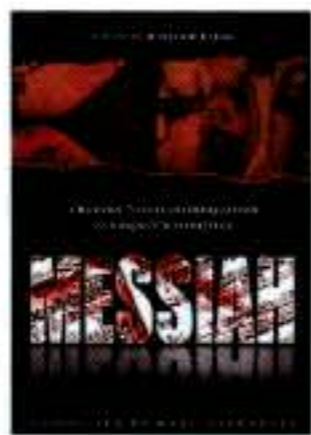


Messiah ★★

117 min. DVD: \$29.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from distributors). Color cover. ISBN: 0-4172-0083-9.



aturing a fine—if somewhat idiosyncratic—performance of Handel's beloved oratorio, *Messiah* finds Marc Minkowski leading his splendid original-instrument group Les Musiciens du Louvre, along with their affiliated chorus and no more than eight soloists—two sopranos, a mezzo, a counter-tenor, a tenor, a soprano, and a bass—in a spirited reading of the score. Although the tempos are at times a little hasty, one fears things might unravel, but the singers and players are agile enough to meet the demands. Unfortunately, director James Klein's approach is to use the music as a backdrop for a flashy visual commentary on life in modern society. Occasionally the opera shows the musicians performing, but often Klein prefers shots of religious ceremonies, prison life, street violence, and other activities, juxtaposed with the scriptural text set by Handel and emblazoned on the screen, often to clumsy effect: i.e., scenes of Vegas casinos appear in conjunction with the words "Behold Your God!" (at times the scenes are placed in unusual locales, too—as when the tenor sings his first aria wearing a suit and sunglasses and gesticulating in the style of a desert). Worse, Klein occasionally breaks into Minkowski's performance to show a few moments of singing by a police band, a prison chorus or a gospel choir—which is just what you can't even turn off the visuals to enjoy the music. The Dolby Digital surround is fine, but this can't seriously be compared to standard readings of the work, and Klein's visuals aren't revelatory enough to stand on their own. Not recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

tion in favor of a more contemporary tone. But as Miller argues in the behind-the-scenes bonus featurette, the choices are defensible, and ultimately the proof is in the pudding: this *Mikado* nicely captures much of the humor of the piece. As Ko-Ko, Eric Idle may not be the strongest tenor, but great vocalism has never been a requisite in G&S, and the Monty Python veteran gets by while earning plenty of laughs. And he's surrounded by solid singers, with Richard Van Allan's Pooh-Bah, Richard Angas' Mikado, and Felicity Palmer's Katisha especially fine. The orchestra and chorus are good, although the London Coliseum, where filming was done, seems an uninviting venue, and the nearly-20-year-old sound (presented here in Dolby Digital stereo) is essentially adequate. An imaginative and enjoyable supplement to more conventional versions, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

New York Dolls: All Dolled Up ★★

(2005) 95 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Formed in 1971, the New York Dolls fell into a category somewhere between glam and punk, or as one local TV report put it, "a cross between the Rolling Stones and Alice Cooper," playing music that was "belligerent, hostile, and deafeningly loud." They might have added that the Dolls were never really successful; nor were they very good, and that's putting it charitably. Not that it mattered much back in the day when clubs like Max's Kansas City and Kenny's Castaways were the places the rock hipocracy wanted to be, and singer David Johansen and the rest of the cross-dressing band were a phenomenon. Culled from some 40 hours of black-and-white footage shot on a video recorder (state-of-the-art at the time but primitive-looking today) by photographer Bob Gruen and his wife Nadya, *All Dolled Up* mixes live performances with interviews and behind-the-scenes/on-the-road stuff (including a trip to L.A.). The latter material is dull at best, unwatchable at worst; other than the lively, talkative Johansen (no surprise that he's the one who went on to bigger and better things in his Buster Poindexter guise and with his folk-blues band the Harry Smiths), these guys were your basic druggie goombahs. Dolby Digital notwithstanding, the audio quality is poor—unintelligible vocals, inaudible bass, everything else a low-fi sonic mess. But songs like "Jet Boy," "Personality Crisis," "Trash," and "Great Big Kiss" had a certain lubricious charm, and the band had attitude to spare. That may be enough for the faithful; others will wonder what the fuss was all about. Bonus features include complete performances of 12 tunes; an interview with Gruen; and commentary

Mikado ★★1/2

130 min. DVD: \$24.95. Warner Home Video. Color cover. ISBN: 0-4172-0632-5.



Albert and Sullivan purport to be the subject to some extent of this 1987 English National Opera production of the 1885 operetta that is probably the most famous collaboration. Turning away from the Savoyard tradition of telling the nonsensical story—about a romantic triangle involving Ko-Ko, Yum, and Nanki-Poo, and the lordly Mikado's intervention—within a Japanese island, Jonathan Miller's version takes place at a 1920s English seaside resort, where the clothes and décor are in black and white. And while most of the original lyrics were retained, Ko-Ko's first patter song has been entirely rewritten, jettisoning Gilbert's "list" of society offenders ripe for execu-

by Gruen, Johansen, and guitarist Sylvain Sylvain (guitarist Johnny Thunders, bassist Arthur Kane, and drummer Jerry Nolan are dead). An optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Otello ★★1/2

(1982) 138 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. Kultur International Films. Color cover. ISBN: 0-7697-7849-6.



Giuseppe Verdi's penultimate opera (only *Falstaff* was to follow), a magnificent adaptation of Shakespeare's tale of malicious cunning and baseless jealousy, is presented in this 1982 taping made for Italian television, which boasts lead performances of considerable distinction. Russian tenor Vladimir Atlantov produces some ringing tones as the deluded Moor, Kiri Te Kanawa shines as the doomed Desdemona, and veteran Piero Cappuccilli makes a vivid impression as Iago, the malevolent soldier who turns Otello against his wife. Unfortunately, the production was staged outdoors in the cavernous Arena di Verona, and though it obviously pleased the huge and enthusiastic crowd—whose applause and shouts are frequently obtrusive—the locale makes for a somewhat untidy reading of Verdi's masterful score. The orchestral playing under the baton of Zoltan Pesko is rather scrappy, and while the three principals are excellent, the secondary roles here disappoint and the choral contributions are mediocre (the virtual absence of sets is also a drawback—the performers simply climb up and down the auditorium stairs and stop on balconies to deliver their arias). While this rendition (presented in Dolby Digital stereo) will appeal to those interested in the lead performers, it can't be recommended over more conventional readings. Optional. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Robin Trower: Living Out of Time—Live ★★1/2

(2005) 83 min. DVD: \$19.95. Inakustik (dist. by Music Video Distributors). Color cover.



Former Procul Harum guitarist and 1970s solo FM radio favorite Robin Trower has never stopped releasing new music or performing in concert, and *Robin Trower: Living Out of Time* ably demonstrates just how comfortable Trower's roadshow has become both for the artist and his loyal fans. Still, the sameness of Trower's Jimi Hendrix-influenced sound from song to song grows wearisome after awhile, and making the effort to hear his band's workmanlike blues beneath all the psychedelic mannerisms simply becomes too much work. That said, this 13-song concert features songs plucked from material spanning more than 30 years,