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 H = High School (grades 9-12) C = Colleges & Universities
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Updated October 26, 2010

Legends of the Canyon ★★★

(2010) 110 min. DVD: \$19.98. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Photographer Henry Diltz, whose images of Buffalo Springfield, The Doors, Joni Mitchell, and Crosby, Stills and Nash helped define their image as counterculture music icons, narrates this documentary portrait of the folk/rock culture that flowered in Los Angeles' Laurel Canyon during the 1960s and '70s. *Legends of the Canyon* covers the origins and influences of each of these performers—along with The Byrds and The Mamas and the Papas—but focuses primarily on David Crosby, Stephen Stills, and Graham Nash, who offer most of the commentary on both the music and community. Also contributing their remembrances are Mitchell, Michelle Phillips (Mamas and the Papas), Van Dyke Parks, Danny Hutton (Three Dog Night), Gerry Beckley (America), late Atlantic Records guru Ahmet Urtegun, and various managers and producers. Directed by Jon Brewer, the documentary is rather disorganized overall, but nevertheless serves up an interesting oral history of the time: yes, viewers will hear about the drugs, affairs, and egos, but also about how this enduring musical landscape was ultimately shaped by the friendships and creative atmosphere. Archival performances from TV and film and a soundtrack of iconic music from the featured bands and performers are interwoven throughout. DVD extras include bonus scenes, extended interviews, silent footage shot by Diltz, and a 20-page booklet featuring Diltz's photography. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. *Axmaker*)

Directors: Life Behind The Camera ★★1/2

(2006) 2 discs. 240 min. DVD: \$29.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).



An interesting but slight survey of filmmaking, *Directors: Life Behind the Camera* serves up four hours of snippets from interviews of 33 American and British directors—including Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman, Spike Lee, George Lucas, David Lynch, Nora Ephron, James Cameron, and others—originally conducted for the American Film Institute, mostly in the 1990s. The program is divided into eight short topic-oriented segments on subjects such as directing actors, scripts and scriptwriting, and working with cinematographers. The two lengthier pieces feature all of the interviewees talking about how they broke into the profession and discussing a key work in their careers (this section is the only one supplemented with actor interviews). The interview clips within each category can also be accessed by director, but many are essentially sound bites that are less than 30 seconds long, making several of the choices hardly worth the bother. Entertaining overall, but not essential, this is still a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (S. *Axmaker*)

Pizza Party: Yoga Class for Kids ★★★

(2009) 30 min. DVD: \$19.95. *Yoga Playgrounds* (avail. from www.organa.com). PPR.

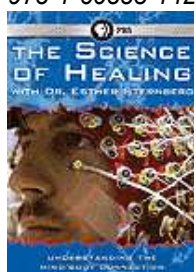


Instructor Lisa Detamore hosts this kid-centric exercise program featuring a group of children in a preschool-style setting. Kicking off with a warm-up that features the young participants doing “hummingbird breath,” “airplane pose,” and “twisting star,” the core of *Yoga Class for Kids* lies in a 20-minute routine with sun dance (“Hello sun, hello toes, hello friends!”), rain dance (with kids grabbing a raincloud and throwing it up to the sky), dragon (breathing fire out), crocodile, snake, and frog poses.

Incorporating sing-song instruction, positive reinforcement (“I like how high your knee is!”), sound effects, and fun interactive interpretive moves such as “make a pizza” (mimicking rolling the dough, opening the oven, etc.), the program ends with a breathing and finger-wiggling relaxation segment along with a group song. Designed for ages 4-7, this is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

The Science of Healing ★★★

(2009) 55 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$44.95 w/PPR). *PBS Video* (tel: 800-344-3337, web: www.pbs.org). Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-142-5.



In this PBS-aired documentary, physician and medical researcher Dr. Esther Sternberg helps viewers understand the brain's role in emotional and physical healing, with filmmaker Renard Cohen focusing on Sternberg's personal experience, including the death of her mother and the onset of inflammatory arthritis. A chance opportunity takes Sternberg to a small cottage on the Greek island of Crete, where she learns to relax and enjoy the enticing fragrances and picturesque views. In this sense-stimulating setting, she begins a routine that includes meditation, gentle exercise, and a healthy Mediterranean diet, and finds that her pain is slowly reduced. Back home, Sternberg tests her insights against research being done at children's hospitals that are designing facilities in a visually attractive manner with the intention of reducing stress and promoting recovery. Other topics covered include the beneficial effects of music (called a “stress buffer”) and the role of thoughts and belief in helping the immune system (surprisingly, the positive effects of love are not mentioned), while a visit to a Greek temple of healing suggests that the ancients were well aware of the mind-body connection. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

John Belushi: His Final Hours ★★

(2006) 60 min. DVD: \$14.95. *Music Video Distributors* (avail. from most distributors).



Saturday Night Live and *Animal House* star John Belushi (1949-82) is the subject of this entry in the *Final 24* series, which looks at the last day in the life of famous people. Combining dramatic recreations with actors, clips from Belushi's film and TV career, and interviews with insiders including Dan Ackroyd, *SNL* writer Anne Beatts, drama teacher Dan Payne, Belushi's widow Judith, and addiction specialist Dr. Drew Pinsky, the tabloid-esque program features urgent narration and 24-style countdown

graphics onscreen to pump up the drama. From a Sunset Boulevard power meeting with Michael Eisner and Bernie Brillstein to discuss his possible role in Martha Coolidge's *The Joy of Sex*, to borrowing money for “a guitar,” to

spending most of the day using cocaine and heroin, the program inexorably moves toward the point where Belushi's binge came to an end with a speedball that left him dead in a luxury bungalow at the Chateau Marmont. Focusing heavily on companion Cathy Smith's involvement (she hooked Belushi up with the dealer, and gave him the final injection), the documentary purports to be a comprehensive record of the last 24 hours of Belushi's life, but it features notable omissions (such as the fact that actor Robert De Niro and comic Robin Williams visited Belushi at his hotel). Both incomplete and exploitative, this is not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Updated October 12, 2010

My Dog: An Unconditional Love Story ★★1/2

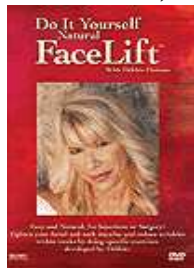
(2009) 50 min. DVD: \$26.95. Docurama (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-7867-2.



Director Mark St. Germain's ode to canines offers a heartfelt look at the effects dogs have on their human owners, here specifically focusing on the stories of a handful of celebrities. Actress Glenn Close talks about her med student dad's rescuing of dogs from labs, fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi giggles as he admits to feeding his dogs from the table, and pianist duo Cipa and Misha Dichter look on as their dog tears the stuffing out of a toy. Other participants include Richard Gere, Greg Louganis, director Lasse Hallstrom, singer Nellie McKay, playwright Edward Albee, poet Billy Collins, and *Law & Order* costars Richard Belzer (who takes his dog to premieres) and Christopher Meloni (who recalls his family's heartbreak when their older dog was put to sleep before the actor left for college). Standout vignettes include Didi Conn's autistic son Danny's adoring fixation on canines, the late Lynn Redgrave's choice of a puppy that helped her cope with cancer, and a segment on the need for adopting animals (according to the box, 20 percent of every dollar earned by the filmmakers will be donated to nonprofit animal welfare charities). DVD extras include deleted scenes and interviews, and filmmaker bios. From the poignant to the funny (on her dogs' behavior, *New York Post* gossip columnist Cindy Adams says "Who cares? My husband wasn't well trained either"), this touching look at man's best friend is highly recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Do It Yourself Natural Facelift with Debbie Dawson ★★1/2

(2010) 45 min. DVD: \$19.99. JLT Films (dist. by Midwest Tape, tel: 800-875-2785, web: www.midwesttapes.com).



Debbie Dawson, a fifty-ish certified fitness trainer and mother of five, shows viewers her methods for naturally strengthening facial muscles in this unique program that claims to offer an alternative to plastic surgery, as well as help anyone interesting in toning the face, including those who have experienced the effects of Bell's palsy. *Do It Yourself Natural Facelift* features Dawson providing narration over footage of her performing exercises such as "A Kiss? Maybe Not," "The Underbite," "The Scraper," "I Think Not," a "You Dirty Rat" scowl, "The Magoo," "What's That Smell?" and "You Did What? No You Didn't," among many others. The moves look just as you might imagine—absolutely ridiculous—but the touted benefits from this holding, stretching, and flexing regimen include tightening of the areas under the eye and around the lids, as well as the neck. "In the end, you'll love the results," says Dawson. As an alternative to going under the knife, why not? A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Imagine This ★★1/2

(2010) 115 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$44.95 w/PPR). PBS Video (tel: 800-344-3337, web: www.pbs.org). Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-216-3.

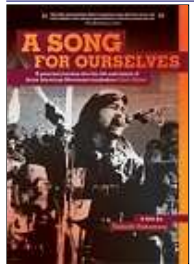


Recorded during its brief run in London's West End in late 2008, the musical drama *Imagine This* is set in the Warsaw Ghetto circa 1942, where a group of imprisoned Jewish actors—closely watched by Nazi thugs—mount a musical about the siege of Masada, in which the heroic Roman general Silva becomes romantically involved with Tamar, the daughter of Jewish zealot leader Eleazar. In a narrative parallel, Daniel (the resistance fighter who takes on the role of Silva) falls in love with Rebecca (who plays Tamar and is also the daughter of the troupe's director,

who is using the play to warn his audience about the reality of the Nazi "work camps" where they will soon be sent). One can't doubt the good intentions of librettist Glenn Berenbeim, composer Shuki Levi, and lyricist David Goldsmith, or of the largely unknown cast led by Peter Polycarpou. But bogged down with cardboard characters and a forgettable score, *Imagine This* ultimately feels both contrived and obvious, coming across like a poor cousin of *Les Misérables* that never achieves any real emotional impact. Still, you have to be grateful to PBS for preserving the ill-fated production; theater is an ephemeral art, and it would be nice if more productions—even mediocre ones—were filmed for archival purposes. DVD extras include a 35-minute Q&A featuring director Timothy Sheader, three cast members (including Polycarpou), and scholar Thane Rosenbaum; two bonus songs; and printable educational materials. Optional. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

A Song for Ourselves ★★★

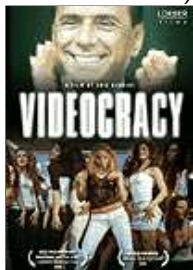
(2009) 34 min. DVD: \$75: high schools & public libraries; \$150: colleges & universities. Center for Asian American Media (tel: 415-863-0814, web: www.asianamericanmedia.org). PPR.



Singer-songwriter, political activist, and law professor Chris Iijima is spotlighted in Tadashi Nakamura's documentary profile tracing the life and accomplishments of a man who helped to launch Asian American social movements in the 1960s and '70s. The filmmaker combines archival footage, photographs, and home movies with interviews of Iijima's parents, wife, sons, and Iijima himself, shortly before his death in 2005. Other speakers include musical collaborators Nobuko Miyamoto and Charlie Chin, and California Assemblyman Warren Furutani. *A Song for Ourselves* covers Iijima's childhood and early adulthood in New York, where he developed an interest in civil rights and participated in protests, including the 1968 student strike at Columbia University; his activities as a founding member of Asian Americans for Action; and the formation, with Miyamoto and Chin, of the group Yellow Pearl, which led to an appearance on *The Mike Douglas Show* courtesy of John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Iijima eventually left his singing career behind, but his continuing interest in politics ultimately led him to law school and later teaching. The DVD title comes from the song of the same name, in which Iijima asks, "What have we got to lose? We have the right to choose"—which seems an apt description of his multifaceted life. DVD extras include an extended interview with Iijima, a conversation with his mother, footage from the Los Angeles memorial to Iijima, and additional photos and music. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Videocracy ★★

(2009) 85 min. In English & Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95 (\$249 w/PPR from www.kinolorbereducation.com). Kino Lorber Films (avail. from most distributors).



Those who deplore the state of American network television may have second thoughts after watching this documentary about its Italian counterpart, featuring snippets of programming (mostly of sex-suffused game shows and smutty soaps) that make U.S. fare look mild by comparison. But writer-director Erik Gandini's *Videocracy* has a bigger target in mind than just the Italian boob tube, trying to tie the entire culture of cheap vulgarity it represents to Silvio Berlusconi, the media mogul who (according to Gandini) not only molded Italian commercial TV in his own image but also used its power to place himself in an unassailable position as the country's prime minister. This grand argument is made with a focus on just a few people: the nation's biggest star-making agent (and a friend of Berlusconi's), a paparazzi king (who often sells his compromising photos to the subjects themselves), and a regular Joe who dreams of making it big as a martial-arts singer. The corpulent agent and the sleazy photographer admittedly make a creepy pair (the former's adulation of Mussolini is chilling), but simply filming them preening in their power doesn't effectively make the case, while the would-be warbler is not much odder than those who fake a child's balloon trip or crash a White House gala in order to gain media attention. And the lading of portentous music over the images doesn't seal the deal. Not recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

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