

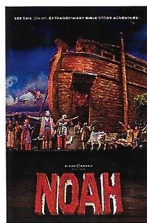
lini classics and *The Godfather*), but this double-bill of two one-act operas demonstrates that his skill extended beyond the screen. Both are set at hotels and employ romantic melodies in the style of Puccini to tell very odd stories with a farcical tone that often seems out of sync with the music. *I due timidi* (1950) centers on a young man and woman who are both so shy that they cannot reveal their love for one another. An accident leads to both winding up with other partners—he with the mature lady who runs the hotel, she with a doctor called in to treat her. The second, *La notte di un nevrastenico* (1959) is about an insomniac who is so desperate for quiet that he pays for three rooms—his own and adjacent ones on either side. Trying to make some extra cash, the manager rents out the other rooms a second time—one to a soldier who drops his shoe on the floor while undressing, and the other to a couple who make love very loudly. Naturally, the noise wakes the sleeping man, who is infuriated at the disturbance and makes his anger clear to everyone. The performances, filmed at Italy's 2017 Reate Festival, are decent rather than exceptional, but Gabriele Bonolis coaxes solid playing from the orchestra, and the singers handle Rota's often demanding vocal lines quite comfortably. Also featuring pleasing sets and costumes, this is a minor but amiable production that would appeal to anyone wanting to explore the byways of 20th-century Italian opera. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)



Noah ★★★

(2019) 110 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Sight & Sound Theatres, with venues in Ronks, PA, and Branson, MO, specializes in family-friendly musical extravaganzas inspired by stories from the Bible. In this videotaped recording of the titular stage show, God instructs Noah to build an ark, stirring conflict between Noah and his clan and the wider society, which views the family as kooks. The highlight is the arrival of the animals—a mix of live creatures and inventive puppetry—along with an imaginative staging of the rains that bring about the great flood that engulfs the world and sends Noah's ark on a 40-day journey. The production admittedly shares some issues that plagued earlier Sight & Sound mountings such as *Jonah: The Musical* (VL-1/18) and *Moses* (VL-1/19)—namely, wildly uneven acting from the large cast and a score (credited to four composers) that often feels like a second-rate riff on old-school Broadway melodies. But the style here more



than compensates and the sheer spectacle of the ark's massive interior with its zoological occupants is a truly stunning feat of engineering in contemporary theater. Presented in 5.1 surround sound, extras include featurettes on Sight & Sound's history and the development of *Noah*. Recommended. (P. Hall)

Pretenders with Friends

★★★
(2017) 66 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99 (audio CD included). MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).



Filed at the Decades Rock Arena in Atlantic City's Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, this 2017 concert features original Pretenders members Chrissie Hynde, the former rock critic turned sultry rock singer/guitarist, and Martin Chambers (guitar), along with a small backup band and guest artists. Weighing in at a little over an hour, the emphasis here is on the "friends" of the title, with the pop/rock/New Wave Pretenders only soloing six of the 12 Pretenders songs (out of 16 tunes total), including the hits "Back on the Chain Gang," "Precious," "Mystery Achievement," and "Brass in Pocket." Is it worth it to miss "Time the Avenger," "My City Was Gone," and "Night in My Veins" in order to hear "The Bucket" (Kings of Leon), "Drive" (Incubus), and "Candy" (Iggy Pop)? In a word, no; in fact, the only joint effort that stands out here is Hynde and Shirley Manson (of Garbage) singing "Talk of the Town" and "Only Happy When It Rains." And the all-hands-on-deck closer "Middle of the Road" suitably rocks. But overall this is a disappointing concert, and Pretenders fans would be much better served by the fine *Pretenders: Loose in L.A.* (VL-1/04). Presented in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo edition in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, extras include a bonus audio CD and brief interview snippets with the Pretenders and guests. Optional. (R. Pitman)

The Rolling Stones: Bridges to Babylon

★★★
(1998) 150 min. DVD: \$24.99 (audio CDs included), Blu-ray: \$29.99 (audio CDs included). Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

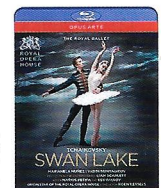


The original bad boys of British rock are in fine fettle in this generous 22-song concert filmed (not in widescreen, unfortunately) in 1998 in Bremen, Germany, during the band's tour in support of 1997's *Bridges to Babylon* (one of their worst albums, although thankfully only five cuts are performed here). This is one of the best Stones line-ups of all time, with Mick Jagger (mostly vocals, some guitar), Keith Richards (mostly guitar, some vocals), Ronnie Wood (guitar), and Charlie Watts (drums) backed by Darryl Jones on bass, Chuck Leavell on keyboards, the late and

great Bobby Keys on sax, Blondie Chaplin on percussion, and Lisa Fischer on backup vocals. The setlist features plenty of hits, kicking off with the group's signature "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and also including "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Honky Tonk Women," "Paint It Black," "Miss You" (with Jagger, ahem, licking Fischer's toes), "Start Me Up," "Tumbling Dice," "Gimme Shelter," "Sympathy for the Devil," and "Brown Sugar." This is classic Stones, with the band totally in their element cranking out beloved tunes and introducing the now *de rigueur* B-stage breakout mini-set. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include four bonus tracks from a Chicago performance and two audio CDs capturing the entire concert. Recommended. (R. Pitman)

Swan Lake ★★★1/2

(2018) 138 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Choreographer Liam Scarlett's 2018 staging of Tchaikovsky's ever-popular classic—the first new mounting by The Royal Ballet in more than 30 years—presents an almost perfect version of the dark fairy tale, reworking many of the numbers while adding a few uncontroversial wrinkles (a prologue showing the evil Von Rothbart changing Odette into a swan, more dance for the prince's friend Benno, and a new *pas de deux* for Odette and Prince Siegfried in the final act). But Scarlett also makes a couple of choices some might find debatable: namely, having Von Rothbart appear at the royal court in the early scenes and showing Siegfried carrying Odette's corpse from the lake in the final tableau. Overall, however, he sticks with the tried-and-true, modeling his work after that of Petipa and Ivanov and even retaining Ashton's popular Neapolitan dance in Act 3. The combination of the new and the familiar proves delectable, especially when buttressed by magnificent new sets and costumes in the traditional style by John Macfarlane. The production is also blessed with superb dancing from Marianela Nuñez, as Odette and her dark twin Odile, and Vadim Muntagirov as the fickle Siegfried, whose love for the former is tested by his attraction to the latter. The other soloists, particularly Bennet Gartside as Von Rothbart and Alexander Campbell as Benno, provide stellar support, the *corps de ballet* is well-drilled, and the Opera House Orchestra plays exuberantly for Koen Kessels. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and LPCM stereo, extras include an introduction to the ballet, a featurette on Macfarlane's design, and an interview with former Royal Ballet principal dancer Darcy Bussell on the swan troupe. One of the best versions available on disc, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)