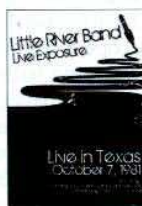


cal works (like a movement from a Beethoven sonata) to adaptations of popular tunes of the day such as "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and "Sunny Side of the Street" (often with mini-orchestral accompaniment arranged by his violinist brother George, and sometimes given a boogie-woogie beat). Occasionally, Liberace is joined by guest singers, instrumentalists, or dancers, and at times sings or dances himself. And he loves to chat before each piece, at one point even narrating a tour of his house (complete with a brief shot of his mother in her bedroom). But mostly Liberace tickles the ivories, smiling and winking at the camera, and always closing with a bow to obviously canned applause. Although less absurdly over-the-top than in his later years (with props here limited to a tux and candelabra), Liberace's penchant for flamboyance is definitely evident. Viewers can take this as camp or a cherished memento of a bygone era in American entertainment—either way it's recommended. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)

Little River Band: Live Exposure ★★★

(1981) 75 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Live Exposure presents Melbourne's Little River Band on stage in Houston on October 7, 1981. Emerging from Australia in 1975, with players from New Zealand (keyboard player Malcolm "Mal" Logan), Holland (guitarist Beeb Birtles), and America (singer/bass player Wayne Nelson), the lineup was completed by drummer Derek Pellicci, guitarist Graham Goble, guitarist Stephen Housden, and hip-swiveling front man Glenn Shorrock (two years later, the group would replace Shorrock with singer John Farnham). In contrast to many of the Aussie acts who hit it big in the 1970s (like AC/DC and Rose Tattoo), LRB blended a more harmonic sound with a slightly country accent—akin to Crosby, Stills & Nash or the Eagles—with a few Bee Gees-style disco beats thrown in at times, while on other songs, the band sounds like Phil Collins-era Genesis. Though not the world's most distinctive group, their mid-tempo material goes down easy and the musicians have a good rapport with each other. On tour in support of *Time Exposure*, their sixth studio recording, they perform a 14-song set, including familiar favorites such as "Happy Anniversary," "Reminiscing," "Lady," and "Help Is On Its Way," their first U.S. hit. Only the listless ballads "Mistress of Mine" and "Ballerina" dull the pace a bit. The film shifts between the live gig and scenes from the band's life on the road—including rehearsals, radio interviews, and dressing room shenanigans. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, this is recommended. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Pete Seeger: Live in Australia 1963 ★★★

(1963) 105 min. DVD: \$24.99. Acorn Media (avail. from most distributors).



Reelin' in the Years Productions, responsible for the multi-volume *Jazz Icons* line (arguably the best jazz performance DVD series around), has made an impressive start with this initial *Folk Icons* offering, featuring Pete Seeger's 25-song 1963 concert filmed in a Melbourne concert hall. Seeger was a controversial character in America at the time—in the 1950s, the former Communist Party member had been blacklisted and banned from American television; he was even convicted for contempt of Congress in 1961 (and would have served a 10-year prison term, had his case not been dismissed)—but he was welcomed with open arms Down Under, where he demonstrates his skills as a musician (on the 12-string guitar and especially banjo), singer, storyteller, and amiable entertainer. The set list includes "If I Had a Hammer," "Down By the Riverside," "Goodnight Irene," and other protest songs, children's tunes, traditional folk and gospel numbers, and material by Bob Dylan and Tom Paxton, as well as adaptations of pieces by Bach and Beethoven, and songs from Scotland, Germany, Brazil, and Japan (Seeger played "world music" long before the term existed). DVD extras include a featurette with Seeger discussing and playing songs by the great 12-string master Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter (including some 1945 footage of Lead Belly himself), home movies, a stills gallery, and a 16-page booklet with liner notes by Seeger biographer David K. Dunaway. As was the case with *Jazz Icons*, the restoration and digital remastering of the original material are impeccable: the black-and-white visuals are clean, and the mono audio is crisp and clear, right down to the insistent tapping of Seeger's foot. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

Stop Making Sense ★★★★★

(1984) 88 min. Blu-ray: \$34.99. Palm Pictures (avail. from most distributors).

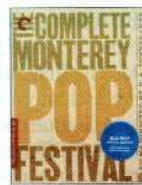


Over the course of three nights at Hollywood's Pantages Theater in December 1983, filmmaker Jonathan Demme and famed cinematographer Jordan Cronenweth joined Talking Heads to create *Stop Making Sense*—one of the greatest concert films of all time. Opening with singer-guitarist David Byrne on an empty stage (accompanied only by a boom box) performing "Psycho Killer," the film builds to an early ecstatic crescendo with "Burning Down the House"—the sixth song of this 16-song set—by which time all of the Heads are onstage (Jerry Harrison on

guitar/keyboards, Tina Weymouth on bass, and Chris Frantz on drums) along with backup musicians. Fueled by the polyrhythmic pop-funk precision that was a Talking Heads trademark—with the deliriously eccentric Byrne as ringleader (he pauses mid-concert to emerge in his now-legendary oversized suit)—other classic songs here include "Life During Wartime," "Girlfriend Is Better," "Crosseyed and Painless," "Once in a Lifetime," and a powerhouse rendition of "Take Me to the River." Presented with two separate DTS-HD 5.1 mixes and in stereo, Blu-ray extras include audio commentary by the band, a 1999 press conference, an archival interview of Byrne interviewing himself, the bonus tracks "Cities" and "Big Business/I Zimbra," and a storyboard-to-film comparison. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (J. Shannon)

New to Blu-ray

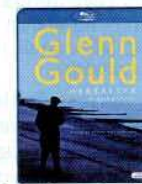
The Complete Monterey Pop Festival (Criterion, Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$69.95). Newly available on high-definition Blu-ray, this compilation (VL-1/03 ★★★1/2) collects D.A. Pennebaker's 1967 concert film *Monterey Pop* (featuring Jimi Hendrix, Simon and Garfunkel, and the Mamas and the Papas), along with *Jimi Plays Monterey* and *Shake! Otis at Monterey*.



Così fan Tutte (Naxos of America, Blu-ray: \$45.98) Nicholas Hytner's 2006 mounting of Mozart's delectable 1790 comedy for the Glyndebourne Festival (VL-3/08 ★★★1/2) eschews the Eurotrash approach in favor of old-fashioned elegance, with sets and costumes that are simple but unfailingly attractive, and comedy that is carefully calibrated to be funny but not raucous. Also new to Blu-ray are the 2007 Teatro Comunale (Florence) production of Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* (VL-5/09 ★★★), the 2007 Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie (Brussels) mounting of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (VL-7/08 ★★★), and the 2006 Royal Ballet 75th anniversary production of Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* (VL-5/09 ★★★1/2).



Glenn Gould, Hereafter (Naxos of America, Blu-ray: \$45.98). Featuring a wealth of archival material, this musical profile (VL Online-3/07 ★★★) offers fascinating insights into the life and work of this legendary Canadian pianist, an eccentric genius whose performances of Bach's keyboard music have become benchmarks.



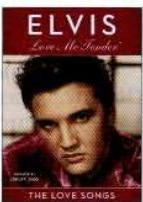
nessarily adds a semi-sung recapitulation of *Das Rheingold* before Wagner's music starts. Although the camerawork is good, the production design diminishes the entire effort, with the action played on a virtually bare stage and the costumes a ragtag assemblage of drab 19th-century garb. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo, this is optional, at best. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Elvis: The Ed Sullivan Show—The Classic Performances ★★1/2
(2009) 47 min. DVD: \$14.98. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



The footage of Elvis Presley's three stints on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in the mid-1950s (totaling 15 songs) will surely be familiar to even the King's casual fans; indeed, the distributor's claim that this is the first time these performances have been made available on a single disc seems to be its principal *raison d'être*. Of course, seeing Elvis in his prime never grows old. The first Sullivan spot, September 1956, reveals a talent who, though inexperienced, was a unique combination of disparate qualities: self-effacing but supremely confident, charming and somehow dangerous (by the standards of the time), sincere yet insouciant. With a rockin' band and the Jordanaires on backup vocals, this collection features multiple performances of "Don't Be Cruel" (ditto for "Love Me Tender" and "Hound Dog"), but the lesser known tunes—such as the rip-roaring "Ready Teddy," the swinging "When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again," the dirty blues "Too Much," and the gospel standard "Peace in the Valley"—make at least as great an impression. The highlight of the bonus material (which includes interviews; home movies of Elvis, Priscilla, and daughter Lisa Marie; and Elvis and friends on a film set) is some color (and silent) home-movie footage of Presley performing outdoors in Houston in 1955. What will still charm viewers is the young Elvis—before the awful films and schlocky songs—whose sheer ebullience and sexual charisma led the director of *The Ed Sullivan Show* to film him only from the waist up on his third appearance. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Elvis: Love Me Tender, the Love Songs ★★★
(2009) 80 min. DVD: \$19.99. EMI Music (avail. from most distributors).



Actress Ashley Judd—seated in a velvet chair beside a drowsy dog—narrates this celebration of the softer side of The King. Gordon Stoker of the Jordanaires recalls that the young Presley bristled when anyone described his music as "vulgar." Elvis said, "People think all I can do is belt. I used to

sing nothing but ballads before I went professional." Elvis loved to rock out, but as the music documentary points out he felt equal ardor for the heartfelt tune. Featured performances here include "Love Me Tender" from *The Ed Sullivan Show*, "You Don't Know Me" from *Clambake*, and stripped-down versions of "Are You Lonesome Tonight" and "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You" from *Elvis* (better known as the '68 *Comeback Special*). For each of the near-two-dozen numbers included here, historical background and anecdotal information is offered: 1956's "Love Me Tender," for instance, sold a million advance copies in one day (a first for a single), while "It's Now or Never" became Elvis's biggest international hit. Interspersed throughout the program are photos, film clips, and other memorabilia. DVD extras include three Graceland commercials and bonus interview footage with Stoker, Ed Enoch (the Stamps Quartet), Joe Moscheo (the Imperials), and Myrna Smith (the Sweet Inspirations). Combining the arcane and the familiar, this valentine for Presley fans is recommended. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Jose Feliciano Band: New Morning—The Paris Concert ★★1/2

(2008) 98 min. Blu-ray: \$24.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



"If you can't interpret a song better than the original," says Jose Feliciano, "don't do it." That's a bold statement—or a foolhardy one—when the songs in question include immortal hits by the likes of Michael Jackson, Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Wonder, and Ray Charles, to name just a few. The unsurprising fact is that the Puerto Rican-born guitarist/singer's versions of "Beat It," "Purple Haze," "Higher Ground," and "I Got a Woman," all performed in the course of this August 2008 gig at the New Morning Club in Paris, aren't a patch on the originals. Same goes for Feliciano's renditions of Cream's "Sunshine of Your Love," Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes' "If You Don't Know Me By Now," and others in this covers-heavy set. Of course, Feliciano, who's now in his mid-sixties, made his name with his take on "Light My Fire," which, while hardly superior, was at least different and unusual enough to stand out from the original Doors' version. That song appears here, along with interpretations of popular Spanish-language material like the Gipsy Kings' "Bamboleo" and the Tito Puente-written Santana standard "Oye Como Va" (with several originals, including his theme song to the TV sitcom *Chico and the Man*). Still, six-time Grammy winner Feliciano is an excellent guitarist (especially when playing acoustic), so this concert—presented in DTS-HD 5.1, LPCM 5.1, and Dolby Digital stereo—should be considered a strong op-

portional purchase for budding Blu-ray music collections. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

La Dame aux Camelias

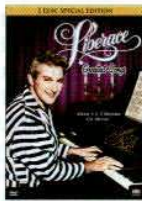
★★★★
(2008) 2 discs. 191 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$49.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Anyone who believes that neoclassical ballet ended in the last century can take heart from this stylish ballet adaptation of the titular 1848 novel by Alexandre Dumas (son of the author of *The Three Musketeers*), performed at the Palais Garnier in Paris in July 2008. Dazzlingly choreographed by John Neumeier, *La Dame aux Camelias* unfolds in a near-cinematic manner, in which the acting, sets, costumes, and music mesh together into an emotionally moving and aesthetically gratifying whole. This tale of the noted courtesan Marguerite Gautier and her tragic affair with Armand Duval has been variously interpreted as a play, an opera, a movie, and now as an immensely satisfying ballet. Although Chopin never wrote for ballet, his music here almost feels as if it was specifically commissioned, and it's beautifully performed by pianists Emmanuel Strosser and Frédéric Vaysse-Knitter and the Paris Opera orchestra under the baton of Michael Schmidtsdorff. Although the choreography is very challenging, the exquisitely-costumed cast from the Paris Opera Ballet superbly handles the demands, with Agnès Letestu as Marguerite, Stéphane Bullion as Armand, Dorothee Gilbert as Prudence, and Karl Paquette as Gaston Rieux—all uniformly excellent in their roles. Presented in DTS 5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD and PCM 5.0 and stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a helpful synopsis, cast gallery, and excellent behind-the-scenes documentary. A memorable, thrilling production, this is highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (J. Reed)

Liberace: Greatest Songs

★★★
(2009) 2 discs. 354 min. DVD: \$24.98. MPI Home Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-7886-0971-8.



Whether considered nostalgia or kitsch, this collection of nearly six hours of performances by pianist Wladziu Valentino Liberace, once the highest-paid entertainer in the world, offers a good retrospective of a unique talent. The material, compiled from an Emmy-winning syndicated TV series from the mid-1950s starring Liberace, suffers from the usual flaws of such a dated source—the black-and-white images are often muddy, while the Dolby Digital sound isn't hi-fi even by the standards of the time. But the musical selections are wide-ranging—from fairly straight renditions of classi-