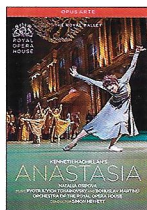


Anastasia ★★1/2

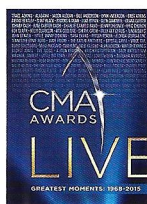
(2016) 113 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



This 2016 Covent Garden revival of Kenneth MacMillan's 1971 ballet about Anna Anderson, the woman believed by some to be the presumably dead daughter of Czar Nicholas II, is sumptuously mounted. Unfortunately, elegance alone cannot conceal the work's structural weaknesses, resulting from MacMillan's decision to expand his original 1967 one-act piece into a three-act spectacle. The original, featuring modernist choreography set to jagged music from the Sixth Symphony of Bohuslav Martinu, depicted Anna in a mental hospital, tormented by disjointed memories of her former life in Russia. In the 1971 version, this became the ballet's third act, preceded by others portraying a voyage on the imperial yacht in 1914, and Anastasia's "coming out" ball in 1917. In each of the earlier acts, bizarre touches in Bob Crowley's sets and historical anachronisms (including an appearance by Rasputin) indicate that these are also Anna/Anastasia's skewed memories, but both are set to blandly pretty music from early Tchaikovsky symphonies and choreographed in a very traditional style. And these disparate parts never cohere into an aesthetic whole. Not surprisingly, the third act here still holds up remarkably well, particularly as danced with the artistry that Natalia Osipova brings to the title role. And the rest of the cast acquit themselves adequately, while the Royal Opera Orchestra plays solidly for Simon Hewett. Presented in DTS 5.1 and LPCM stereo (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release), extras include a brief introduction, an interview with Crowley, and a conversation between Darcy Bussell and Viviana Durante (who danced Anastasia in an earlier revival). Although somewhat of a mixed bag, even lesser MacMillan is still of interest, so this can be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

CMA Awards Live: Greatest Moments 1968-2015 ★★

(2017) 10 discs. 710 min. DVD: \$119.99. Time-Life (avail. from most distributors).

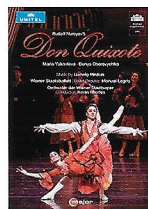


Time-Life's extensive overview of the Country Music Association's annual awards ceremony is all about the highlights, offering over 10 hours of introductions, acceptance speeches, and 127 performances, along with interviews with Roy Clark, Vince Gill, and dozens of other award winners. By starting in 1968, when the program was in black and white, and ending in 2015, country's underappreciated variety comes into clearer focus. In the 1960s, artists like Jeannie C. Reilly ("Harper

Valley PTA") incorporated pop elements into their crossover sound, a trend that continues today, but there are also statements about place and class like Loretta Lynn's "Coal Miner's Daughter" from 1975, and unifying anthems such as Alan Jackson's 9/11-inspired "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)" from 2001. While most of the performers are white, there are some notable exceptions, like Freddy Fender (born Baldemar Huerta), who brought Tejano music into the mainstream with "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," and African American vocalist Charley Pride, who won the coveted Entertainer of the Year award in 1971. Of course, many of the big names are all well represented, with repeat appearances from Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, and Dolly Parton, although there are no live performances by George Jones, Toby Keith, or Garth Brooks, possibly due to music rights (Jackson and George Strait do pay tribute to Jones, who passed away in 2013, with a fine cover of "He Stopped Loving Her Today"). Other unforgettable performances include Parton, Tammy Wynette, and Loretta Lynn performing "Honky Tonk Angels," and 22-year-old Miranda Lambert singing "Kerosene" as pyrotechnic flames blaze around her. Presented in mono and Dolby Digital stereo, extras include numerous featurettes, bonus interviews, and a 44-page book. Recommended. (K. Femnessy)

Don Quixote ★★1/2

(2016) 122 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99. C Major/Unitel (dist. by Naxos of America).

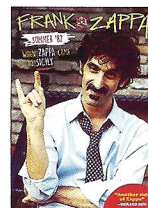


Rudolf Nureyev's revised version of Ludwig Minkus's tuneful 1869 ballet—in which Cervantes's titular knight errand and his squire Sancho Panza help to bring the lovely Kitri and impoverished barber Basilio together, despite Kitri's father's desire to marry her off to a wealthy suitor—is memorably preserved in Nureyev's own lavish 1973 film of an Australia Ballet production (VL-7/12) in which he also starred as Basilio. Manuel Legris's 2016 staging from the Vienna Staatsballett joins Milan's 2014 La Scala mounting (VL-9/16) as an excellent modern recreation of Nureyev's adaptation (Legris danced Basilio under Nureyev's direction at the Paris Ballet, so fidelity to his vision is assured). Maria Yakovleva and Denys Cherevycho are an attractive young couple as Kitri and Basilio, while Kamil Pavelka and Christoph Wenzel prove to be good comic foils as Quixote and Sancho. And the rest of the company make the most of their many vibrant solos, duets, and ensembles, while the Staatsoper Orchestra delivers John Lanchbery's reworking of Minkus's score dynamically under the baton of Kevin Rhodes. Boasting colorful sets and costumes by Nicholas Georgiadis, this is an excellent complement to Nureyev's own film,

especially since technically it is far superior. Presented in DTS 5.0 (DTS-HD 5.0 on the Blu-ray edition) and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Frank Zappa Summer '82: When Zappa Came to Sicily ★★★

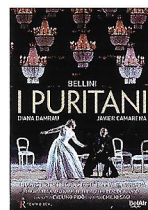
(2017) 82 min. Blu-ray: \$29.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Not so much a concert film as a film about a concert, filmmaker Salvo Cuccia's documentary charts the director's attempt to revisit and understand the circumstances behind a disastrous 1982 performance by the late Frank Zappa in Palermo, Sicily. But Cuccia, a huge fan of Zappa in his youth, is also interested in a broader narrative about his subject's adventures in and around Palermo—the hometown of the musician's father, full of relatives Zappa had never met. Cuccia zooms out from this history, too, asking Zappa's widow, son Dweezil, and daughter Moon Unit to look back on their lives and times with the composer, singer, and bandleader. Watching extensive film footage of Zappa's activities in Sicily, their flood of memories and affection brings a warm tone to the film, balancing out the strangeness of that Palermo concert, in which we see Zappa visibly unable to get his outdoor audience to calm down amidst a heavy-handed police presence. You don't have to be a Zappa fan to appreciate the film's overlapping objectives. Moon Unit's recollection of recording the novelty song "Valley Girl" (Zappa's one and only radio hit) with her dad, and how that brought them closer, is a loving story that holds universal appeal. Extras include a photo gallery. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

I Puritani ★★1/2

(2016) 181 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).



Beautiful vocalism is the essential element in any successful performance of *bel canto*, and this 2016 production from Madrid's Teatro Real of Bellini's last opera—a romantic melodrama set against the background of the English Civil War—is an absolute winner in that regard. Young Mexican tenor Javier Camarena is a revelation as Talbot, the pro-Stuart Cavalier whose scheme to rescue Henrietta, the wife of King Charles I, drives his betrothed, the Puritan Lady Elvira, to madness—until Talbot returns to declare his love, escaping execution only when a general amnesty is announced. Camarena's range and purity of tone are exceptional. And he is not alone: as Elvira, Diana Damrau is no less impressive, and their duets