

Bulgarian Communist government of the 1980s, for which he was condemned after its collapse in 1990. *Art Is a Weapon* has a strong autobiographical component due to the lengthy interview excerpts with Wagenstein, which are combined with archival material, clips from his movies, and commentary by friends, collaborators, and film historians. An engrossing portrait of a significant figure in Eastern European post-war cinema, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Cassandra the Exotico! ★★★

(2019) 73 min. In English & Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.95. Film Movement (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

An odd but not unappealing low-tech approach to the subject of *lucha libre*—Mexican professional wrestling—makes for a perfect match of style and subject in filmmaker Marie Losier's loose, vignette-driven documentary, shot in a whatever-works guerrilla fashion. The focus is on Saúl Armendáriz, known as Cassandra, a middle-aged wrestler in Mexico's loony but wildly popular masked wrestler tradition. But Cassandra does not wear a mask. As a gay man with a penchant for drag presentation, he dons heavy makeup and arrives at the ring in a poor man's version of a Liberace coat with a super-long tail. Viewers witness some wrestling, where carefully rehearsed moves emphasize remarkable speed, agility, and strength, and observe that the community of wrestlers that includes Cassandra appears to be a tight one. Cassandra is seen coaching some younger guys in the ring, a warming act of mentorship, free of any bias among the students regarding his sexuality. Cassandra also discusses his rough childhood as a gay misfit, beaten by other kids but able to move past the hurt by watching operatic *lucha libre* on TV. A rough but loving portrait, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Clarence Clemons: Who Do I Think I Am?

★★

(2019) 90 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

An example of artistic overreach paired with underwhelming substance, this documentary comes up short in telling viewers who Bruce Springsteen's fabled sideman and saxophonist in the E Street Band really was offstage. Clarence Clemons, who died in 2011 at age 69, is both a past and present figure in this film by Nick Mead, whose original footage of the legendary sax man is interspersed with interviews of many who speak about Clemons after his passing. The documentary began production following Springsteen and the E Street Band's lengthy "Rising Tour" in 2003. Clemons is heard on the soundtrack saying that after eight months on the road, he's "in need of repairs," one of many unfortunately scripted statements by Clemons here

that are vague, enigmatic, and celebrity-style spiritual-seeking vapid. The film's most unexpected section follows Clemons on a trip to an industrial town in Northeast China, where he investigates religious practices, yet even this looks affected. As Springsteen's longtime fans know, Clemons' was the "Big Man" in E Street lore, around whom Springsteen constructed a larger-than-life mythology that audiences adored. Viewers get some clues about his formative years from aunts who helped raise him in Virginia, and a white friend from Clemons' childhood describes how racial segregation made it hard for them to play together. While Springsteen is not interviewed, E Street member Nils Lofgren is here to share recollections. But Mead's infatuation with recording Clemons with curious Chinese crowds—while also leaning heavily on faux-mysterious visual motifs—eclipses the director's ability to tell us more about the actual man inside the Big Man. Optional. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Every Act of Life ★★★1/2

(2019) 93 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Seamlessly blending the artistic and personal for a rounded portrait of four-time Tony Award winning playwright Terrence McNally, filmmaker Jeff Kaufman's PBS-aired *American Masters* documentary is a warm, life-affirming tribute to a titan in the American theatre. Viewers hear from his brother (who describes the horrors for Terrence of growing up gay in South Texas with an abusive, drunken father); his muses (Tyne Daly, Angela Lansbury, Rita Moreno, Christine Baranski); agents of fortune (F. Murray Abraham, Nathan Lane, Joe Mantello, Anthony Heald); and still-living lovers, including his husband, Tom Kirdahy. McNally talks about his long affairs with Edward Albee and several other actors, writers, and directors, although when he speaks of his close relationship with late playwright Wendy Wasserstein, he leaves it to others to acknowledge that he had a romantic attachment. McNally's alcoholism and his lung cancer battle both represent dramatic chapters in his personal life. And then there's McNally's work: an astonishingly prolific output of dramas, comedies, and musicals, all noteworthy for his trademark ability to strip characters to their core of fears, rage, bigotry, and the nagging question in their hearts of whether they matter. Clips are included from performances/films of *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, *Master Class*, *The Stendhal Syndrome*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *The Ritz*, *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, and *Corpus Christi* (which was enormously controversial for its depiction of a gay Jesus). McNally was also one of the few playwrights who addressed life with AIDS during the epidemic's peak years. A fine celebration of a gifted and entertaining legend, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Series Update

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

JoJo Siwa: Sweet Celebrations

(52 min., DVD: \$14.98) is the latest title from Paramount featuring energetic pop star JoJo Siwa in a compilation that includes "JoJo Dream Birthday Special" celebrating her 16th, and six digital shorts from "The JoJo and BowBow Show Show." See review of *JoJo Siwa: My World* in VL-5/18.



Newly available from Warner Bros. Entertainment is *Scooby-Doo: Return to Zombie Island* (80 min., DVD: \$19.98), an all-new original movie set on the mysterious Moonstar Island Resort, where the Mystery Inc. gang encounters an army of zombies. Extras include bonus episodes from *The New Scooby-Doo Mysteries* and *What's New Scooby-Doo?* series. See review of *Scooby-Doo! And the Gourmet Ghost* in VL-11/18.

Featuring four new songs and music by Andy Grammer, Universal Pictures Home Entertainment's *Curious George: Royal Monkey* (87 min., DVD: \$16.98) finds lovable primate George involved in a *Prince and the Pauper*-style tale as he switches roles with the king's snobby monkey and heads to the castle. See review of *Curious George Swings Into Spring* in VL-5/13.

PAW Patrol: Pups Chase a Mystery (96 min., DVD: \$10.99) is the newest compilation from Paramount and Nickelodeon's computer-animated series, here following the canine crew on various cases including a rescue of Captain Gordy, a missing phone, and a celebration of Chase's birthday. See review of *PAW Patrol* in VL-7/14.

Dreamscape Video has released the newest addition to author Adam Wallace and illustrator Andy Elerton's *New York Times* bestselling picture book series, the fun prehistoric tale *How to Catch a Dinosaur* (9 min., DVD: \$38.99). See review of *How to Catch the Tooth Fairy* in VL-7/17.

