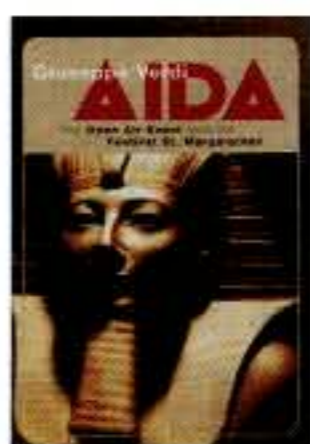


Aida ★★1/2

(2004) 150 min. DVD: \$29.99. EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.



Set in Egypt during the time of the pharaohs, Giuseppe Verdi's classic opera (which premiered in Cairo in 1871) follows the doomed love affair between the eponymous captured Ethiopian slave and an Egyptian commander named Radames, who are torn between conflicting calls to patriotic and filial duty. While there have been several fine productions of *Aida* released on DVD (including Franco Zeffirelli's 2001 mounting [VL-11/02], and the 2003 production shot in Barcelona's Liceu [VL-11/04]), this 2004 open-air staging from Austria's St. Margarethen features—and this is what caught my philistine eye—real live elephants and horses. Unfortunately, the realism (a dubious aim for such a patently artificial art anyway) is regularly compromised with, among other sights, noticeably post-Egyptian-era bra straps and mics taped to the cast's foreheads (which makes them look a bit like the Borg on *Star Trek*). Eszter Sümegi is in fine voice as Aida, with Kostadin Andreev solid as Radames (although the somewhat chunky Andreev is a bit of a stretch as a "youthful hero"), Janusz Monarcha suitably stately as the King, and Cornelia Helfricht a little scary as his daughter (one close-up of bare legs and varicose veins offers a little more realism than we need—open-air or not). Under the baton of Ernst Märzendorfer, the National Theatre Brno sounds technically proficient, but due to the outside setting, the music's aural punch is somewhat dissipated. Kudos for the big sets (and big elephants), and the powerful finale (a particularly timely and resonant call for "peace"), but ultimately the minuses here outweigh the few pluses. Presented in DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo, the DVD includes a 10-page booklet but no other extras. Optional. Aud: C, P. (R. Pitman)

Chris Isaak: Live in Concert ★★★

(2005) 47 min. DVD: \$19.98. Koch Vision (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. ISBN: 1-4172-2760-5.

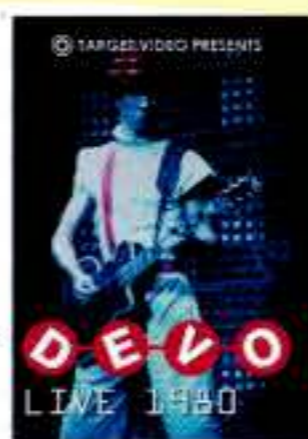


The musical love child of Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison, rockabilly/country artist Chris Isaak serves up a short but reasonably sweet hour-shy 11-song 2003 concert in this entry from the PBS *Soundstage* series. Backed by a solid band, singer-songwriter-guitarist Isaak comes out playing the upbeat "American Boy" off his 2002 CD *Always Got Tonight* (the often funny Isaak later introduces "Court-house"—from the same CD—as "probably the only song we're doing tonight about a hanging"). Most everyone will recognize Isaak's breakthrough hit "Wicked Game"

(featured in David Lynch's *Wild at Heart*), and fans are sure to enjoy favorites such as "Heart Shaped World," "Somebody's Crying," "Forever Blue," and the boot-scootin' "Baby Did a Bad, Bad Thing." Isaak nicely wraps the show with the audience-pleasing, guitar-trio led, rockabilly instrumental "Super Magic 2000." Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 or stereo, DVD extras include four bonus songs from other *Soundstage* productions (with tracks by Raul Malo, Lyle Lovett, and Randy Newman). Spotting one of the truly fine heirs to the Orbison crooning tradition, this surefooted outing is fun to watch, fun to listen to, and sure to be popular with Isaak's fans. Recommended. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Devo: Live 1980 ★★★

(1980) 75 min. DVD: \$14.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Hey spuds! In my review of the 2003 *Devo: Land of the Rising Sun* (VL-1/05), I mentioned that the DVD extras included a four-minute 1980 clip of the band performing "Gut Feeling" that was more lively (and better sounding) than anything in the main program. *Devo: Live 1980* (a DualDisc with the DVD on one side, and an audio CD on the other) features the entire 20-song concert filmed at the Phoenix Theater in Petaluma, CA on August 17, 1980. Captured at the height of their creative arc and popularity, the four-piece New Wave electronic pop/novelty band fronted by Mark Mothersbaugh perform here dressed in their signature yellow jumpsuits (which are later torn away to reveal black shirts/shorts). As in the 2003 concert, the band serves up six tunes from their 1978 debut *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!*, including the classic, stripped-bare monotone version of the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction," as well as cult favorites "Mongoloid," "Uncontrollable Urge," "Gut Feeling," and "Come Back Jonee." More likely to be recognized by most are the commercial breakthrough hits "Whip It" and "Girl U Want," along with "Gates of Steel" and the title track off 1980's *Freedom of Choice*. Presented in both Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, DVD extras include two bonus clips of the band playing "Praying Hands" and "Shrivel Up." While the overall audio quality is only so-so, this is the best Devo concert currently on the market. Recommended. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

The Dick Cavett Show: Rock Icons ★★1/2

(2005) 3 discs. 540 min. DVD: \$39.98. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. ISBN: 0-7389-2998-0.

The Dick Cavett Show: Ray Charles Collection ★★★

(2005) 2 discs. 210 min. DVD: \$24.98. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. ISBN: 0-7389-3350-3.

The late 1960s and early '70s may have

been a golden age for rock music, but the geniuses who controlled television programming remained largely clueless as to how to present it on the small screen. Dick Cavett was an exception: younger and hipper than most of his talk show contemporaries, Cavett seemed to really like the music, and a number of big name performers were eager to be on his show. *The Dick Cavett Show: Rock Icons* collects a total of nine Cavett shows from 1969 to 1974, and the list of performers is impressive, topped by George Harrison, Janis Joplin, Stevie Wonder, Paul Simon, David Bowie, Sly and the Family Stone, and Joni Mitchell. Joplin is terrific; she appears on three shows, singing "Move Over," "Get It While You Can," and others with power and emotion. Simon (joined by the Jessy Dixon Singers for "Loves Me Like a Rock" and "Bridge Over Troubled Waters") is also good, as is Wonder, and Cavett's Madison Square Garden interview with Mick Jagger is amusing. But Harrison is a disappointment; he only plays on one song (backing a mediocre Gary Wright), talks little about the Fabs ("I don't really remember anything about the Beatle days"—yeah, right), and plugs *The Concert for Bangladesh*. What's more, the TV sound mix does no one any favors, especially the Jefferson Airplane, who are dreadful. In fact, witnessing these musicians' sometimes bizarre interactions with Cavett's other celeb guests (Joplin with Gloria Swanson, Raquel Welch, and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.; a very stoned and nearly unintelligible Sly with Debbie Reynolds and Oklahoma senator Fred Harris) may be the most entertaining aspect of these shows, along with a genuinely literate discussion involving Cavett and authors Anthony Burgess, Jerzy Kosinski, and Barbara Howar. DVD extras include new episode introductions and an interview with Cavett. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P.

"I'm unable to sing any song the same way twice," Ray Charles tells Cavett in *The Dick Cavett Show: Ray Charles Collection*, compiling three complete programs on a two-disc set. He then proves it, offering versions of his best-known material ("Georgia on My Mind," "I Can't Stop Loving You," "America the Beautiful") that breathe new life into songs he'd sung hundreds of times before. In his early 40s here, "the Genius" performs more than a dozen songs altogether. Charles' music, of course, is sublime, even in the antiseptic environment of a television studio (sound-wise, he says, "TV is death to me"); ever the stylistic alchemist, he makes material as diverse as Sam Cooke's "Shake," the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby," and pianist Oscar Peterson's instrumental "Blues for Big Scotia" sound as if he'd written them himself. His conversations with Cavett are nearly as good—the two clearly like and respect one another, and Ray freely discusses his blindness, drug addiction, his mother, and

