

and a quartet of backup players for a 2004 12-song set at the Stamford Center for the Arts in Connecticut that includes "Cherish," "Windy," "Never My Love" (the second most played radio song), "Along Comes Mary," "Six Man Band," and "Enter the Young," among others. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, the sound is not the highest of fi on this extra-less disc, but this will still be one enjoyable stroll down memory lane for a large number of Baby Boomers. Recommended. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

### Pop Legends Live!: Gary Lewis & the Playboys

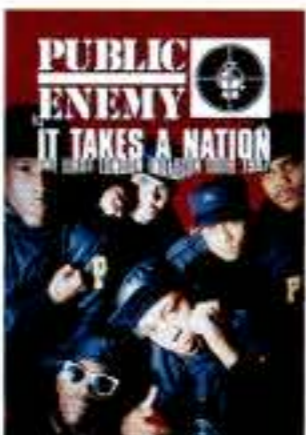
★1/2  
(2005) 45 min. DVD: \$14.99. SRO (dist. by Kultur International Films). Color cover. ISBN: 0-7697-7802-X.



It's about time Gary Lewis got some props, considering the wide swath he and his group the Playboys cut through the mid-'60s pop landscape, right? Well, when it came to guys whose parents were Hollywood stars, Jerry Lewis' kid was better than Dino (Martin) and Desi (Arnaz), although this 45-minute program from the *Pop Legends Live!* concert series provides evidence that—decades after the fact—Gary's still got the same tuneless, nasal voice and nerdy, charisma-free presence. This recent performance finds him running through 11 songs (seven Top 10 hits), one of which is pretty good ("This Diamond Ring," co-written by Blood, Sweat & Tears founder Al Kooper). However, the majority of the rest (including "Count Me In," "She's Just My Style," and "Everybody Loves a Clown") are featherweight fluff, and frankly, Lewis', um, *oeuvre* isn't even a footnote to an era when rock was undergoing a radical and wondrous evolution, although Lewis himself is a nice guy with a modicum of talent and some great connections, who had a few moments in the sun before being rightly consigned to the nostalgia circuit. Not recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

### Public Enemy: It Takes a Nation—The First London Invasion 1987

★★★1/2  
(2005) 85 min. DVD: \$16.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



This concert by what is very likely the best and certainly the most influential rap group of the past two decades is a decidedly mixed blessing. On the plus side, there's very little Public Enemy available on DVD, which alone makes this 11-song set worth watching, especially as it roughly coincides with the release of *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, their incendiary second album. Fronted by the fiery Chuck D and the self-described "hype of the group," Flavor Flav, the band puts on a

performance that's more like an assault than an evening's entertainment—calling "songs" like "Bring the Noise" hardcore barely begins to describe this relentless, razor-edged music, which gave no quarter to the pop music conventions of that or any other day. What's more, Public Enemy was actually saying something—it wasn't all about ho's, hula hoop rims, and bling-bling, but rather about African-American pride and empowerment and the evils of a system that keeps young blacks (especially males) down. Alas, the quality of both the sound and the visuals is horrible; the former—5.1 mix notwithstanding—is tinny and grating (both here and on the bonus audio CD), while the latter is annoyingly indistinct (a couple of DVD extra songs featuring the 2003 Public Enemy lineup are technically much better). Although the drawbacks here are serious, this is still a historic document that's worth considering (also for Chuck D's entertaining and informative audio commentary). A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

### Roy Orbison: Live from Australia ★★1/2

(2005) 51 min. DVD: \$19.99. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Some artists are woefully underrepresented on music DVD, but not Roy Orbison: in addition to *Roy Orbison: Black & White Night*, the svelte-voiced '60s troubadour's *oeuvre* includes *Roy Orbison: Greatest Hits (VL-9/03)*, *Roy Orbison: The Anthology (VL-5/99)*, and *Roy Orbison: Live at Austin City Limits (VL-5/03)*. Originally airing on Australian television, this 15-song 1972 concert, filmed in black-and-white at the Festival Hall in Melbourne, finds the crooner backed by a full band and an orchestra on hits such as "Only the Lonely," "Crying," "Dream Baby," "In Dreams," "Blue Bayou," and "Oh, Pretty Woman" (Orbison also covers Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" and Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline," though he improves on neither). Presented in DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, the sound is reasonably good (there are some imperfections in the source material that cannot be corrected), but this is ultimately a short, undistinguished outing, and viewers would be better served by *Black & White Night* or one of the collections. DVD extras include a half-hour of interviews with band members from the '72 tour. Optional. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

### A Simple Man ★★1/2

(1987) 88 min. DVD: \$24.99. BBC Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.

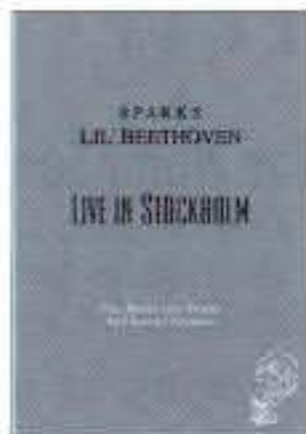
Contrary to his self-description as "a simple man," British artist Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887-1976) was complex enough to inspire this moving dance drama, which was com-

missioned by his hometown of Salford to celebrate the centenary of his birth. Created for television in 1987 by Gillian Lynne (*Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*) with a softly elegiac score by Carl Davis, *A Simple Man* features the Northern Ballet Theatre, with veteran actor/dancers Moira Shearer and Christopher Gable eloquently capturing the lead roles of the artist and his mother. Albert Finney, himself a Salford native, introduces the program with a thumbnail sketch of the artist's life and an overview of his works: a solitary sort—clerk by day, painter by night—Lowry captured the power and poetry of industrial England in paintings that, for instance, featured a white background with masses of people set against buildings that dwarfed and dominated them. Sadly, Lowry's mother was self-absorbed and rejected her son's work, yet she was a dominating force and her death left the artist bereft. Here, the dance unfolds—touching on Lowry's search for his subject as a painter, his relationship with his mother, and the girls (real and imagined) in his life—with settings and costumes mimicking and juxtaposed against his works, and gloriously moving performances from Gable and Shearer. Presented in Dolby Digital 2.0 and LPCM stereo, *A Simple Man* also includes an interview with Lynne and Davis. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (J. Reed)



### Sparks: Lil' Beethoven—Live in Stockholm ★★★

(2005) 115 min. DVD: \$24.99. SRO (dist. by Kultur International Films). Color cover. ISBN: 0-7697-7801-1.



Sparks, I'll be the first to admit, is an acquired taste. Fronted by the brothers Ron and Russell Mael (onetime clothing models for mail-order catalogs), the band might have easily been dismissed as a novelty act (the hair-slicked-back, Hitler-mustachioed Ron scowls and plays keyboards while his falsetto-voiced, long-haired brother prances around the stage) were it not for the quality of such songs as "Talent Is an Asset," "This Town Ain't Big Enough for the Both of Us," and "Amateur Hour," off their hit 1974 album *Kimono My House*, as well as "Hospitality on Parade," and "When Do I Get to Sing 'My Way'"—all of which are performed, along with eight others, during the second half of this March 2004 concert from Stockholm, Sweden. But there's more: the opening hour finds Sparks playing their 2003 album *Lil' Beethoven* in its entirety, and while the repetitive nature of songs such as "The Rhythm Thief" and "My Baby's Taking Me Home" may well try the patience of the uninitiated (warning: the songs are very difficult to shake loose once they're in your head), even those new