

Al Foster Quintet: New Morning—The Paris Concert ★★★

(2007) 97 min. DVD: \$19.95. Inakustik (dist. by Music Video Distributors).



Longtime Miles Davis sideman Aloysius "Al" Foster—who has played over the years with Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, and Herbie Hancock, among other jazz greats—swings in this 2007 concert. Here, the famed drummer is joined by saxophonist Eli Degibri, trumpeter Eddie Henderson, pianists Aaron Goldberg and George Colligan (who play on separate pieces), and standup bassist Douglas Weiss. Filmed in high-def at the New Morning in Paris, the band performs for just over an hour-and-a-half, which allows every one of the musicians an opportunity to shine (if anything, Foster's colleagues spend more time in the spotlight than their leader). The 10-track set combines compositions from Davis (a majestic "So What") and Hancock (a surprisingly mellow "Cantaloupe Island") with well integrated originals such as "Monk Up and Down" (from Foster's 1997 album *Brandyn*), culminating in the post-bop meets hard funk of "Jean-Pierre." As for Foster's instrumental prowess, the percussionist here eschews flash for focus, spending most of the time with his eyes closed and a look of concentrated bliss on his face. Unfortunately, Foster doesn't identify any of the selections (nor are they listed on the DVD jacket), so those already familiar with his repertoire will gain the most from this concert presented with DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and stereo options. Recommended. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Così Fan Tutte ★★★1/2

(1996) 2 discs. 187 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$32.98. EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America).

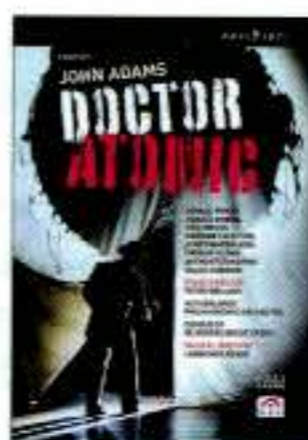


The third performance of Mozart's comic romp conducted by Riccardo Muti to appear on DVD, this 1996 production from the Wiener Staatsoper in Vienna is an impressive mounting, captured with fluid camerawork and presented here with excellent sound (in DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo). The plot—in which two besotted lovers unwisely accept a bet to disguise themselves and swap girlfriends in order to test the fidelity of their sweethearts—is a lark, but the music is consistently exquisite, performed with obvious affection by the members of the Staatsoper Orchestra under the baton of Muti, whose reading is fleet but never routine. The cast—which includes, in the principal four roles, Barbara Frittoli, Angelika Kirchschrager, Bo Skovhus, and Alessandro Corbelli—is strong, exhibiting a real feel for the opera's humor, aided by Roberto de Simone's witty 19th-century-style staging.

The only minor quibble is that here (and in all of his other audio and video recordings), Muti makes two little cuts in the score—the duet *Al fato dan legge* in Act I and the aria *Ah! Lo veggio* in Act II—neither of which are fatal, but both are inexplicable. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Doctor Atomic ★★★★★

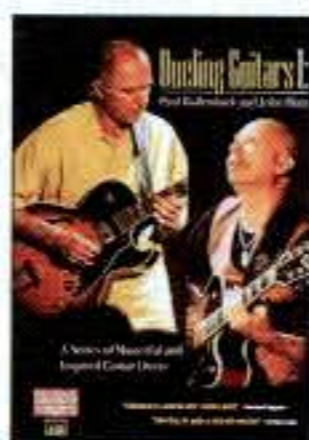
(2007) 2 discs. 230 min. DVD: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



American composer John Adams continues his string of operas based on recent real-life events (which began with *Nixon in China* in 1987 and continued with *The Death of Klinghoffer* in 1991), working again with librettist-director Peter Sellars for *Doctor Atomic*, which focuses on the WWII-era Manhattan Project responsible for the creation of the atomic bomb. At the center is the tragic figure of Robert Oppenheimer, who brought the project to fruition over the qualms of many scientists working under him, while also dealing with a demanding government officer, and coping with his own troubled wife and child. Adams' music retains traces of his early minimalist style, but boasts greater complexity and power than in previous scores, while Sellars' libretto—which mixes poetic arias with matter-of-fact recitative passages—skillfully blends the personal, historic, and didactic. This 2007 production from De Nederlandse Opera, which followed the 2005 San Francisco premiere and a staging at Chicago's Lyric Opera, is superb in every respect, with magnificent singing from both the principals (especially Gerald Finley as Oppenheimer) and chorus, expert orchestral work under the incisive baton of Lawrence Renes, and excellent background choreography by Lucinda Childs. Presented with crystal clear audio (in DTS 5.1 and LCPM stereo), DVD extras on this double-disc set include featurettes on the opera, cast, Adams, and Sellars, as well as an extended interview with the director. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Dueling Guitars 1: Paul Bollenback and John Hart ★★1/2

(2006) 78 min. DVD: \$19.98. Arkadia DVD (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-8030-7021-7.



Little known outside of very dedicated guitar heads, John Hart and Paul Bollenback are two guys from jazz's mainstream. Not as funky as, say, George Benson, original as Wes Montgomery, or forward-thinking as Pat Metheny, Bollenback and Hart are straight-ahead players in the tradition of masters like Joe Pass and Barney Kessel. The pair play fat, hollow-body electric instruments, employ few effects (save

for a dose of reverb), and only occasionally indulge in common guitar techniques such as string-bending. This set of duets, recorded in 2006 in an art gallery in Saugerties, NY, finds Bollenback and Hart making their way through a few standards ("Alone Together," "But Not For Me"), some originals, and a couple of more unusual covers (Thelonious Monk's "I Mean You" and Stevie Wonder's "Superstition") for a total of nine tracks. Bollenback and Hart have played with some top leaders (the latter with Joey DeFrancesco, among others; the former with Jimmy Smith, Lou Donaldson, and James Moody), and both are clearly no slouches either as improvisers or accompanists. But without a rhythm section, there's nothing happening here but guitars, and those with limited exposure to this playing style are unlikely to be attracted to the ceaseless flurries of notes. Still, this is swinging, sophisticated music from excellent players, nicely filmed in high-def, and beautifully recorded in Dolby Digital 5.1, making it a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Europafest: Jazz Highlights ★★★1/2

(1990) 60 min. DVD: \$19.98. Arkadia DVD (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-8030-7006-3.



Those who dismiss jazz as music that only musicians can love will find plenty of fodder for that argument in *Europafest: Jazz Highlights*, a selection of performances recorded at a West German festival in 1990. There are certainly enough grating elements here—non-melodic melodies, annoying slap-funk bass lines, screeching sax solos, guitar heroes playing very fast but saying nothing, and fingernails-on-a-blackboard vocals (the singer accompanying Korean percussionists Samul Nori makes Yoko Ono sound soothing)—to send anyone scurrying for their Dave Koz CDs. But there's also some good stuff here. Rabih Abou-Khalil, who plays the oud (a 12-string Arabian instrument with a haunting, windswept sound), combines Eastern drone and Western improvisation in a spot that features bassist Glen Moore of the group Oregon. Sun Ra and his group offer a glorious mix of colorful costumes (and nutty headgear), swinging music with an African feel, and a pervasive sense of pure joy. Saxophonist John Zorn and guitarist Bill Frisell are on the more experimental edge—plenty of honking, mewling, and squeaking—but theirs is nevertheless an appealing sound, overall. And soprano saxist Archie Shepp's triple-time workout is nicely reminiscent of classic John Coltrane (with whom Shepp played). Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, DVD extras include three audio-only tracks (one with guitarist Pat Metheny and sax player Dave Liebman), text artist bios, and