she teaches her teenage niece and a friend how to make good food choices based on the newest USDA nutrition graphic, MyPlate (which replaces the "food pyramid"). The underlying concept is pretty simple: fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, a quarter of it with whole grains, and the remaining portion with lean protein. Add a serving of dairy, and the result is a well-balanced meal. But what does that really mean in the kitchen? Not only will young viewers learn how to create healthy tacos and pizza, but they'll also learn how to choose better snacks, what fats are good, and why breakfast needs to be a priority. Plenty of practical tips for nutritious eating and getting exercise are given along the way, and (in between each short segment with Melissa) younger children talk about their favorite healthy foods and activities. Of course, since it's usually the parents who buy the groceries, this will be a worthwhile watch for them as well. Recommended. Aud: E, I, P. (E. Gieschen)

Truck Farm ★★★

(2010) 48 min. DVD: \$250. Wicked Delicate Films (dist. by Bullfrog Films). PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 1-59458-821-X.

Painfully hip but also good-natured, director Ian Cheney's (*King Corn*) lat-

est documentary looks at funky ways to practice back-to-the-land hippie agrarianism in a big, organically unfriendly city. Brooklynite Cheney focuses specifically on his recession-fighting quest to grow leafy veggies in the back of his old pickup truck. Instead of employing the usual dry voiceover narrative, Cheney opts for a self-consciously silly acoustic folk soundtrack with *Sesame Street*-style lyrics playfully and continually commenting on the unfolding urban-gardening process, interspersed with crude but effective cartoon segments. From a purely gardening standpoint, Cheney receives good horticultural advice and is soon nurturing a modest harvest of garnish-type edibles (he even has a physicist devise a solar-powered camera to mount in the vehicle's back window so it can record the stages of plant growth). Cheney's enterprise witnesses its share of setbacks, including having lavender stolen from the truck bed during the night. Cheney also looks at other similar alterna-farming in the area—such as a collective in the Red Hook neighborhood raising crops on an unused baseball field, as well as a barge that is being turned into a floating garden. Offering an interesting look at the world of DIY urban-guerilla gardening, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Sandlin)

PETS



The Elephant in the Living Room ★★★

(2011) 94 min. DVD: \$19.99. Millennium Media (avail. from most distributors on Feb. 7).

The growing fad for keeping “exotic”—and dangerous—animals as pets is the subject of Michael Webber's engrossing documentary, which focuses on Tim Harrison, an Ohio policeman whose specialty is rescuing lions, snakes, and other wild beasts that have escaped their “homes” or been abandoned by their owners, and then locating spaces for them in zoos and shelters so the animals won't have to be euthanized. Harrison's description of his own past experiences is interwoven with segments filmed at conventions (where he demonstrates how easy it is to purchase venomous reptiles), as well as archival news footage about incidents in which creatures have attacked their owners, family members, and neighbors, plus drives by politicians to criminalize the practice of keeping wild “pets” in populated areas. Webber also introduces burly Terry Brumfield, a troubled man who's fought his depression through a close, loving relationship with a pair of African lions, and the intersection of his story and Harrison's adds genuine poignancy to the film. Even those viewers who believe that keeping wild animals in the home is completely bonkers (and some of Harrison's subjects do seem to be utterly obtuse about the dangers) will find that *The Elephant in the Living Room* offers a nuanced examination of a problem that is more complex than it might appear. DVD extras include an audio commentary, deleted scenes, and a related featurette. A fine companion doc to the similarly themed *The Tiger Next Door* (VL Online-7/10), this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

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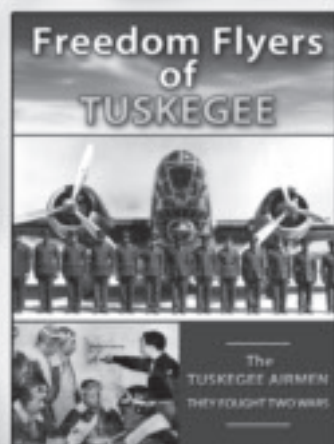
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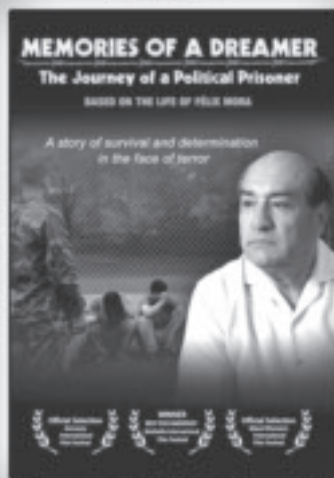
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COMPUTERS & TECHNOLOGY

Discover What's New in Office 2010

★★

(2011) 50 min. DVD: \$39.95. Technology Skills. PPR. ISBN: 978-0-9838156-5-5.

Essentially serving up a collection of PowerPoint presentations with voiceover, this old-school approach to teaching users about different aspects of Microsoft Office 2010 seems better suited to a live setting with a presenter than on DVD. Segments include "The History of Microsoft Office" (a brief, painful walk down memory lane), "The Buzz" (a thorough overview of new features), "How to Work With Office Web Apps," and "Office Mobile 2010—a Sneak Peek." Additional technical limitations include the fact that viewers can't use the "skip forward" button on their remotes (after hitting "play," you're in for the long term), and variable audio quality (the lecturer sounds like he's speaking into a cheap mic). These drawbacks detract from the content, which does provide some good information, although finding it requires a serious effort. The last—unhelpful—segment, "Free Migration Guides for Office 2003 to Office 2010," shows viewers how to use Google search for the term "Office 2010 migration guides" and download the results from Microsoft's popular TechNet site. Speaking from the viewpoint of someone who's led an organizational migration from previous versions of Office to the vastly different 2010, the time would've been better spent discussing strategies to help users and techs to understand and master the new interface and file formats. Other new titles in the series include *Discover Word 2010, Level 1*; *Discover PowerPoint 2010, Level 1* and *Discover Excel 2010: Tips & Shortcuts*. Not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (C. Block)

Truth in Numbers: Everything, According to Wikipedia ★★★

(2010) 85 min. DVD: \$99.95; public libraries; \$295; colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. Closed captioned.

Filmmakers Scott Glosserman and Nic Hill look at the phenomenon of Wikipedia, the worldwide collaborative online encyclopedia that allows contributors to provide or revise information on a vast array of subjects. The term *wiki* comes from the Hawaiian word for "speed"—making for an appropriate moniker given Wikipedia's explosive growth (entries number more than 1.5 million in English alone) and the fact that the website is likely to turn up in an instant in response to online searches. Founder Jimmy Wales's venture started as both a hobby and a desire to capitalize on the Internet boom. Wales and various contributors interviewed here view Wikipedia as a community, while critics, whose opinions are also well represented,

dismiss it as "cultural anarchy"—a source of unedited, potentially unreliable information that crowds out competitors and values starlets as much as noteworthy historical figures. Naysayers note that biased writers can hide behind a cloak of anonymity—in one case accusing a respected journalist of murdering John F. Kennedy. *Truth in Numbers* follows Wales and Wikipedia fans to gatherings, defines terms such as "edit wars," and presents both sides in the ongoing debate over a new laissez-faire information environment that doesn't trust "experts." The question remains: Is Wikipedia a tool for scholars, a rough draft of history, or merely a slanted version of reality? Offering a thought-provoking examination of a much-debated topic, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

SPORTS, GAMES & RECREATION

Boys of Summer ★★★

(2011) 95 min. DVD: \$26.95. New Video Group (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned. ISBN: 1-4229-7497-9.

There are certain places on Earth where sports dynasties perennially flourish, such as the tiny Caribbean island of Curaçao, which has long been a bastion of Little League baseball. The sunny documentary *Boys of Summer* follows the high-spirited adventures of a Curaçao team one year as it progresses to the Little League World Series in Williamsport, PA. Led by a passionate, 27-year-old coach, the band of scrappy, skinny kids win one game after another before entering a championship confrontation with archrival Japan (whose team has a history of dashing Curaçao's hopes). Director Keith Aumont has a keen eye for sports action and also nicely captures fly-on-the-wall moments of the boys cutting loose and meeting girls—when they're not playing their hearts out. DVD extras include bonus footage. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Discoveries...America—Special Edition: Magic of Flight ★★★

(2011) 55 min. DVD: \$24.95. Bennett-Watt HD Productions. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-934682-59-3.

This entry from Jim and Kelly Watt's acclaimed high-definition-filmed *Discoveries...America* series combines their characteristic stunning visuals and smart editing to showcase related topics built around the theme of human-powered flight. In Phoenix, AZ, early risers embark on a hot-air balloon flight, with viewers witnessing the process from start to finish, as the vessel's fabric is stretched across the desert floor and inflated first with cold air and then with hot in order to lift its basket of occupants. Powered kites—or ultralights—are about as bare-bones as airborne vehicles get, offering an exhilarating physical experience; although these contraptions have a motor

and wheels, all of the steering is performed by human hands on the cross-members of the kite-like wings. Another fun sequence here takes viewers to the Kansas-based Cessna Aircraft Company, home of the single-engine Skyhawk—still one of the most popular small planes in the world. Other segments include visits to aviation museums (including Kitty Hawk and the Air Force Museum), a look at “powered parachutes,” and a segment on the ultimate aircraft—the space shuttle—and other vehicles at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

Fire in Babylon ★★½

(2011) 95 min. DVD: \$24.95. New Video Group (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-7333-6.

You don’t have to know much about the sport of cricket to appreciate *Fire in Babylon*, an engaging documentary about the most successful, longest-dominating (as well as one of the most controversial) teams in all sports history (not just cricket): the legendary West Indies squad of the late 1970s and ’80s, underdogs not taken seriously until a concentration of talent and a shift to a more intimidating style of play reversed their fortunes. Employing a fastball that could take

their opponents’ heads off, the West Indies players began winning games while stoking international black pride. This was the era of protests against apartheid in South Africa, the rise of militant black power in the United States, and a pushback from immigrants of color in a hostile, postcolonial Britain. The team’s aggressive play was seen as a blow against white oppression, and its undefeated

record over many years kept the legend going. Director Stevan Riley mixes archival footage of game action with contemporary interviews of former teammates, along the way incorporating music (especially from Bob Marley) to add cultural context. Riley never really addresses the ethical issue of the violence the “Windies” brought to the sport, but *Fire in Babylon* does successfully tell the



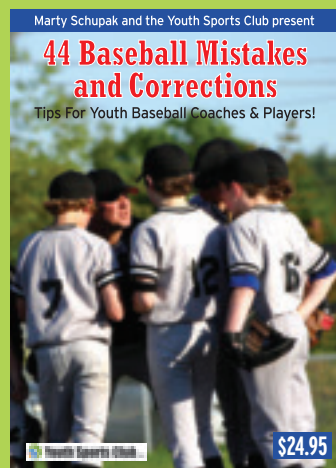
Modern Tennis: Essential Tools ★★★★★

(2011) 94 min. DVD: \$24.95. Evolve Player (dist. by Janson Media). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-56839-401-2.

In this comprehensive primer on tennis skills, British pro Bert Rowley leaves no stone unturned (or racket unspun) in pursuit of the perfect game. As the cover rightfully claims, this is “not the game your old folks played” but a thoroughly modern sport, although that doesn’t mean the basics are ignored here; indeed, the opening segment covers a warm-up, followed by a detailed treatment of various shots and tactics. The information is presented in a straightforward manner aided by multiple angles and effective use of slow-motion (especially valuable for demonstrating how to create the essential topspin). The program is divided into beginner, intermediate, and advanced sections, with the latter placing special emphasis on the mental aspects of the game, particularly visualization and intent (Rowley urges viewers to “keep your feet moving and never stop to admire your own shot”). One of the best affordably-priced single-disc tennis instructional titles on the market, this is highly recommended. **Editor’s Choice.** Aud: J, H, C, P. (C. Block)

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team's story while also opening a window on the era's racial tensions. DVD extras include an interview with Riley and producer John Battsek. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

CRAFTS, ARTS & HOBBIES

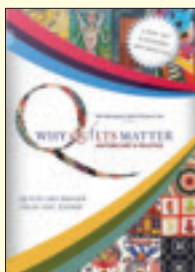
The Best of Antiques Roadshow ★★★

(2011) 160 min. DVD: \$19.99. PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-60883-557-7.

Hosted by Mark L. Walberg, this three-part compilation from the long-running PBS *Antiques Roadshow* series highlights a selection of dramatic and interesting encounters between hopeful collectors/owners and assorted experts who provide background information and appraise the value of various objects, such as folk art, furniture, and antique toys and guns. "Simply the Best" covers some of the most surprising and valuable finds, including a pair of 18th-century Massachusetts-made chairs and a trove of posters from the women's suffrage movement. "Trash to Treasure" focuses on things salvaged from dusty attics, dumpsters, and roadsides, including a rare Zuni pot and items from a mansion once owned by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Finally, "Politically Correct," delves

into political memorabilia and treasures, including signed photos and documents; among the surprises here are a self-portrait painted by Dwight D. Eisenhower and a set

of photos by Cecil Stoughton, JFK's White House photographer (including his historic snapshot of LBJ being sworn in on Air Force One after JFK's assassination). Rounding out

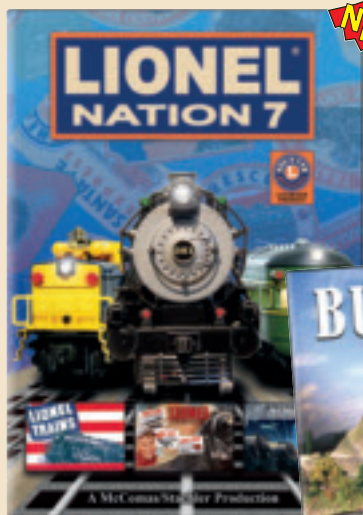


Why Quilts Matter: History, Art & Politics ★★★

(2011) 2 discs. 250 min. DVD: \$39.95. *The Kentucky Quilt Project*. ISBN: 978-0-615-45375-0.

Author and lecturer Shelly Zegart hosts this illuminating nine-part TV series about the history of quilting, which she launches by explaining the difference between antique and contemporary quilts (the former pre-date the 1960s; the latter came afterward). Zegart also distinguishes art or studio pieces, which exist primarily for display. Vintage and contemporary footage and photographs are interwoven throughout the running commentary offered by Zegart and others, including quilt makers, antique dealers, textile curators, gallery owners, and history professors, such as William Ferris, who describes quilts as "recycled works of art." To many owners and collectors, each completed piece tells a story about its creator, whether an individual or a group (and also through the choice of fabrics and messages stitched into them). Aside from their practical and aesthetic value, quilts have served as moneymakers for contest participants and as fundraisers for various causes. According to Zegart, prices took off after a 1971 exhibit at the Whitney Museum but started to decline after the remarkable Reconciliation Quilt sold for \$264,000 at Sotheby's in 1991. The most interesting episode looks exclusively at the striking work of the quilters of Gee's Bend, AL, who've achieved international acclaim. Zegart is knowledgeable about her subject, although her high-pitched voice can be grating at times, and her inexperience with a teleprompter creates some awkward moments. DVD extras include bonus clips and an interview. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

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the production are a few stops at museums and historical societies near the various shooting locales. Sure to please fans of the enduringly popular program, this is recommended. Aud: P. (S. Rees)

Instant Hoedown! ★★½

(2010) 2 discs. 137 min. DVD: \$30. ChopSquared (dist. by The AV Cafe). PPR.

The clockwork precision of square dancing has never looked more entertaining than in *Instant Hoedown!* (a double-disc DVD set with an accompanying CD), which presents—over the course of 10 mini-lessons—both the vocabulary and essential choreography of the form. Featuring seasoned callers Scotty Sharrer and Roland Morin (who also serve as guides for home viewers) and the Traveling Hoedowners (four couples who demonstrate the various movements), this how-to looks at the basics—squaring sets, home positions, identifying corners, understanding what makes a head couple versus a side couple—before tackling fun stuff such as pass-throughs, star-throughs, twirling, and promenading. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

THE ARTS

Acting Seminar with Eric Sherman

★★½

(2011) 3 discs. 333 min. DVD: \$150. Eric Sherman. PPR. ISBN: 978-0-9833133-3-5.

Eric Sherman was literally born into the movie world (as the son of prolific director

Vincent Sherman), and he's parlayed his connections into a career that's included producing, directing, and acting (although all on a relatively modest scale). In addition, Sherman offers seminars on all three subjects to those hoping to increase their chances of succeeding in showbiz. Sherman's approach during this acting seminar is practical, easygoing, and anecdotal (while he periodically employs clips from films such as *Royal Wedding* and *Rio Bravo*, his related discussion isn't very deep or analytical). Sherman has little to say about technique, talking instead in more general terms about the necessity of embodying a character, both physically and emotionally. Speaking over the course of five-plus hours to a small audience, Sherman covers topics such as the role of agents, managers, and entertainment lawyers; securing auditions; and increasing the chances of callbacks and bookings. Sherman also recommends helpful publications and describes what might be termed tricks of the trade, along the way freely sprinkling his comments with personal reminiscences and amusing digressions. And he takes questions from the class as well as inviting remarks about their own experiences, ultimately making this less of a structured presentation than a free-association conversation with an industry pro. Other titles in the series include *Writing Seminar with Eric Sherman*, *Directing Seminar with Eric Sherman*, and *Producing Seminar with Eric Sherman*. A very simply filmed production (with variable sound), this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Captains ★★★

(2011) 96 min. DVD: \$19.98. eOne Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4172-3600-0.

The *Star Trek* universe clearly revolves around William Shatner, the first (not counting Jeffrey Hunter's one-episode pilot stint) and most iconic of the franchise's helmsmen. In this feature-length documentary, Shatner boldly takes his ego where it's never gone before: visiting the quintet of actors—Patrick Stewart, Avery Brooks, Kate Mulgrew, Scott Bakula, and Chris Pine—who followed him in the captain's chair on the Starship *Enterprise* in the various *Star Trek* incarnations. It's fascinating to see Shatner, who wrote and directed *The Captains*, jet around the globe, meeting each performer on his or her home turf, with detours to *Star Trek* conventions where he's really in his element (clowning with stunned attendees and, in one moving encounter, greeting a fan with ALS). The interviews are, by turns, revelatory, confessional (playing an icon can be hell on home life), and flat-out surreal. By the time Shatner asks Brooks, "What happens when we die?" and Brooks, at his piano, responds musically, we find ourselves reflecting on what a long, strange trip it's been. The sky's the limit with Shatner's self-aggrandizement—as evidenced in a drawn-out question to Stewart (who tries to stay engaged as Shatner rambles)—at one point even betraying some resentment at Leonard Nimoy's receiving an Emmy nomination (an honor Shatner was denied). Although the target audience is clearly the galaxy of Trekkies, Shatner fans (and psychologists) will also appreciate. DVD extras include a "making-of" featurette. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (D. Liebenson)



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The Cask of Amontillado ★★½
(2011) 22 min. DVD: \$29.95 (teacher's guide included). DijitMedia (dist. by Library Video Company). PPR. Closed captioned.

Pittsburgh-based filmmaker Thad Ciechanowski helmed this highly impressive adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's landmark short story about bitter Montressor (David Bielewicz), who obsessively seeks payback against boorish wine connoisseur Fortunato (Frank Tirio Jr.) for an unspecified insult, ultimately luring his oenophile enemy into a fatal trap. The film takes a few liberties with the original text—most notably in shifting the setting from Italy to the United States and tacking on a prologue with an elderly Montressor (Richard Tardell), who reveals the secret of Fortunato's fate to his adult son, an American military officer who is clearly confused by the odd tale—but the production design and appropriately eerie cinematography by Jeff Garton nicely capture the texture of the unsettling source material. Tirio subtly underplays Fortunato's extreme behavior, while Bielewicz provides a chilling interpretation of Montressor; his matinee-idol good looks slowly giving way to a seething viciousness towards his doomed victim. DVD extras include lesson plans and Poe's original short story in PDF format. Although aimed at students, this will also appeal to adult Poe fans—not to mention would-be construction workers eager to learn how to build a wall in record time. Highly recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (P. Hall)

Cosmology & Belief ★★½
(2009) 30 min. DVD: \$89.99. Visual Education Centre Limited. PPR.

Part of the *Art Through Time: A Global View* series, *Cosmology & Belief* looks at how humans have employed art to help understand both the seen and unseen world, backed with interviews of various experts on anthropology, art, religion, history, culture, and art history, who describe the wide variety of artistic forms used through the ages. Some images will be immediately familiar to Western audiences, such as Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* fresco or the Pantheon in Rome; others, including African sculpture or Amazonian tribal dress and dance may be less so. Showing how art can be a medium for addressing matters of faith and religion, the program covers a wide range of related topics, including origin stories, worshipping through image, creating sacred space, and interfaith communication. Other titles in this series—which carries a general advisory warning that some images may be considered either inappropriate for underage viewers or offensive to some individuals—include *Ceremony & Society*, *Conflict & Resistance*, *Converging Cultures*, *Death*, *Domestic Life*, *Dreams & Visions*, *History & Memory*, *The Human Body*, *The Urban Experience*, and *Writing*. Boasting excellent editing and impressive cultural



Michael Feinstein's American Songbook ★★½
(2010) 2 discs. 180 min. DVD: \$39.99. Hudson West Productions (dist. by The AV Cafe). PPR.

This three-part PBS-aided documentary series finds singer-pianist Michael Feinstein performing the songs he loves and indulging his passion for collecting and preserving sheet music, recordings, and other artifacts from the glory days of the Great American Songbook—visiting flea markets and storage trailers in search of lost treasure, while also interviewing the elderly associates of famous singers, composers, and band leaders. Along the way, snippets of archival audio and video footage are used to provide additional historical context. Part one looks at the contributions of former big-band crooners like Frank Sinatra and Rosemary Clooney, who remained faithful to the standards, even as rock 'n' roll exploded in 1950s America. In the second section, viewers travel back to World War II, a time when music was used to inspire the patriotism of soldiers and build morale at home, with many tunes—including sentimental love songs like "You'll Never Know"—retaining their popularity long after the war. The final episode covers the Prohibition era, with its jazz scene and popular but segregated nightclubs, early radio broadcasts, and burgeoning need for songwriters, as talkies replaced silent movies. Throughout, Feinstein performs key songs and discusses his friendships with Ira Gershwin and other greats, while insights into Feinstein's life and career are provided by his parents and domestic partner. Producer-director Amber Edwards achieves a nice balance between musical performance and history lesson in this winning series sure to appeal to fans of early-to-mid-20th-century American popular music. DVD extras include two hours worth of additional performances and archival footage. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

breadth, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (E. Gieschen)

Figaro! Living in the Moment of a Character ★★½
(2010) 119 min. DVD: \$19.99. Filmbyframe (dist. by Film Baby).

D.V. Schaefer's documentary on a joint production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* by music schools in the United States and Poland promotes the power of cultural exchange in education, while also emphasizing that opera demands not just fine singers but excellent singing actors. In fact, Michael Ramach of the University of Louisville insists that his cast—or casts, as two complete companies are formed, with some singers doubling roles—must understand the words being vocalized in order to be effective onstage and fulfill the composer's intentions. The first half of *Figaro!* follows the rehearsals that culminate in the Kentucky staging, with behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with Ramach, conductor Kimcherie Lloyd, various crew members, and students from both countries, coupled with exuberant clips from the completed performance. The second half switches to the Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, where the production is systematically reconstructed and presented to a Polish audience. Schaefer offers a good sense of the intensive collaborative labor that goes into such an undertaking, as well as a nice portrait of the friendships that develop across national lines in the process—ultimately demonstrating that music truly is a universal language. DVD extras include a photo gallery

and a partial audio concert performance. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

In Their Own Words—British Novelists: Nothing Sacred (1970-1990) ★★½
(2010) 58 min. DVD: \$169.95. Films Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-61733-710-9.

The third and final (to date) installment in the BBC's titular series on 20th-century British literature, *Nothing Sacred* draws from a wealth of rare televised archival material. The U.K. media are obviously far more respectful of writers than their U.S. counterparts, as evidenced by the BBC's popular *Book Programme*, as well as an attempt to make the Booker Prize ceremony into an Academy Awards-like TV spectacle. Eye-opening material presented here includes the young Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* being read by a pre-stardom Ben Kingsley, Martin Amis as himself in an amusing skit, and Hanif Kureishi offering a devastating denunciation of political correctness. Yet the chronology is selective and scattershot; feminism, imperialism, leftism, and Thatcherism gave most writers big juicy issues, but "punk" and New Wave culture—where truly nothing was sacred—are ignored. An otherwise lucid dissertation on the *Satanic Verses* affair has Rushdie vanishing under armed protection, but the irony that his life wound up guarded by the same Thatcher establishment he loathed is not probed. Other featured authors include Fay Weldon, Angela Carter, Ian McEwan, John Berger, Penelope Fitzgerald, Margaret Drabble, and James Kelman. The other titles in the *In Their Own Words—British Novel-*

ists series are *Among the Ruins* (1919-1939) and *The Age of Anxiety* (1945-1969). Worth considering for academic collections, this is a strong optional purchase elsewhere. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassady)

James Salter: A Sport and a Pastime

★★★1/2

(2011) 54 min. DVD: \$45 (\$150 w/PPR). Checkerboard Film Foundation.

James Salter is an accomplished American novelist-screenwriter, although this documentary focuses on one specific work: his 1967 novel *A Sport and a Pastime*, which concerns the short-lived love affair between an American youth and a French student in rural Burgundy. Although the book may not be well known outside of the *Paris Review* readership, the reading of passages here drives the late author Reynolds Price to tears. Salter, whose expat life in France after military service hearkens back to the earlier "lost generation" that included Hemingway and Fitzgerald, revisits French villages that figured heavily in his prose. Filmmakers Edgar Howard and Sandy Gotham Meehan make a wise choice to illustrate the sensual content of *A Sport and a Pastime* not with gauzy sex-scene dramatizations but rather with the art photography of Harry Callahan, Horst, Barbara Morgan, and other masters of black-and-white. Although nominal biographical information is included, the real subject remains the titular work and its impact on fans ranging from Susan Sontag to Robert Redford (who collaborated with Salter on various projects, notably the drama *Downhill Racer*). Collections with a heavy literary emphasis, especially in academia, should consider this, although it's perhaps too specialized for public libraries (the test being, of course, how many times Salter turns up in the catalog). A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassady)

Making War Horse ★★★

(2009) 49 min. DVD: \$25 (\$199 w/PPR). Microcinema International.

Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's children's novel *War Horse*—about an English lad who joins the army to be reunited with the beloved horse that's been drafted to serve on the front lines in World War I—was one of the most anticipated films of 2011. But *Making War Horse* isn't about the movie, but rather offers a behind-the-scenes look at the mounting of the play—by Britain's National Theatre—which went on to win great critical acclaim (and audience popularity) both in London and later on Broadway, where it won a 2011 Tony award. Filmmakers David Bickerstaff and Phil Grabsky follow the evolution of the project from its initial conception through its realization on stage, concentrating on the use of full-sized puppets to serve as the horses (and some human fig-

ures, too). The heroes here aren't writer Nick Stafford, artistic director Nicholas Hytner, or even the actors, but rather the Handspring Puppet Company, a South African firm whose employees worked wonders in crafting the magnificent puppets, operated by three or four puppeteers each, that became the heart of the production and the main reason behind its enormous success on both sides of the Atlantic. DVD extras include a lengthy interview with Morpurgo, "making-of" featurettes, backstage footage, a segment on Handspring, a visit to the King's Troop of royal horsemen, and a stills gallery. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Rickey Smiley: Open Casket Sharp

★★★1/2

(2011) 75 min. DVD: \$19.98. eOne Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4172-3459-8.

Comedian, television host, and syndicated radio personality Rickey Smiley performs a standup act before an adoring Atlanta audience in this special. Smiley's material proves a mixed bag, opening strongly with a bit about a scene-stealing bassist for pop-soul group The O'Jays, followed by an extended sequence about a grandmother—touching on multiple prescriptions and her tendency to fall asleep while in the middle of criticizing a family member, among other things. The

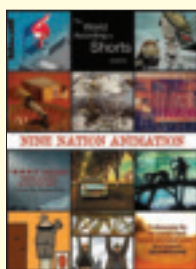
show goes downhill from there as Smiley talks about the smell of an airplane after a long flight, and his jokes turn towards the obvious with a lame account of a little person's funeral. But the program ends on a high note with Smiley's memories and observations about playing gospel piano in church, recalling how he once deliberately irked his pastor by embellishing the ends of songs with unnecessary flourishes. Finally, Smiley's contrasting impressions of white folks and black people singing "Amazing Grace" is priceless. DVD extras include bonus sketches. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

HISTORY & CURRENT EVENTS

Armadillo ★★★

(2010) 100 min. In Danish, Pashto & English w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$189 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). Lorber Films.

While most U.S. news coverage of Afghanistan mentions "coalition" troops, media attention remains focused—for the most part—on American forces. Reminding us that other countries have military personnel in the conflict, Janus Metz's Cannes award-winning documentary takes a look at Denmark's contribution to the 10-year-old war. Metz spent six months on the front line



Nine Nation Animation ★★★1/2

(2010) 82 min. In English, Swedish, Farsi, Chinese & Norwegian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95. New Yorker Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-56730-499-0.

This virtuoso anthology of nine recent shorts from around the world offers visionary, grown-up (i.e., sometimes enigmatic) animation in various permutations and moods. The collection is bracketed by two Scandinavian entries: Norway's mordant opening, *Deconstruction Workers*, by Kajsa Naess, uses a computer-assisted style of photo-collage to eavesdrop on two laborers discussing job and life issues, oblivious to a violent revolution/apocalypse besieging their worksite; and the Swedish closer from Jonas Odell, *Never Like the First Time*, employs different techniques (all computer-assisted) in four segments with various narrators reflecting on their first sexual experiences, good and bad. In between those bookends, Turkey's *Average 40 Matches*, from Burak Dogan, draws on photography and stop-motion techniques to depict matchsticks satisfying their craving for cigarettes. France's astounding *Bamiyan*, by Patrick Pleutin, uses a multimedia stop-motion swirl of paints, powders, sand, stone, and organic material to link a seventh-century Chinese Buddhist monk with the doleful history of Taliban-dominated Afghanistan. In *Please Say Something*, Ireland's David O'Reilly employs a style resembling early computer graphics to present a futuristic tale about a cat and a mouse. Belgium's *Flatlife*, a constant four-panel nonverbal comedy by Jonas Geirnaert set inside an apartment complex, is probably the nearest this compilation gets to traditional hand-drawn cartooning (and it's still fairly unorthodox). From Croatia, Veljko Popovic's *She Who Measures* offers a surreal take on American consumerism, while the U.K.'s *Home Road Movies*, by Robert Bradbrook, occupies a netherworld between live-action footage and photo-realistic digital backgrounds and props for its bittersweet reminiscence about a late father's penchant for road trips. And from South Africa's Blackheart Gang, *The Tale of How* pairs an operatic score with wobbly camerawork to portray a mythical kingdom of birds. DVD extras include a bonus short, *The Runt*, from Germany's Andreas Hykade. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassady)

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Battle of Britain ★★½

(2010) 89 min. DVD: \$19.98. BFS Entertainment & Multimedia (avail. from most distributors).

In honor of the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Britain—the WWII-era air war hailed by Winston Churchill as his nation's “finest hour”—actor Ewan McGregor and his brother Colin, a military pilot, examine the weapons and tactics of this brief but intense conflict conducted in the skies over southern England, interviewing some of the brave Brits who piloted the Spitfire and Hurricane aircraft against Germany's seemingly invincible Luftwaffe. In the summer of 1940, Britain stood alone to face the

Nazi air force, which was under orders to destroy England's defenses in preparation for a German invasion. Although German planes were renowned for their power, the Nazi commanders—including Hermann Goering—hadn't counted on a recent British innovation called “radar,” coupled with an elaborate system of plane spotters and coast watchers. Directed by Ashley Gething, the documentary provides an effective account of the historic military operation, including Germany's infamous terror tactic known as “the Blitz,” which targeted London and other urban centers. Also covered are the importance of sea rescues (many men ditched their planes in the icy, unforgiving ocean), the battle's heavy losses (which included over 500 pilots, with an average age of 22), and Britain's ultimate victory. Aviation buffs will love the vintage and contemporary aerial footage included here, showing the British fighters maneuvering over the countryside. An exciting and informative addition to the ranks of winning WWII history docs, *Battle of Britain* is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

as Danish soldiers, based at Camp Armadillo in Helmand Province, found themselves in shootouts with Taliban forces. In one remarkable sequence that ignited a firestorm debate in Denmark, the Danes use a grenade attack against their Taliban enemies and fatally shoot the badly injured fighters who survived. As if that weren't bad enough, they pose the dead Taliban combatants for the sake of comic photographs. Metz also follows the platoon in their bungled attempts at winning hearts and minds—at one point, they mistake shouts from a group of youngsters as evidence of friendship (the hostile children are actually urging the Danes to go home). Not surprisingly, the Danes become disillusioned with their mission, which was originally framed as a strictly peacekeeping effort. Almost unique in offering a non-U.S. perspective, *Armadillo* is recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Engineering Ground Zero ★★½

(2011) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$44.95 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-60883-516-4.

Commemorating the 10th anniversary of 9/11, this PBS-aided NOVA episode captures behind-the-scenes activities at Ground Zero—namely, the construction of One World Trade Center and the development of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum intended to honor the almost 3,000 lives lost. Directed by David Shadrack Smith, *Engineering Ground Zero* combines voiceover narration with dramatic footage and CGI animation showing the attacks and the monumental work that followed: from the initial clearing of the devastation, through the planning and eventual construction of the new skyscraper and memorial site. Ar-

chitects, engineers, laborers, and dignitaries offer commentary, detailing the project's incredible challenges—including years of debate over whether anything at all should be built on the 16-acre site in lower Manhattan. Lead architect David Childs sees the ultimate goal as achieving a combination of security and beauty while also celebrating openness rather than fear. Learning from the mistakes of the past, new substances are incorporated to create a structure that is “beautiful, green, and, above all, safe”; but it's a trial-and-error process, with methods and materials being altered or discarded along the way. As for the memorial, its fountains are meant to embrace life while also symbolizing loss and absence, and its “forest” of 400 trees will be irrigated with the help of computers. While workers seen here race against time to be ready for the dedication ceremonies on September 11, 2011, the effort will continue for several more years. Offering a fascinating look at an architectural project of unusual historical significance, this compelling documentary is recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

Fambul Tok ★★★

(2011) 82 min. In English & Krio w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Fambul Tok takes its name from a grassroots organization dedicated to fostering forgiveness in Sierra Leone. Since the conclusion of the civil war in 2002, victims and perpetrators have returned to live together after years of rape, mutilation, murder, and destruction of property (the rebels also drafted children to fight, using funds from blood diamonds to keep the battle going). The situation in Sierra Leone recalls similar scenarios in South

Africa and Rwanda, although Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was ultimately less effective because the government granted amnesty to most of the guilty. Human rights activist John Caulker formed Fambul Tok ("family talk") to foster communication in order to make real amends in hopes that such atrocities will never recur. Reporter-turned-director Sara Terry records testimony from victims, including a man who watched in horror as a neighbor executed 17 members of his family. Caulker tries to track down the perpetrator, Tamba Joe, to ask him to apologize to the citizens of Foendor and ask for forgiveness, but Joe proves elusive, so his sisters and a former colleague attempt to make things right. In over 50 other villages throughout the country, ex-combatants face their accusers around traditional bonfires to express remorse, ask for mercy, and join together to rebuild their communities. DVD extras include a director's statement, filmmaker bios, and a snapshot of an American classroom that benefited from the "fambul tok" approach to conflict resolution. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Israel vs. Israel ★★★

(2011) 59 min. DVD: \$24.95. Choices, Inc. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-933724-37-9.

Israel's peace movement—protesting the country's continued occupation of much of the Palestinian territories—is the subject of this documentary by Swedish director Terje Carlsson, which not only showcases various demonstrations, but also captures the often vitriolic reaction from equally passionate fellow citizens on the opposite side. Carlsson focuses on four anti-occupation activists: a woman who assists Palestinians at the ubiquitous Israeli security checkpoints; a soldier who gathers testimony from other military

personnel about human-rights abuses; a rabbi who aids Palestinian farmers in resisting the takeover of their land by Jewish settlers; and a self-styled anarchist who engages in civil disobedience to delay the construction of Israel's "security wall." Carlsson gives each one ample opportunity to explain their motives, which range from theological argument and simple anti-government rhetoric to a desire to liberate the Israeli military from the self-inflicted damage caused by its actions and a wish to save future generations on both sides from having to endure continued suffering. *Israel vs. Israel* nicely personalizes this polarizing issue with portraits of some courageous people, while also illustrating that the movement itself is hardly monolithic, but rather composed of different groups that employ varying methods to achieve distinct goals. A timely documentary, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Monumental Myths ★★★

(2009) 47 min. DVD: \$19.95: individuals; \$200 w/PPR: institutions. Skipping Stone Entertainment.

Inspired by interviewee James Loewen's *Lies Across America*, filmmaker Tom Trinley takes an Airstream trailer cross-country to visit misleading or misrepresented historic sites, such as the spurious birth-cabin of Abraham Lincoln, various commemorative statues of Christopher Columbus (we can blame popular 19th-century yarn-spinner Washington Irving for inaccurate tales of the explorer's 1492 voyage), and a New York City statuary depiction of Indians trading Manhattan to the Dutch for a handful of beads. At Mount Rushmore, Trinley does a Michael Moore-like stint, asking embarrassing questions about Ku Klux Klan connections to the landmark until he's asked to leave. Trinley's messages—leaning to the left—are familiar

The Palace of Versailles ★★★1/2

(2010) 51 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9138-8.

Offering a personal tour of France's historic Palace of Versailles, featuring insights from historian-guides who know the full history of the complex's magnificent structures, filmmaker Jacques Vichet's documentary describes how a hunting lodge built by Louis XIII in the early 16th century was eventually expanded to become the elaborate royal home and seat of government until the French Revolution. After Louis XIII's successor, the infamous Louis XIV, decided to shift his court and home to Versailles—leaving Paris, while also concentrating power in one locale so as to undercut the influence of the nobility—lodgings were added to the estate, as well as the famed Hall of Mirrors, and the Royal Chapel. One of the guides explains the various architectural innovations, including the establishment of the Hall of Mirrors as the central point of the residence—a gathering place for men and women after a long night of strict segregation of the sexes. Other intriguing details include the fact that one of the apartments was full of silver objects, and so many candles burned that a visitor could pass from one room to the next without seeing a shadow. Of course, a look at the extraordinary collection of art at Versailles is also included. The palace—or the Château de Versailles, as the French call it—was built to impress the king's visitors, and it continues to do so today. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)



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but vital: history is written by the winners and dominant culture (in this case, male, white, Anglo-Saxon); minority groups and the poor are marginalized; and establishment public art foists a simplistic point-of-view that reinforces the status quo. Late historian Howard Zinn is among those appearing in this engaging production, which concludes with an edu-taining recap in hip-hop rhyme. DVD extras include extended interviews, a music video, and a featurette about the Airstream. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Cassidy)

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY

Sleep Furiously ★★

(2011) 90 min. DVD: \$29.99 (\$199 w/PPR). Microcinema International.

It's hard to watch Gideon Koppel's documentary about the Welsh farming village of Trefeurig, where he grew up, without thinking about the sitcom classic *Seinfeld*—or at least the guiding concept of the series: a show about nothing. Koppel here captures the quotidian daily activities of Trefeurig in such a dreary manner—absent commentary or voiceover narration—that this does indeed come across as a film about nothing. Granted, some things happen—a bookmobile makes a monthly visit, a woman asks her husband if he would prefer leeks or cabbage for his dinner, a dog chases after his master's van as it lumbers down a road, schoolchildren learn their lessons in English and Welsh. As presented here, Trefeurig feels like a place that time (mostly) forgot until the appearance of modern farming vehicles reminds the viewer that this is not a vintage travelogue. But Koppel never gets close enough to the villagers to ascertain why they prefer to live in this isolated area. Everyone seems very pleasant—perhaps somewhat for the benefit of Koppel's camera, as there are no unruly students or cranky elders to be found. Still, the crisp cinematography and a charming score by Aphex Twin do somewhat help keep the viewer's attention, although some will no doubt take the title literally and doze off. DVD extras include a bonus short. Optional, at best. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Travel with Kids: Scotland ★★½

(2011) 57 min. DVD: \$14.95. Equator Creative Media (dist. by Janson Media). ISBN: 978-1-56839-402-0.

In this latest addition to the acclaimed *Travel with Kids* series, the Roberts family visits Scotland, a destination featuring plenty of kid-friendly attractions. Edinburgh offers a good example, with its touchstone Edinburgh Castle (full of medieval suits of armor, weapons, and other antiquities), fun museums, a bagpipe store, and places where one can feed reindeer or interact with reptiles and tarantulas. The two young boys appear to be having

a wonderful time (before they tucker out in late afternoons), trying on mock crowns, checking out an old cannon, and strolling along the Royal Mile. The family also visits Loch Ness and Cairngorms National Park in the Scottish highlands. The production is infectiously perky, with enough travelogue-like shots to make this welcome viewing for armchair tourists, especially with the addition of pop-up screen facts. DVD extras include a trip planner, a "Scotland at Home" section (with recipes and crafts), and bloopers. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

BIOGRAPHY

Dirty Pictures ★★½

(2011) 86 min. DVD: \$24.99. *Breaking Glass Pictures* (avail. from most distributors).

Popular on the film festival circuit, this fine documentary with an unfortunate title serves up a profile of Alexander "Sasha" Shulgin, an idiosyncratic chemist who has developed more than 200 psychedelic compounds—most notably MDMA, better known as Ecstasy. Seen in a makeshift laboratory at his Northern California home, at various speaking engagements with his therapist wife of 40 years, and in interviews, Shulgin comes across as a preoccupied genius with thoughtful views regarding ecstatic experience in general. A number of other scientists—some former colleagues of Shulgin's, as well as a younger skeptic—weigh in on the human impulse to seek altered states, and the film also explores how psychedelic research might help to answer questions about the inner workings of the mind. Directed by Étienne Sauret, *Dirty Pictures* is ultimately the story of

a man who inspires differing reactions: from the legions of admirers who thank Shulgin profusely for his work, to the cops who raid his home (caught on camera), to the middle-age son who is obviously ambivalent about his father's legacy. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

His Way ★★★½

(2011) 86 min. DVD: \$19.98. HBO Home Entertainment (avail from most distributors). Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-7806-8166-5.

To say producer Jerry Weintraub is well-connected is an understatement: singing his praises in this HBO documentary are such A-listers as George Clooney, Bruce Willis, Matt Damon, Julia Roberts, Brad Pitt, and George and Barbara Bush; even his wife (whom he never divorced) and longtime live-in girlfriend (how Hollywood!) are on hand to offer accolades. From music to movies, from the William Morris mailroom to the rarefied air of Hollywood's summit, Weintraub's is an extraordinary and uniquely American success story. Better than gossip, Weintraub offers a peek behind the curtain of Oz, from a figure whose more celebrated movies include *Nashville, Oh, God!, Diner*, the original *The Karate Kid*, and the *Ocean's Eleven* remake. This is one nonfiction film where the term "talking heads" is a plus: Weintraub tells great stories, ranging from how he saved his job after an all-night, long-distance phone call threatened his early tenure under legendary studio mogul Lew Wasserman, to his work promoting tours for Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley (he promised the King there would be no empty seats at his concerts—even if he had to recruit convicts to fill 5,000 chairs for an undersold show). Writer-director Douglas McGrath delivers most of the ups but few



Condoleezza Rice: Her Life and Career ★★★

(2011) 30 min. DVD: \$29.95. Worldwide Academic Media. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-59163-176-7.

This glowing biography looks at the many accomplishments of Condoleezza Rice, the first African-American woman to serve as Secretary of State. Born to a Presbyterian minister and a teacher in Birmingham, AL, in 1954, Rice experienced first-hand both the violence and the hope of the time. Always an outstanding student, she earned advanced degrees in political science after deciding against a career as a concert pianist. Rice went on to become a popular professor at Stanford University and eventually was the Soviet affairs specialist on the National Security Council during the George H. W. Bush presidency, a position in which she was involved in many important diplomatic decisions. After a stint on the boards of Chevron, Hewlett-Packard, and other corporations—as well as serving as the first female and first minority provost of Stanford—she returned to the political sphere during the administration of George W. Bush, ultimately being named to her Cabinet post. Other achievements highlighted here include the many books she has authored or co-authored, her 10 honorary doctorates, various humanitarian involvements, and her personal discipline and tenacity. While this is a well-produced portrait, it's not exactly balanced, neglecting to even mention the controversial nature of many decisions she made as part of the Bush administration, especially in relation to the war in Iraq and post-9/11 counterterrorism policies. Still, this is recommended, overall. Aud: H, C, P. (E. Gieschen)

of the downs of Weintraub's career, but no matter. As Clooney remarks, "He's one of the last of his kind." DVD extras include a featurette with Weintraub discussing "My First Real Job." Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (D. Liebenson)

Jerry Lewis: The David Susskind Show "Open End" ★★½

(2011) 90 min. DVD: \$19.98. *S'more Entertainment* (avail. from most distributors).

Aired on David Susskind's *Open End* TV series, this two-part 1965 interview of comedian/filmmaker Jerry Lewis by Susskind—his former agent-turned-talk-show-host—is a largely amicable exchange except for brief flair-ups hinting at old hostilities. Susskind maintains his disarming style even when asking penetrating questions, while Lewis proves to be an ideal guest: honest, well-spoken, and tough but vulnerable. The pair discuss Lewis's early childhood as the son of two vaudevillians who often left him in the care of relatives (Lewis also cites difficulties related to being transferred to 16 different schools, particularly noting his humiliation at being retained in the fourth grade). Comments about marriage, fatherhood, and religion (Lewis's then-wife was Catholic; he's Jewish) hint at Lewis's emotional and spiritual complexity, while a brief talk about his compulsive spending reveals a deep-seated sense of emptiness. The second segment focuses on Lewis's career, which had taken a hit from the failure of a primetime television show. Lewis disavows TV as a suitable medium for his comedy, defining himself as a filmmaker, better understood by the European press than American critics. At one point, Susskind presses Lewis about frequent criticisms of him as an underachiever who refuses to realize his full potential; Lewis dismisses the charge, but it's easy to pick up some personal frustration from Susskind. Lewis, on the other hand, says he wishes there was more time on the program to do "battle" with Susskind, a statement left unexplained but perhaps alluding to their checkered history. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Ne Change Rien ★★★

(2009) 100 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95 (\$295 w/PPR). *The Cinema Guild*. ISBN: 0-7815-1377-4.

Portugal's Pedro Costa spent years making this meditative music documentary about French actress/singer Jeanne Balibar, which he started filming before 2006's *Colossal Youth*, picking up the project afterwards. In both cases, Balibar shot in black-and-white, but because he eschews artificial light, most scenes are shrouded in darkness, which fits the smoky alto's nocturnal style. Balibar isn't the most expressive vocalist, but Costa prefers languid types. Absent narration or storyline, the documentary serves up a series of rehearsals and performances in which Balibar talks,

sings, smokes, and works things out with her band (offering an insightful snapshot of the creative process itself). At one point Balibar says, "We should really try to bring out the silences," a stylistic choice that Costa himself sometimes follows in his own way (the director even includes a voice lesson in which Balibar receives instruction from an unseen coach). Although her ensemble includes bass, drums, and keyboards, voice and guitar take center stage more often than not, resulting in a slow-motion mélange of jazz, chanson, and electronica. DVD extras include Costa's short film "The End of a Love Affair," deleted scenes, and musical sketches. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Paloma Herrera: Here and Now ★★★

(2011) 76 min. DVD: \$19.99. *Kultur International Films* (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9130-2.

A substantial portion of this biographical tribute to the prima ballerina of the American Ballet Theatre is devoted to footage of her performances and rehearsals, clearly demonstrating her artistry. Interspersed throughout are interviews with Herrera, as well as her first teacher, Olga Ferri; ABT choreographer Irina Kopalkova; Juilliard School dance master Hector Zaraspe; ABT Artistic Director Kevin McKenzie; and Mauricio Wainrot, Director of the Ballet Contemporáneo in Buenos Aires. Together, the clips and commentary provide a solid overview of her career, which began—after seven years of training in her native Argentina—with a stellar appearance at the Varna International Ballet Competition in 1990. Only a year later, at the age of 15, she was accepted as a student at New York's School of American Ballet, and less than a year after that joined the ABT, where she was named soloist in 1993 and principal in 1995. Now, a decade and a half after her meteoric rise, Herrera is recognized as one of the world's great dancers, and engaging behind-the-scenes footage illustrates both her professional dedication and down-to-earth personality. Filmmaker Julio Panno's film is clearly a labor of love, designed to show off Herrera's prodigious technique and celebrate her achievement. DVD extras include an extended interview with McKenzie, a photo gallery, and text bios. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

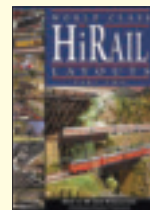
Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during January and February, including: *First Face: The Buck Starts Here*, *Hood to Coast*, *The Last Lions*, *Lessons for the Living*, *Liszt: The Pilgrimage Years*, *Reagan*, *Tapestries of Hope*, *Teaching ESL Students in the Mainstream Classroom*, *The War of 1812*, and much more!

Series Update

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

Shot in high-definition, **World Class HiRail Layouts, Part Two** (60 min., DVD: \$19.99) is the second entry in TM Books & Video's series featuring scale train track layouts.



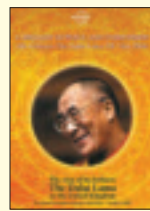
See review of *World Class HiRail Layouts, Part One* in VL-9/10.

Dora the Explorer: Dora Loves Boots (92 min., DVD: \$16.99), the most recent title from Paramount Home Entertainment following pint-sized explorer Dora and her pal Boots, compiles four episodes: "Boots' First Bike," "Bouncy Boots," "Vacaciones!," and "The Big Red Chicken's Magic Wand." See review of *Dora the Explorer: Big Sister Dora* in VL-5/05.

The most recent additions to PBS Home Video's *Rough Cut—Woodworking with Tommy Mac* series are **Arts & Crafts-Style Arm Chair**, **Greene & Greene-Inspired Dressing Mirror**, **Pie-Crust Tray**, and **Serving Cart** (30 min. each, DVD: \$24.99 each), hosted by master craftsman Tommy MacDonald. See review of *Rough Cut—Woodworking with Tommy Mac: Wall Cabinet* in VL Online-8/11.

The latest title from On Air Video founder Larry Withers's series on painting is the completely revised 2nd edition of **Stretching & Priming Your Canvas** (42 min., DVD: \$14.95), which offers a primer on basic materials, preparation, and canvas maintenance. See review of *Perspective Made Simple* in VL Online-6/11. Available from: On Air Video, 8203 Westminster Rd., Elkins Park, PA 19027; tel: (215) 885-2828; web: onairvideo.com.

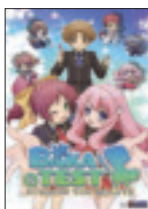
Newly available from the Meridian Trust and Music Video Distribution are two new titles that feature His Holiness the Dalai Lama: **The Essence of Mahayana Buddhism** by H.H. The Dalai Lama (165 min., DVD: \$19.95), and **A Message of Peace & Compassion: His Holiness the Dalai Lama UK Visit 2004** (60 min., DVD: \$19.95). See review of *Facing Death and Dying Well* in VL-11/11.



Baka & Test—Summon the Beasts: The Complete First Season

★★★

(2010) 5 discs. 325 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. *Funimation* (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4210-2325-3.



At Fumizuki Academy, students who score highest on the entrance exams get the nicest and best-equipped classrooms; but classes can challenge each other to better their lots—using virtual avatars. Kindly loser Yoshii, stuck in the lowly Class F along with a bunch of other misfits, leads the charge against top-flight Class A, both to help out Himeji, who would be in Class A had she not been sick at the time of the test, and to demand more egalitarian treatment at the school. Based on a young adult novel series that led to a manga, *Baka & Test* is a stripped-down anime that knows exactly what it wants and aims no higher, combining elements of other successful comedies together with shallow but pleasant characters, running gags, and a relentless barrage of bawdy humor. *B&T* will inevitably draw comparisons to over-the-top productions such as *Excel Saga* and *Pani Poni Dash!*, but it lacks similar nuance and character development, relying instead on competent animation and a sure feel for delivering laughs to a certain audience segment. Compiling all 13 episodes of the 2010 first season in a dual-language DVD/Blu-ray combo set, rated TV-14, extras include related short anime pieces. Viewers outside the target demographic may find this extremely irritating, but for its intended audience, this is recommended. (L. Martincik)

High School of the Dead: Complete Collection

★1/2

(2010) 2 discs. 300 min. DVD: \$59.98, Blu-ray: \$69.98. *Sentai Filmworks* (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5117-1 (dvd), 978-1-6161-5118-8 (blu-ray).



Grindhouse gore and eroticism reign as a group of “average” Japanese high schoolers (mostly Anglo-looking, impossibly nubile coed girls with torpedo-like breasts) are swept up in an unexplained zombie apocalypse after the crazed, flesh-eating creatures—who are blind, but hunt victims via sound—swarm the world. As civilization swiftly crumbles, a lad named Takashi leads an escape party comprised of former girlfriend Rei and a handful of other teen survivors (along with one cheerful busty-bimbo school nurse). Fortunately, some of the females—including purple-haired Saeko—are kick-butt martial artists, while Kôta, an overweight nerd-outcast, gleefully

finds his “calling” as a ruthless gunslinger. The gang lucks out in locating vehicles, caches of weapons, lingerie (yes, lingerie), and a cute little dog in this muddled over-the-top series where the tone warps wildly from splatter-action to boob-centric cheesecake to sober drama. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2010 in a dual-language set, rated TV-MA, this is not a necessary purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Legend of the Millennium Dragon

★★★

(2011) 98 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$45.99. *Sony Pictures Home Entertainment* (avail. from most distributors).



Sheer animation brio makes this familiar concoction of traditional Far East fantasy elements an entertaining watch. After fatherless Jun, a well-meaning but ineffectual adolescent schoolboy in modern Kyoto, is suddenly assailed by an “oni” (demon), he seeks refuge in a temple that is actually an intentional time-trap set by mystic priest-king Gen’un. Jun is teleported back 1,200 years to an ancient Nippon in which a budding human civilization suffers attacks from the savage, shape-shifting oni. Jun’s heritage, Gen’un explains, marks him as a born warrior-messiah who can summon a powerful spirit-dragon and destroy attackers. But Jun can’t imagine himself fighting, even with an entire worshipful city calling him their “savior” and an obedient dragon at his side. His misgivings turn out to be justified after he learns that the oni are not what they seem and Gen’un is not as virtuous as he first appears. Based on *Onigamiden*, a beloved novel by Takafumi Takada, this fairy-tale fantasy is reminiscent of the acclaimed *Princess Mononoke* (VL-5/00), even if the plot ultimately turns into a predictable—albeit spectacular—*Transformers*-style beat-down between increasingly powerful magical beings, with Jun finally realizing his destiny. Presented in a dual-language release, rated PG-13, extras include an art gallery. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Mardock Scramble: The First Compression

★★★

(2011) 60 min. DVD: \$29.98. *Sentai Filmworks* (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-6161-5122-5.



Familiar Japanese cyber-fiction elements combine with striking chiaroscuro and neo-noir panache in this opening title in a scheduled trilogy (based on a graphic-novel serial) depicting a future with bizarre medical transplants, resurrections, and tangled legalities over what constitutes “human life.” Incest-scarred teen prostitute Balot is the latest victim of

Shell, a gangster and serial killer rendered virtually untouchable because he’s able to erase any implicating memories after each murder. But Balot is revived as a para-human cyborg witness by Oeufcoque, who was once an ordinary yellow lab-test mouse but now has human intellect and shape-shifting abilities. Oeufcoque serves society as a crime fighter/prosecutor, and Balot is his “litigant” against Shell. A monstrous hit team tries to kill the girl, leading to a cliffhanger ending that will leave viewers hungering for more—if they aren’t utterly baffled by the dense literary allusions (especially to Lewis Carroll), mind-blowing concepts, and technology bordering on magic. Presented on a dual-language disc, rated TV-MA, this dark, mature anime offering is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Robotech: The Complete Series

★★★★★

(2011) 17 discs. 2,028 min. DVD: \$99.95. *A&E Home Video* (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-4232-5.



More mature and intricate than the look-alike rival animated hit *Transformers*, the *Robotech* series was English-redubbed and recut by American producer Carl Macek out of three pre-existing Japanese TV cartoons (primarily *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*) into an 85-episode serial that, during its 1980s TV syndication, helped open the floodgates for anime in the U.S. The narrative unfolds as a giant derelict alien battleship crashes to Earth and humans adapt its “robotech” technology into shape-changing military craft and mecha fighting suits. Mankind barely has time to comprehend the weaponry before it must be wielded against repeated waves of otherworldly invaders attracted by the downed (but still flyable) starship and/or its MacGuffin contents: a multipurpose wonder-goo called “protoculture.” In between countless combat scenes (reminding us what anime was like pre-CGI), the storylines incorporate love triangles, culture-shock comedy, warrior chivalry, and pleas for peaceful coexistence and individuality, as well as occasional pop songs. *Robotech* even features a female-impersonator action hero in its addictive saga, during which—despite juvenile elements—key characters occasionally die and the difference between right and wrong is not always clear. This epic compilation and remastering is a must for Japanimation collections, although hardcore fans may still grumble at the absence of the Japanese-language originals. The 10 hours worth of DVD extras include a “making-of,” a tribute documentary to Macek (who died in 2010), original pilot episodes, alternate scenes, music videos, storyboards, and numerous stills galleries. Highly recommended. **Editor’s Choice.** (C. Cassidy)

Alcina ★★½

(2011) 205 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



The title character of Handel's 1735 opera is a sorceress who transforms her cast-off lovers into rocks, trees, and animals on her enchanted island. The plot kicks in with the new arrival of travelers, led by a woman searching for her lost fiancé, whom Alcina has bewitched. To further complicate matters, the woman, disguised as a man, catches Alcina's eye as a prospective new conquest. Much confusion ensues before the witch's power is destroyed, the transformed humans are restored to normal, and true love triumphs. *Alcina* may be nonsensical fantasy, but the score is delightful (despite its length), and in this 2011 staging by Adrian Noble at the Wiener Staatsoper, the music's color and beauty are brilliantly conveyed by the original instrument band Les Musiciens du Louvre-Grenoble under the vigorous leadership of Marc Minkowski. The singing is of high order as well, with Anja Harteros cutting an imposing figure in the title role. The only drawback is the decision to stage the piece as an "opera within an opera," set at an 18th-century English estate, a conceit that allows the production to remain small-scaled (an obvious financial benefit) but misses the grand spectacle the work invites. Still, the overall excellence of the performance makes this a standout. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.0 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.0 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland ★★★

(2011) 120 min. DVD: \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Given that so much of Lewis Carroll's titular classic tale is based on clever wordplay, it might seem unwise to base a ballet on the book, but choreographer Christopher Wheeldon's adaptation for London's Royal Ballet ends up working surprisingly well. Granted, some of the most famous episodes, such as the Mad Hatter's tea party, suffer badly from the lack of dialogue; and in order to contrive a romance (with the son of the family's gardener, transformed into the Jack of Hearts), Alice must be made considerably older. But Joby Talbot's score, while not terribly memorable, provides ample opportunity for the company to shine, with Lauren Cuthbertson, who is onstage virtually nonstop, standing out as Alice, and the others, including Sergei Polunin as Jack, providing strong support. The physical

production is consistently colorful, boasting some clever and enthralling visual effects, such as the appearance and disappearance of the Cheshire cat (a bevy of dancers conceal parts of the feline's body by a simple turn of their own). The animated back-projection video, capturing the initial tumble into Wonderland, is also eye-catching. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* may never be a classic ballet but it will surely provide enjoyment across the age spectrum. Presented in DTS 5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a "making-of" featurette hosted by Cuthbertson, and a cast gallery. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Anna Nicole ★★★

(2011) 120 min. DVD: \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Operas have been successfully staged about Richard Nixon and Jerry Springer, so why not Anna Nicole Smith? Her story is a tabloid tragedy that raises larger issues about the contemporary fascination with celebrities who've accomplished nothing besides becoming famous and indulging in every sort of excess—a theme, actually, that virtually invites flamboyant operatic treatment. Smith was a buxom Texas blonde who worked her way up from strip joints to a marriage with an elderly sugar-daddy and then had to engage in prolonged legal battles over his estate. She lost her son to a drug overdose in 2006 before suddenly dying herself less than a year later. Librettist Richard Thomas (of *Jerry Springer* fame), composer Mark-Anthony Turnage, and director Richard Jones crafted this narrative into a splashy, trashy premiere production, seen here in 2011 at London's Royal Opera House—with one scene even re-creating the set of CNN's *Larry King Show*. Turnage's score isn't terribly memorable, but Antonio Pappano conducts it with confidence, and Eva-Maria Westbroek brings all her formidable vocal and physical prowess to bear in the title role. *Anna Nicole* is unlikely to enter the repertory, but it's worth watching at least once, and it surely leads one to wonder whether operas about Michael Jackson and Kim Kardashian might not be on the horizon. Presented in DTS 5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette and a cast gallery. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Ballet Favorites ★★★

(2011) 90 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9128-9.

Ballet Favorites recycles excerpts from previously issued Kultur ballet discs as a sort of "greatest hits" compilation, even if the "hits" aren't always what one would expect. Predictably, Tchaikovsky is well represented

by numbers from *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, and one could hardly quarrel with the inclusion of numbers from Adam's *Giselle* and Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. But two dances from *La Fille Mal Gardée* and another from Britten's *The Prince of the Pagodas* seem a bit of a stretch. Are these really "favorites"? And the complete Act I of Minkus's *Don Quixote*—even when so nicely done here by the American Ballet Theatre with leads Mikhail Baryshnikov and Cynthia Harvey—isn't an obvious choice. Still, the performances, otherwise fairly equally divided between the Kirov Ballet and the Royal Ballet, are on a high level, showcasing the work of some of their finest dancers (Galina Mezentseva, Darcey Bussell, Irina Kolpakova, Wayne Eagling, and Brian Shaw, among others) and choreographers (Frederick Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan, and Peter Wright). And while the audiovisual qualities are understandably variable, the overall production generally looks and sounds excellent. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)



Bette Midler: The Showgirl Must Go On ★★½

(2011) 67 min. DVD: \$19.98; Blu-ray: \$24.98. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Viewer reactions to Bette Midler's performance here—filmed at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas in December 2010, near the end of her three-year Vegas run—will depend largely on whether or not they think that the Divine Miss M's repertoire is enhanced by showgirls flashing bare butt cheeks. Serving up an abbreviated version of the stage show, this hour-plus 11-song set (some tunes don't even feature Midler) finds the brassy Bette in fine voice on a number of popular hits, including "Friends," "The Rose," "Do You Wanna Dance," "From a Distance," "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," and the sentimental closer, "Wind Beneath My Wings." But these are highlights in an otherwise over-produced and over-sized Vegas lounge act that feels disappointingly frantic. Midler is no shrinking violet (she delivers a steady stream of bawdy jokes as her famed alter-ego "Soph"), but the stage is too big and cluttered for a diva who really only needs a spotlight and a mic to shine. Less costume changes, more songs, and the absence of the Staggering Harlettes and Caesar Salad Girls might have made this truly a show to remember instead of a run-of-the-mill Vegas revue. Presented in DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital 5.1 on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is an optional purchase. (R. Pitman)

Chet Baker: Candy

★★★1/2

(2009) 55 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Recorded in the intimate confines of the library of a Swedish recording company in Lidingö in 1985, this session for the Sonet Records label matches the trumpeter Chet Baker (sometime vocalist, but only once here—on the title tune) with two excellent European musicians, pianist Michel Graillier and bassist Jean Louis Rassinfosse. A junkie for several decades, with stints in jail and various other woes ravaging both his appearance (Baker was once matinee-idol handsome) and his playing, Baker had to develop his embouchure all over again after his teeth were knocked out in a beating and replaced by dentures. But he sounds great here, with playing that is consistently lyrical, adept, and strong—swift when it needs to be and contemplative elsewhere. The repertoire is fairly stock, but interesting arrangements and tight ensemble playing help keep Great American Songbook standards like “Love for Sale” (distinguished by a five-note ostinato bass pattern and fine piano and trumpet solos) and “Bye Bye Blackbird” fresh, while renditions of Bud Powell’s up-tempo, boppish “Tempus Fugue-It” and Miles Davis’s “Nardis” coast along like improvised chamber music. Also included are some brief interview bits, with Baker gently prodded by expatriate bassist Red Mitchell (who also joins in on piano for the closing “My Romance”). Among other things, the two musicians discuss playing with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini’s son, a jazz pianist (who knew?). Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, this is highly recommended. (S. Graham)

Counting Crows: August and Everything After—Live at Town Hall

★★★1/2

(2011) 78 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Filed at NYC’s Town Hall in 2007, alt-rock faves Counting Crows perform their 1993 debut release *August and Everything After* in its entirety in a 10-song set that reimagines one of the seminal albums of the ‘90s. Singer/songwriter Adam Duritz sets the bar high from the start, singing in an intense almost-spoken-poetry style while throwing his whole body (especially illustrative hand gestures to act out the lyrics) into each number, starting with “Round Here/Raining in Baltimore,” which intertwines the CD’s opening propulsive track with its moody penultimate song. Duritz is joined by original band members David Bryson (guitar) and Charlie Gillingham (keyboards,

accordion, harmonica), along with Jim Bogios (drums), Millard Powers (bass), and accompanying guitarists David Immerglück and Dan Vickrey. Highlights include the beautiful “Omaha” (featuring Gillingham’s plaintive accordion), the rarely-performed “Perfect Blue Buildings,” the haunting “Anna Begins,” the mega-hit “Mr. Jones,” and the rockin’ “Rain King” (with nicely interwoven bits of Bruce Springsteen’s “Thunder Road”). Duritz’s emotionally introspective lyrics may not be for all tastes—some would call him the quintessential rock whiner—but rarely has musical heart been bared on sleeve with such raw but focused energy as here. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include interviews with Duritz and Gillingham. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Cream: Royal Albert Hall London May 2-3-5-6

2005 ★★★1/2

(2005) 167 min. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



In 2005—37 years after their farewell concert—British power trio Cream did the unthinkable, reuniting for a historic four-night stand that began with Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker, and Eric Clapton stepping onto the stage of London’s Royal Albert Hall before a capacity crowd that included Sean Penn and Jude Law. This 19-song set captures highlights from the epic engagement, beginning with a buoyant “I’m So Glad” and ending with a triumphant “Sunshine of Your Love.” Although the legendary gentlemen don’t look exactly like they did in the 1960s (frontman Bruce appears a little frail), they demonstrate that they still have the musical chops. The compact Bruce represents the essence of soul, bringing a particularly rich performance to “Politician”; and the long-limbed Baker is as irrepressible as ever, offering a rare vocal on “Pressed Rat and Warthog” and a percussive tour-de-force on “Toad.” Then there’s Clapton, who remains as much a master of the guitar as of understatement. “Thanks for waiting all these years,” he quips after a slow-burning “Outside Woman Blues,” then adds, “We’re going to do every song we know.” The track listing is, indeed, generous, despite the absence of classics like “I Feel Free,” “Strange Brew,” and “Tales of Brave Ulysses”—and there isn’t a bad one in the bunch. Blu-ray extras include three alternate takes and interviews with the band. Highly recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Der Ring des Nibelungen ★★★1/2

(2011) 11 discs. 924 min. In German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$99.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9134-0.

Presumably it was the proliferation of

new DVD and Blu-ray versions of Wagner’s enormous *Ring* cycle—good, bad, and indifferent—that induced Kultur to reissue Harry Kupfer’s classic 1991–92 Bayreuth productions, although whatever the reason, this comes very close to sweeping the field. Granted, the staging is minimalist, with stylized sets, props, and costumes sporting modern touches that occasionally generate a smile, while some of the effects—such as the laser-light show that depicts the underwater locale at the beginning of *Das Rheingold*—no longer look very spectacular compared to those in more recent versions, like the 2007 mounting in Valencia (VL-5/10). But musically this is an outstanding reading, as the Festival Orchestra plays with amazing power and refinement under conductor Daniel Barenboim, and the singers are uniformly strong, with John Tomlinson’s Wotan, Siegfried Jerusalem’s Siegfried, Günter von Kannen’s Alberich, Graham Clark’s Loge and Mime, Poul Elming’s Siegmund, Nadine Secunde’s Sieglinde, and Anne Evans’s Brünnhilde standing out among a sterling cast. Although the resonant acoustics of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus occasionally lead to a bit of muddiness, the engineers have used encoding technology to get the best from the original masters, and the result—presented with DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and LPCM stereo options—is impressive. The combination of a masterful performance, excellent restoration, and low price makes this a genuine bargain that wears its age lightly. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



Dialogues des Carmélites ★★★

(2010) 152 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$33.98, Blu-ray: \$45.98. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).

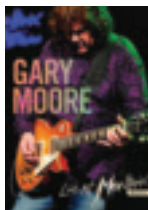


This impressive 2010 mounting of Francis Poulenc’s 1957 opera by the Bavarian Staatsoper showcases refined, expressive playing from the Bavarian State Orchestra under Kent Nagano (a specialist in 20th-century French music), and firm, clear vocalism by Susan Gritton as Blanche de la Force, the noblewoman who joins a convent of Carmelite nuns as the French Revolution rages, only to be torn between commitment to her vocation and the instinct to survive when the new regime targets her community. Gritton is matched by Hélène Guilmette and Susanne Resmark as Soeur Constance and Mère Marie, respectively, who represent the choice between faith and doubt that confronts Blanche. Unfortunately, the fine musicality is compromised by the staging: Dmitri Tcherniakov’s decision to present the work in modern dress is debatable, but defensible; but he’s also chosen to

situate much of the piece in a wooden box on the stage to represent the convent, and the view of the singers is sometimes obstructed by its beams (Tcherniakov also manipulates the action—especially toward the close—in a provocative but not always convincing manner). Still, even though the more traditional versions from the Staatsoper Hamburg (VL-11/10) and the Opéra du Rhin (VL-9/01) are preferred, this presentation still shines on the musical front. Presented with Dolby Digital 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo options, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Gary Moore: Live at Montreux 2010 ★★1/2

(2010) 119 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Although not well known in the U.S., the late Gary Moore built a solid reputation on the other side of the pond, where stints with Thin Lizzy and other bands, coupled with a long solo career, earned him guitar-hero status. Moore had been making blues records for several years before this 2010 gig, but for this 13-song concert, he returned to the Celtic rock style of his '80s heyday; in fact, the only blues tune here is the Jimmy Rogers chestnut "Walking By Myself." That's fine, as this material (including "Military Man" and "Parisienne Walkways," written by or with former cohort Phil Lynott) is surely more interesting than yet another shot of British blooze; some of it recalling the ringing, majestic sound of the Scottish band Big Country and its hot-wired evocation of bagpipes and other traditional instruments. But Moore fans were less interested in his songs and singing (which ranges from adequate to awful) than his playing, which remained strong until the end. Moore and his Les Paul produce a loud, piercing sound typical of other hard rock players, but along with the requisite (and impressive) speed, he displays admirable precision and discipline, and his solos are the highlight here. Sadly, Moore died of a heart attack seven months after this gig. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include four bonus performances from 1997. A strong optional purchase. (S. Graham)

Goya ★★

(2004) 101 min. DVD: \$29.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



Gian Carlo Menotti's opera about the Spanish painter was written specifically for Plácido Domingo, who sang during the 1986 premiere in Washington and assumes the lead again

in this 2004 revival at the Theater an der Wien. Even in his 60s, the tenor is in strong voice—although his acting is rudimentary and his accent wreaks havoc on the English text—and he's the sole reason to watch this piece. Menotti's libretto is a pedestrian commentary on the nature of artistry, presenting Goya as a man driven by an ideal of pure beauty who falls in love with the beautiful Duchess of Alba (Michelle Breedt), who is later poisoned by the vengeful Queen María Luisa (Írida Martínez). The opera closes with the aged Goya declaring that while he mourns his lost love, his true devotion has always been to art itself. The composer sets this abstract text to music in a characteristically late-Romantic vein, but there's none of the melodic invention that marks his best work. A threadbare production, with modest sets and unattractive costumes, *Goya* suffers from flabby conducting on the part of Emmanuel Villaume and ragged playing from the Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien, while the secondary singers—stumbling around the tiny stage—are at most adequate. Also, with Breedt appearing much too old for her role and Domingo no longer looking the part of a dashing young man, the numerous close-ups do neither of them justice. Presented in PCM stereo, this is not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

The Hollies: Look Through Any Window 1963-1975 ★★1/2

(2011) 120 min. DVD: \$14.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

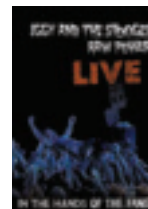


The Hollies might not have been in the highest tier of '60s British Invasion groups, but they were close, as evidenced in this fine compilation of over 20 songs. Like almost all Brit bands of the era, the Hollies started out playing blues and R&B covers (e.g., "Rockin' Robin" and "Just One Look"); but even at that early stage, the soaring harmony vocals of lead singer Allan Clarke, rhythm guitarist Graham Nash, and lead guitarist Tony Hicks defined their sound. A brilliant run of pop singles followed, including "I'm Alive," "Look Through Any Window," and "Bus Stop" (the latter two written by Graham Gouldman, later of 10cc); by the time "Stop Stop Stop" and "Carrie Anne" arrived, the Clarke-Hicks-Nash team was writing most of the group's material (Nash left in 1968 to join Stephen Stills and David Crosby). But the Hollies never went on to progress much beyond the status of reliable Top 40 hit-makers, with post-Nash singles including "The Air That I Breathe," "Long Cool Woman," and "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother." Recorded in the U.K., Germany, Sweden, Yugoslavia, and Holland, these performances are in black-and-white and color, with consistently superb remastered sound and visuals; many are live, and almost all

are complete. The DVD also includes fascinating footage of the group recording "On a Carousel" at Abbey Road, and interspersed throughout are illuminating interviews with Clarke, Nash, Hicks, and drummer Bobby Elliott. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, this is highly recommended. (S. Graham)

Iggy and the Stooges—Raw Power Live: In the Hands of the Fans ★★★

(2010) 150 min. DVD: \$16.95, Blu-ray: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Just as the Beastie Boys called on fans to shoot the video for *Awsome: I Fuckin' Shot That!*, Iggy and the Stooges do the same with *In the Hands of the Fans*. In this case, six contest winners filmed the band performing the 1973 album *Raw Power* live in its entirety at 2010's All Tomorrow's Parties Festival held at Kutscher's Country Club in Monticello, NY. Following testimonies from the participants about their devotion to the group, the concert begins, with wiry 63-year-old front man Iggy Pop sounding a little reedier than usual but still displaying his patented serpentine moves, while guitarist James Williamson, drummer Scott Asheton, bassist Mike Watt, and saxophone player Steve Mackay play solidly while also dodging the occasional projectile and overeager audience member. Although security removes the rowdies from the stage, Pop invites dancers to join him during "Shake Appeal." The faster and louder songs tend to work best; consequently, the guys speed up a slower number like "Gimme Danger" to keep the energy up, but the up-tempo renders such tracks less distinctive. After *Raw Power*, the band performs eight additional selections, including the early favorites "No Fun" and "I Wanna Be Your Dog." Extras include a Q&A session with fans, video submissions, and a promo featuring Dictators frontman Dick Manitoba. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and Dolby Digital 5.0 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Jenůfa ★★★1/2

(2009) 128 min. In Czech w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Leoš Janáček's powerful opera (and first masterpiece), which premiered in 1904 but was revised in 1916, is presented in this riveting 2009 production from the Teatro Real in Madrid. The somber work centers on Jenůfa (Amanda Roocroft), whose illegitimate child—by her cousin Števa (Nikolai Schukoff)—is drowned by her stepmother, Kostelníčka (Deborah Polaski), in order to pave the way for Jenůfa's

marriage to Laca (Miroslav Dvorský), Števa's brother. But Janáček, who wrote the libretto himself, fills the dark tale with music that runs the gamut from genial peasant ensembles to the most emotionally wrenching solos. Conductor Ivor Bolton captures every nuance of the score's light and shade, drawing refined but vigorous playing from the Teatro Real Orchestra. The solo vocalism is exceptional across the board, but it's Roocroft and Polaski who stand out, with the latter in particular earning the protracted cheers she receives during the curtain calls. Stéphane Braunschweig's staging is minimalist—sparse sets and pale costumes—but it creates a suitable milieu for the stark story. Presented in DTS 5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a cast gallery and an illustrated synopsis. Far preferable to the 2005 Barcelona mounting (VL-11/07), this production is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Les Troyens ★★

(2009) 261 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$45.98; Blu-ray: \$45.98. Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



This 2009 mounting at Valencia's Palau de les Arts—a co-production with St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre and Warsaw's Wielki Theatre—of Hector Berlioz's 1863 Wagnerian-length grand opera based on Virgil's *Aeneid* is, unfortunately, the weakest of the versions currently available. The staging of the Trojan War by Carlus Padrissa and the Catalan theater company La Fura dels Baus is spectacularly silly, drawing on the modern concept of a computer virus as a Trojan horse, with the men of Troy—dressed as *Tron*-like video game avatars—devoured by gigantic worms disgorged from the Greeks' fatal gift. When Aeneas flees fallen Troy for Carthage, Queen Dido's realm appears to be patterned after a huge particle accelerator, and his later departure to found Rome is staged as an exploration into space. The puerility here—with one ballet sequence becoming a literal boxing match—is astonishing, and the musical performance doesn't compensate. Although Valery Gergiev leads the Valencia orchestra and chorus with passion and Daniela Barcellona and Elisabete Matos sing powerfully as Dido and the prophetess Cassandra, Lance Ryan is strained and wobbly as Aeneas. Add to this the fact that the visual imagery is often dark and murky and this rendition doesn't begin to challenge the superb Gardiner *Les Troyens* from Paris (VL-1/06). Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a "making-of" featurette. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Manfred ★★1/2

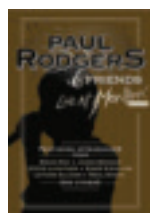
(2010) 89 min. DVD: \$24.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



Composed in 1848 and rarely performed today, Robert Schumann's massive tribute to the Romantic spirit is based on a verse-drama by Lord Byron (which also inspired a symphony by Tchaikovsky) and consists of long recitations by an actor playing a Faust-like nobleman, racked with guilt over some unnamed offense, who prefers to end his torment by dying rather than submitting to the spirits who represent a higher authority. Manfred's harangues are periodically interrupted by 16 pieces of incidental music—an overture and 15 interludes, solos, and choruses. Not surprisingly, contemporary audiences have difficulty sitting through such a static work without some visual distraction, so the solution offered by director Johannes Deutsch in this 2010 performance from the Tonhalle Düsseldorf is to project the face of Johann von Bülow (playing Manfred) against a screen on the back of the stage where mountains and swirling clouds also appear in various colors. Von Bülow performs with vigor, and the musical side is solid, with Andrey Boreyko leading the Düsseldorf Symphony in a virile reading of the score, and the chorus and vocalists in fine form. But apart from the oft-recorded overture, this just isn't top-flight Schumann, and for most viewers the music won't make up for Manfred's protracted monologue. Presented in PCM stereo, this is an optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Paul Rodgers & Friends: Live at Montreux 1994

★★1/2
(1994) 79 min. DVD: \$14.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



A soulful belter who is the equal of any other British rock singer, Paul Rodgers hasn't always used his talent to best effect, all too often surrounding himself with journeyman musicians playing faceless, generic music (yes, he teamed with Jimmy Page in The Firm, but who can name a single one of their songs?), and such is the case for most of this 16-song set from Switzerland's 1994 Montreux Jazz Festival. While there are some well-known players in Rodgers' band, they don't bring a lot to the party; rather, guitarists Neal Schon (Journey), Steve Lukather (Toto), and even Brian May (Queen) spend way too much time simply wailing away in a notes-for-notes'-sake approach that turns even blues classics like "I'm Ready," "Crossroads," and "Good Morning Little School Girl" into standard hard rock fare ("Hoochie Coochie Man," with genuine bluesmen Eddie Kirkland and Luther Allison sitting in on voice and guitar, is an improve-

ment). Better are the songs from the catalog of Rodgers' first band, the restrained but rocking Free (including "Fire and Water," "Little Bit of Love," "Mr. Big," and the inevitable "All Right Now"), as well as Bad Company's "Feel Like Making Love." Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, this is a strong optional purchase. (S. Graham)

Peter and the Wolf

★★★

(2010) 30 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Sergei Prokofiev's delightful orchestral fable—a musical depiction of a clever young boy's stroll in the forest, where he encounters various woodland creatures, including a hungry wolf—has long been a staple of children's concerts, accompanied by charming narration. Transformed into a ballet by Matthew Hart for students in the Royal Ballet School in 1995, *Peter and the Wolf* is presented here in a 2010 revival. Most of the leads are played by talented and charming youngsters enrolled in the school—Peter (Kilian Smith), the bird (Laurine Muccioli), the duck (Charlotte Edmonds), and the cat (Chisato Katsura)—as are the smaller parts, such as the willow bushes and bricks in a stone wall. But two roles are handled by mature performers: Will Kemp is imposing as Peter's grandfather, who also delivers the narration; and despite the heavy costume, Sergei Polunin manages some striking poses as the ravenous wolf. In conducting the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Paul Murphy favors tempos somewhat slower than usual—probably a concession to the needs of the dancers. But the colorful sets, imaginative costumes, and inventive choreography bring Prokofiev's score to vivid visual life. Presented in DTS-5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a rehearsal featurette, and a cast gallery. Likely to have wide appeal for family audiences, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Procol Harum: Live at the Union Chapel ★★★

(2004) 149 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



This 2003 concert filmed at London's Union Chapel finds Procol Harum—actually Gary Brooker, since the two are pretty much one and the same these days—revisiting their glory days and presenting new songs from an album released around the time of the gig. Brooker plays piano, sings lead, composed the lion's share of the music (with lyrics provided by Keith Reid), and does all the talking. Although still known primarily for 1967's "A Whiter Shade of Pale" (which arrives at the

very end of the two-hour show), the band plays several other fine tunes from their catalog, including "Shine on Brightly," "Grand Hotel," "Homburg," "A Salty Dog," and "Conquistador," all from their late '60s–early '70s heyday. The characteristic stately tempos, piano-organ textures, wailing guitar solos, and progressive-pop-rock feel all put the band in the same general category as Jethro Tull. While songs from the 2003 recording *The Well's on Fire*—including "Every Dog Will Have His Day" and "Wall Street Blues"—are more dynamic, Procol Harum is a group that tends to plod more than it rocks or rolls. The band's longtime fans—and after more than 40 years, there are plenty of them—will be pleased, but this probably won't attract many new adherents. Presented in DTS-HD 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and LPCM stereo, Blu-ray extras include an interview with Booker, a video montage, and fan comments. Recommended. (S. Graham)

Queensrÿche: Mindcrime ★★½

(2006) 179 min. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Although heavy metal fans herald the band Queensrÿche as genre-jumping pioneers, mainstream music lovers may only recognize the name from the group's influential 1988 album, *Operation: Mindcrime*. Utilizing the concept/rock opera format, Queensrÿche—consisting of longtime members Geoff Tate (vocals), Michael Wilton (guitars), Eddie Jackson (bass), and Scott Rockenfield (drums)—created in *Operation: Mindcrime* a timely statement on individual isolation and alienation. After an equally successful sequel in 2006, the band decided to stage the entire *Mindcrime* "experience" in a 30-plus song set at the Moore Theatre on their home turf in Seattle. With special guests such as the late Ronnie James Dio and Pamela Moore, the progressive outfit crafted a truly special concert, with outstanding renditions of songs like "Revolution Calling" and "Speed of Light." Employing massive stage screens spouting messages and meaningful sequences from the albums' storyline (incorporating jabs at politicians, political parties, and corporations), Queensrÿche managed to superbly integrate their sonic statement with the high quality visuals. Presented in DTS-HD 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and LPCM stereo, Blu-ray extras include a tour documentary, a music video, and a clip of the band on a fundraising bike ride. Highly recommended. (B. Gibron)

Taylor Swift: Journey to Fearless ★★

(2011) 135 min. DVD: \$16.98. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-60399-677-8 (dvd).

Designed to capitalize on the success of

Taylor Swift's multi-platinum album *Fearless*, this concert film combines live performances and interviews, with the first half focusing on the singer's past, while the second goes behind the scenes of her debut headlining tour. Between songs, Swift, mother Andrea, and best friend Abigail offer commentary. Home-movie footage underscores the fact that Swift was musical from an early age, although her talent made elementary school difficult because classmates weren't supportive—unlike her parents, who moved the family to Nashville, where Swift secured a record deal with upstart Big Machine (after rejecting a less advantageous offer from RCA). Swift, who also talks about the inspirations behind songs like "Fifteen" and "Teardrops on My Guitar," begins the show portion dressed as a majorette to sing "You Belong With Me," eventually removing the uniform to reveal a mirrored shift. Other songs include "Tim McGraw" and "Hey Stephen," after which she hugs audience members, most of whom are young women. Swift also mingles with fans at after-show "T-Parties," where she recognizes the most devoted concert-goers. Throughout the 15-month *Fearless* trek, Swift dons more cowboy boots and tasteful dresses, including a medieval princess gown for "Today Was a Fairytale," while also wielding a couple of sparkly guitars. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, this is recommended. [Note: Best Buy is selling an exclusive Blu-ray edition priced at \$21.98.] (K. Fennessy)



Zanzibar: Trance, Dance, & Devotion ★★

(2011) 80 min. DVD: \$39.95. Dance on Film (avail. from www.danceonfilm.info). PPR. ISBN: 978-09795155-9-0.

This collection features 26 live performances shot in Zanzibar, a largely Muslim island state in Tanzania. As filmmaker, cinematographer, and dancer Tamalyn Dallal explains in the introduction, she worked with the folkloric troupe Kariako for two years to compile the material. Throughout, Dallal provides unobtrusive commentary regarding the steps, costumes, languages, instruments, and facial markings (such as paint and piercings). Subtitles translate the lyrics, which can be amusing, as in "You are skinny, but you are arrogant" and "If you have a funny head, the hairdresser has trouble." For the people of this East African territory, each dance holds a distinct significance, although Dallal admits that even the participants in the Mwanandege ritual have no idea why umbrellas are involved; nonetheless, they feel strongly about preserving such traditions. Other dances recognize or celebrate



sexuality, marriage, harvest, rites of passage, political ceremonies, and the treatment of diseases (fortunately for viewers who may be animal lovers, Dallal doesn't film the killing of a chicken for the Kilua dance). For the most part, these aren't particularly difficult or complex routines, but there's plenty of joy throughout, with the possible exception of the trance sequences, which involve sheitans (spirits) who seem to possess some performers. Before her final edit, Dallal showed each tribe or village her footage to make sure she had represented each aspect correctly. DVD extras include a filmed segment of an acrobatic display that draws from Chinese traditions. A fine multidisciplinary title that incorporates history, religion, geography, and ethnomusicology, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Zoot Sims: In a Sentimental Mood

★★★

(2010) 51 min. DVD: \$14.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



"If I can't play music, what am I gonna do?" John "Zoot" Sims says at one point during this 1984 performance; fortunately, he never had to figure that one out. Although rarely considered one of the greatest, the tenor saxophonist nevertheless displayed many of the attributes of Lester Young, Ben Webster, Stan Getz, and other more celebrated players, including a warm tone, beautiful vibrato, and an effortless, swinging way with improvisation. Recorded in the library of Sonet Records in Lidingö, Sweden, this is an intimate trio session, matching Sims with fine bassist Red Mitchell and fluid guitarist Rune Gustafsson for chamber-style sound. The repertoire includes a laidback rendition of Duke Ellington's title tune, an extended "Gone with the Wind," a leisurely stroll with "Sweet Lorraine," and "Autumn Leaves" (one of the most standard of standards). The sound is crisp and clear, the playing excellent (Mitchell is an entertaining, inventive performer who infuses his solos with humor), and the ensemble communication spot-on. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, extras include Mitchell's lighthearted interview of Sims, who recounts his long career, noting that "Music keeps people sane ... Musicians don't get into too much trouble—if they can blow, and if they enjoy blowing." Recommended. (S. Graham)

Opera Goes 3D

Carmen in 3D (Blu-ray: \$39.99) captures Francesca Zambello's 2010 staging of Bizet's 1875 workhorse at London's Royal Opera House, featuring Christine Rice and Bryan Hymel.



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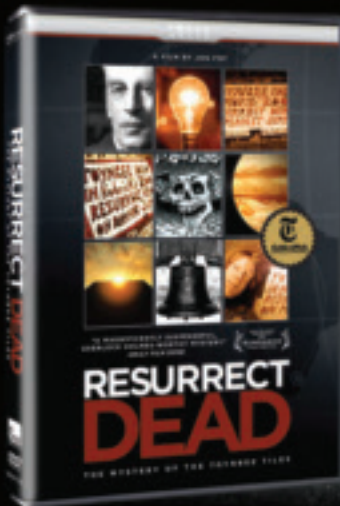
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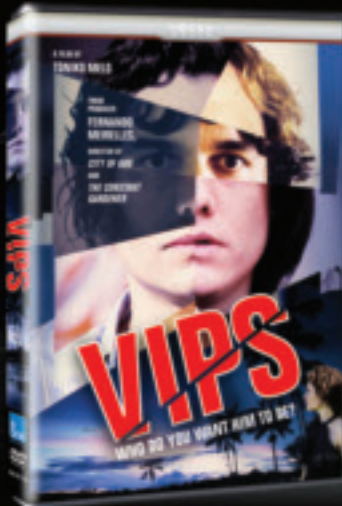
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Celebrating Docs

Welcome to 2012.

Of course, technically it is still 2011 as I type these words in my suddenly semi-bare office midway through the month of December—only one week away from a wholesale kit and caboodle move to our new site in lovely Poulsbo, WA.

Hopefully by the time you read this the phone lines will be installed, high-speed Internet set-up, and viewing room ready to go, so we can hit the ground watching, so to speak.

Speaking of watching, much of the last four months has been spent working on the Best Documentaries list for 2011 (see pg. 46). *Video Librarian* staff logged hundreds of hours checking out over 150 documentaries—reviewed either in the magazine itself or on *Video Librarian Online* during the calendar year—in order to create our seventh annual annotated list of 25 best documentaries.

Past “Best Documentaries” lists have featured a wide array of high-profile films (including *The Cove*, *Grizzly Man*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Jesus Camp*, *Man on Wire*, *March of the Penguins*, *Murderball*, *No End in*

Sight, *Sicko*, *Taxi to the Dark Side*, *Waltz with Bashir*, *Wordplay*, and *Young @ Heart*) and lesser-known titles (such as *51 Birch Street*, *Beethoven’s Hair*, *Big Enough*, *Dear Zachary*, *Four Seasons Lodge*, *Hacking Democracy*, *The Hobart Shakespearians*, *A Life Without Pain*, *Monster Camp*, *No Impact Man*, *Nursery University*, *Sister Helen*, *So Much So Fast*, *Sunset Story*, and *Yellow Brick Road*).

What stands out on this year’s list is the wide range of interesting characters at the center of some fascinating stories, including young stroke victim Devin Dearth’s quest to walk again after being prematurely ejected by the American healthcare system—a journey that takes him to China in Doug Dearth’s *9000 Needles*; charismatic cowboy Buck Brannaman, the real-life “horse whisperer” who inspired Nicholas Evans’s 1995 bestselling novel—profiled in Cindy Meehl’s *Buck*; filmmaker Tom Murray and his autistic brother Chris, whose touching relationship lies at the center of *Dad’s in Heaven with Nixon*; the charming, chameleon-like author Norma Khouri, who tries to convince filmmaker Anna Broinowski that her 2003 bestseller *Forbidden Love* is not a case of literary fraud; and cantankerous David Carr, the scrappy *New York Times* reporter constantly fighting the good fight for print media in Andrew Rossi’s insightful *Page One*.

Finally, there’s Joyce McKinney, who became a celebrity in the British tabloid press in 1977 after pursuing the Mormon man she loved to England—where she either kidnapped or rescued him (but definitely tied him spread-eagled to a bed), as related in Errol Morris’s wonderfully entertaining *Tabloid*. Incidentally, McKinney is currently suing Morris for “...defamation, misrepresentation, fraud, intentional infliction of emotional distress and breach of contract.” Whether the lawsuit is behind Netflix’s recent decision—and I raise this question in the best damn-the-facts tabloid fashion—to mysteriously yank *Tabloid* from its database of available titles, I don’t know.

But I do know that visiting their local library is one of the few ways—outside of buying a copy—for people to see it. Ditto for *9000 Needles*, *The Battle for Marjah*, *Dive!*, and *Family Affair*.

So, as 2011 winds down, here’s to happy viewing in 2012.

And let’s hope the Mayans got it wrong with that whole end-of-the-world calendar business—that would seriously put me off my popcorn.

Randy Pitman

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