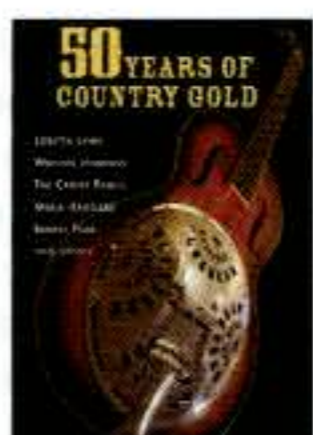


50 Years of Country Gold

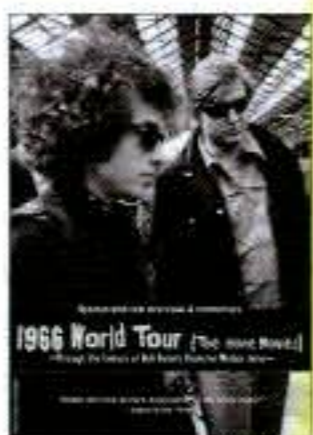
★★
(1980) 48 min. DVD: \$14.95.
S'more Entertainment (avail.
from most distributors).



If *50 Years of Country Gold* plays like an hour-long TV variety show with the commercials taken out, it's because that's exactly what it is: a 1980 "special" filmed at the Grand Ole Opry, but also including canned video segments and recorded tracks from the Longhorn Ballroom in Dallas (Loretta Lynn) and Las Vegas (Roy Clark). Host Dennis Weaver works off a corny, reverential script that would be embarrassing today, even in the reddest of states, and a few of the 13 artists performing 14 songs (such as Lynn Anderson and Barbara Mandrell) were already passé. There is some fun to be had, like a "surprise" visit by Johnny Cash, who engages in some carefully scripted but still charming banter with his wife, June Carter Cash. Johnny doesn't even sing, yet he's the most interesting part of the show, especially considering the competition, including Lynn's tired-sounding performance of "Coal Miner's Daughter" and the closing collaboration of Merle Haggard and Ernest Tubb on "Walkin' the Floor Over You." The Dolby Digital stereo is sketchy, some of the performances are embarrassingly trite, and the whole thing seems dated well beyond its 26 years. Not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (M. Moore)

1966 World Tour [The Home Movies] ★★1/2

(2006) 95 min. DVD: \$14.95.
Music Video Distributors
(avail. from most distributors).

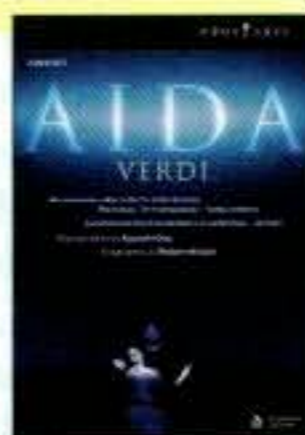


Mickey Jones, who worked for years with Trini Lopez and Johnny Rivers, joined Bob Dylan as a drummer for one tour over 40 years ago, after which he put in time with Kenny Rogers and the First Edition, before embarking on an acting career (he appeared in *Sling Blade* and *Tin Cup*, among other films, and had a regular spot on TV's *Home Improvement*). Still, the fact that Jones has had a legit career in the entertainment business doesn't make this attempt to capitalize on his brief association with Dylan a particularly compelling program. For one thing, the 8mm home movies, none of which have sound, are amateurish at best. Despite some cool moments (like concert footage of the Beatles, with whom Lopez toured in the early '60s), this is mostly standard tourist stuff, with the footage from the Dylan tour—including the infamous Manchester, England show and its "Judas!" catcall—consisting largely of Dylan and his entourage seeing the sights as they traveled the world from Denmark to Australia. Jones himself provides the narration, and he proves to be a well-spoken but

too voluble and not entirely credible host (Dylan's electric set was "not well-received" anywhere on the tour, yet it "brought down the house" at London's Royal Albert Hall?). In the end, *1966 World Tour* [*The Home Movies*], which contains lame background music by a Dylan tribute band, feels more like your motor-mouthed neighbor forcing you to watch a slideshow in his den than a film of any genuine historical significance. DVD extras include new interviews with Lopez, Rivers, and others. A better choice here all around would be Martin Scorsese's excellent Dylan documentary *No Direction Home* (VL Online-11/05). An optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Aida ★★1/2

(2004) 2 discs. 159 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$39.99 (booklet included). BBC Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.



Aida tells the tale of the titular Ethiopian slave whose love for an Egyptian army commander conflicts with family and ethnic loyalties, ultimately leading her to join her lover Radamès in death. Richly scored, with a cast of thousands, Verdi's *Aida* has been a staple of the repertory for well over a hundred years, and thanks to its exotic setting in ancient Egypt—as well as triumphal marchers leading an array of animals bearing treasures—it's the poster child for pageantry and lavish production values in the opera world. As such, *Aida* seems an unlikely candidate for the minimalist vision of internationally acclaimed, multifaceted artist Robert Wilson. Recorded live at the Théâtre Royal de La Monnaie-De Munt in Brussels, Belgium, this production is set against a background of sliding panels (lit to convey mood) with the players moving in gliding motions using stylized hand and arm movements, à la Noh Theatre. The effect is actually hypnotic and involving, while also allowing the music (a well-received orchestral performance by the Symphony Orchestra of La Monnaie-De Munt led by Kazushi Ono) to prevail. The principals—Norma Fantini as Aida, Marco Berti as Radamès, Ildiko Komlosi as Amneris, Mark Doss as Amonasro, and Orlin Anastassov as Ramfis—capture the spirit of the concept. Some will feel that this *Aida* borders on blasphemy (at least judging from the tepid audience response and sheepish expressions on some of the principals during the curtain calls), although the production was generally praised by critics. Presented in DTS and LCPM stereo, with DVD extras including a cast gallery and synopsis, this *Aida* should be considered for major music collections (and by ardent Wilson cultists) due to its original artistic approach, and is a strong optional purchase for others. Aud: C, P. (J. Reed)

Airto & Flora Purim: The Latin Jazz All-Stars—Live at the Queen Mary Jazz Festival ★★

(1986) 60 min. DVD: \$19.98.
V.I.E.W. Video. ISBN: 0-8030-2311-1.



Brazilian drummer-percussionist Airto Moreira has a long list of impressive credits, but a few in particular stand out: he played on Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*, he was an original member of Weather Report (along with cofounders Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter, also Davis alumni), and, along with his wife, singer Flora Purim, he performed with Chick Corea and Return to Forever on *Light as a Feather*, arguably the best acoustic fusion recording of the '70s. Such a history can create great expectations when Moreira and Purim hit the stage, and while this 1986 concert at the Queen Mary Jazz Festival in Long Beach, CA largely lives up to them, it's also scuttled by technical shortcomings. The problem doesn't lie with the musicians: Airto and his band are on fire from the first tune in this eight-song set, a high-speed romp called "Xequeré" that features some nifty horn work and the first of several breathtaking piano solos by Kei Akagi. For her part, Flora looks fairly weird—sporting a silver wig that makes her head look like a tinsel-draped Christmas tree—but her singing, featuring falsetto chirps and squeaks described as her "natural sound," is distinctive and original (and occasionally off-key during an otherwise cooking "Light as a Feather," with former Return to Forever saxophonist Joe Farrell sitting in). But even though the visuals and audio are remastered, the former lack crispness and definition, while the Dolby Digital stereo sound is muffled and poorly mixed. And talk about poor presentation: Airto announces that the set will include "the only jam of this jazz festival," but we only see about 30 seconds of said jam over the closing credits. DVD extras include a few text musician bios. Optional. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Amelia ★★

(2006) 2 discs. 138 min. DVD: \$29.99 (booklet included). BBC Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.



The dance is everything in Canadian choreographer Édouard Lock's beautifully crafted film of his 2002 ballet *Amelia*, shot here on a sleekly tapered wooden set. The title seems arbitrary, since on the audio commentary (one of the first disc's bonus features), Lock claims that he resolutely avoided any sense of narrative: in fact, the ballet itself consists of 14 seamlessly joined scenes featuring men and women from the La La La Human Steps dance troupe—costumed in black and white—dancing rather franti-