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New reviews of other videos not in the print version of Video Librarian.

Rating system: ★ = poor, ★★ = fair, ★★★ = good, ★★★★ = excellent

K = Preschool-Kindergarten E = Elementary (grades 1-3)

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H = High School (grades 9-12) C = Colleges & Universities

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Updated September 28, 2010

The Quake ★★★(2010) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.95 w/PPR). PBS Video (tel: 800-344-3337, web: www.pbs.org). Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-60883-228-6.

This PBS-aired *Frontline* episode focuses on the earthquake that leveled the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince and much of the surrounding countryside in January 2010, examining the catastrophe within the larger context of Haiti's checkered history. Although the quake itself wasn't particularly powerful, several hundred thousand residents were killed in the disaster. Despite dramatic news coverage of rescues, most of the victims trapped in the rubble died (supplies were short, and doctors were often forced to operate without anesthesia). The homeless took refuge in unsanitary makeshift camps, although government leaders were conspicuously absent. Why were relief efforts so slow? And what does the future hold? As the documentary notes, Haiti has a long history of poverty, corruption, substandard building codes, and depleted natural resources, as well as a weak political infrastructure dominated by ruling elites known for absorbing foreign aid while resisting change. It wasn't always so: once relatively prosperous, Haiti was known as the "pearl of the Antilles" before it dissolved into a troubled state marked by occupation and exploitation by the U.S. and other countries. Correspondent Martin Smith effectively sketches this broader picture while also interviewing key officials and experts to examine the lack of coordination that marked the aftermath of the crisis (former President Clinton and the U.S. Army, along with volunteer doctors, emerge as the heroes in this sorry story). Offering solid background information while also making some suggestions for moving forward, *The Quake* is recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

The Beetle ★★★(2008) 70 min. In Hebrew, English & Arabic w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.90: individuals; \$115: public libraries & high schools; \$300: colleges & universities. Ruth Diskin Films (web: www.ruthfilms.com). PPR.

This first-person documentary begins on the eve of Jerusalem filmmaker Yishai Orian's wedding to Eliraz—the same week during which he buys a used yellow Volkswagen with a red hood. *The Beetle* picks up the story six years later with a pregnant wife and a worn-out car. While Yishai is a likable slob, Eliraz is a somewhat unsympathetic scold, who's tired of the 40-year-old Beetle. "This car," she complains, "is a piece of junk." But to Yishai the car is more than just a broken-down hunk of metal, and he tracks down the vehicle's original owners, along the way tracing the history of the "bug" back to Nazi Germany, where it gained popularity as "the people's car" (eventually the model found its way around the world, including Israel, where prime minister Menachem Begin protested its arrival before relenting). Yishai's quest to learn his own Beetle's story leads him to Lionel, whose father had a love/hate relationship with the car; Yoram, who remembers it fondly; Eva, who gave birth in it; and Mara and Karol, who held on to it for the sake of a sick child. Yishai enjoys their stories but worries about safety, the price of baby supplies, and mounting repair costs, wondering whether to sell it or have it overhauled before ultimately making a decision that feels right. Recommended. Aud:

C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Faded Glory ★★1/2

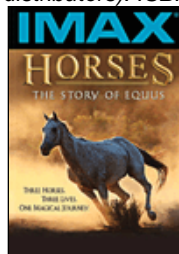
(2008) 86 min. DVD: \$29.99. NEHST Studios (avail. from most distributors). PPR. ISBN 978-0-98-235012-6.



Faded Glory tells an all-American story of a group of men who formed the National Network amateur baseball team in 1990, played a single season and failed to win a championship, then went their separate ways. Sixteen years later a player named Rick Cohen (who directed the film) pursues his dream of taking another run at the title, reuniting some of the original team members while also bringing some new players into the fold. In many cases, the lives of these now middle-aged guys have been marked by divorce, dead ends, disappointment, and various adversities. The documentary follows the team over two seasons as they cope with failed relationships and injuries on the one hand, and the joys of friendship and male bonding on the other. Playing under the banner of the National Amateur Baseball Association, the team falls short in the 2007 season but wins a cliffhanger game to take the 2008 title. Unfortunately, *Faded Glory* never makes clear what elements ultimately came together to make winners out of these contenders. Still, this inspiring sports comeback story should be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Rees)

Horses: The Story of Equus ★★★

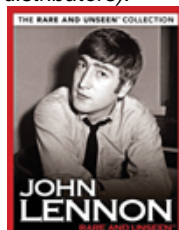
(2001) 45 min. DVD: \$14.98. Warner Home Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4198-9835-3.



Before being domesticated some 6,000 years ago, horses were threatened by climate change and hunted to near extinction, although today 60 million are scattered around the globe, performing multiple tasks and often enjoying a unique bond with humans. This IMAX documentary, narrated by Gabriel Byrne, offers a dramatized portrait of three subjects—The Chestnut, The Bay, and The Black—who are all shown from the moment of birth but embark on very different lives. The Chestnut, bred for racing, boasts a proud pedigree dating back to the 18th century; after being injured in a race, she is slowly brought back to recovery, then retired for breeding a possible future line of champions. The Bay starts out in the world of show jumping and riding, but proves incompatible with his rider and master and is sold to a trainer who lovingly guides him to a successful career doing movie stunt work. The Black escapes from a trailer while being transported to a ranch; free but defenseless, he roams the wilderness, faces an inhospitable winter, and is rejected by a wild “bachelor herd.” Briefly recaptured, the horse once again flees to the open range. Like most IMAX documentaries, *Horses* is more style than substance, but it features first-class production qualities, gorgeous wide open Australian vistas, and a Celtic-flavored music soundtrack to back its inspiring message about the animals’ courage and loyalty. Recommended. Aud: P. (S. Rees)

John Lennon: Rare and Unseen ★★1/2

(2010) 75 min. DVD: \$14.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Considering all of the Beatles-related material on the market, it takes a certain amount of chutzpah to release a program entitled *Rare and Unseen*, yet this documentary lives up to its name. The key components here are interviews and television appearances that either haven’t been seen since their first airings in the 1960s and ’70s and were thought to be lost, or have never been released on DVD, or

haven't been available to American viewers (or so the distributors claim; while I'm no archivist, I've seen a lot of Beatles footage, and almost none of this looked familiar). The subject matter, on the other hand, is nothing new, as Lennon and others (including occasional comments by the remaining Fabs, as well as observations from talking heads such as Beatles press officer Tony Barrow and musician Phil Collins) discuss the furor over his remarks that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus, the breakup of the band, and his subsequent life with Yoko Ono, among other topics. But most of Lennon's comments are more extensive than usual: of Beatlemania, he says, "I can't define it—I'll leave it to the psychologists, and let them get it wrong," and his and Ono's avant-garde art experiments are dealt with at length in a TV appearance with David Frost. On the minus side, not a single note of Beatles or Lennon songs is heard (indeed, music is barely mentioned). Despite that major shortcoming, Lennon completists should consider this a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

Updated September 14, 2010

Waiting for Armageddon ★★★

(2009) 74 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).



For America's 50 million evangelical Christians, the Holy Land—particularly Jerusalem—is the site of events foretold in biblical prophecy that will bring about the return of Jesus Christ and the end of the world as we know it. Directed by Kate Davis, David Heilbroner, and Franco Sacchi, *Waiting for Armageddon* treats that provocative belief in an evenhanded, respectful manner as it explains the evangelicals' views and explores their sometimes uneasy relationship with Israeli Jews, including how those ties influence American policy in the Middle East. For example, Israel courts evangelicals to gain political support and tourist dollars, but takes exception to their religious conversion efforts and "triumphalism" (one individual expresses hope that Islam's Dome of the Rock, a Jerusalem landmark, will be destroyed by an earthquake or missiles). The documentary combines archival material and interviews with scholars, religious professionals, and others to depict the stages leading up to history's last battle: notably, the "Rapture," or "snatching up" of true believers into Heaven; the "Tribulation" of a string of massive natural disasters; a face-off between the Antichrist and his followers and the forces of Christ; and finally, a restoration of the heavenly kingdom and a great reign of peace. Viewers also follow evangelical families both in the U.S. and during visits to the Holy Land, with baptisms in the Jordan River and treks to the Masada and the Sea of Galilee. DVD extras include an interfaith roundtable discussion. A thought-provoking film, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

Blacking Up: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity ★★1/2

(2010) 56 min. DVD: \$49.95: public libraries & high schools; \$195: colleges & universities. California Newsreel (tel: 877-811-7495, web: www.newsreel.org). PPR. Closed captioned.

In this thought-provoking if somewhat scattershot PBS-aired documentary, filmmaker Robert A. Clift explores the tensions surrounding white youth's embrace of hip-hop culture, asking whether it's grounded in genuine admiration and a desire to overcome racial boundaries or simply another example in a distressing history of mimicry and stereotyping. Clift speaks to professional and amateur MCs, music professors, cultural critics, casual observers, and ardent fans, as well as Ed Greenbaum of the Al Jolson Society—"Jolson has become the poster boy for political incorrectness," Greenbaum notes—and visits a Jolson festival. On the subject of white rappers, Vanilla Ice says he regrets his legacy as a "novelty act." To comedian Paul Mooney, such entertainers represent yet another case of cultural appropriation. Author and activist Amiri Baraka, quoting from his poem "In the Funk World," asks, "If Elvis Presley is king, who is James Brown? God?" (a question that sidesteps

the fact that the two artists hail from different music genres). Former white female rap duo Empire Isis (now a single act), who add reggae flavors to their recipe, says they don't define themselves by race, while DJ Kool Herc argues that hip-hop is the ultimate melting pot. Other notables offering their thoughts include Greg Tate, Aesop Rock, Sage Francis, Public Enemy's Chuck D, and Def Jam co-founder Russell Simmons. Offering an evenhanded although rambling look at an interesting issue, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: H, C, P. (*K. Fennessy*)

Contrary Warrior: The Life and Times of Adam Fortunate Eagle

★ ★ 1/2

(2010) 82 min. DVD: \$150. Lillimar Pictures (dist. by Cinema Purgatorio, web: www.cinemapurgatorio.com). PPR.



John Ferry's documentary looks at the life of Native American activist and artist Adam Fortunate Eagle. Born to a Swedish father and Native American mother on Minnesota's Chippewa Reservation, Adam Nordwall grew up and eventually ran his own termite-control business in San Francisco during the 1960s. Nordwall became involved with the Native American civil rights movement, initially gaining public attention with a parody of Peter Minuet's "trinkets" purchase of Manhattan Island in 1626, announcing that Native Americans would like to buy Alcatraz Island from the U.S. government for \$24 worth of beads and goods. Nordwall adopted the surname Fortunate Eagle in 1972 and later became a successful sculptor and creator of artistically striking ceremonial pipes; meanwhile, his gift for publicity stunts continued with a celebrated reverse "discovery" of Italy. While Nordwall clearly has a fascinating tale to tell, his skills as a raconteur fall short—which is unfortunate, since the film, shot in Nevada on the Paiute-Shoshone Indian Reservation, consists mostly of Fortunate Eagle onscreen solo, talking about his life and opinions. Some of his stories bog down in unnecessary detail, while others (particularly those dealing with the shunning of his Scandinavian heritage and his 1982 arrest for the sale of eagle feathers) seem unfinished. Still, viewers with a strong interest in Native American culture will appreciate the distinctive insights and compelling anecdotes that crop up throughout. DVD extras include deleted scenes and outtakes. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (*P. Hall*)

Frank Yankovic: America's Polka King ★ ★ ★

(1995) 55 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-8948-4.



It's a sure bet that your toes will be tapping at some point during this Emmy Award-winning documentary about the bandleader who was awarded the title of Polka King at a competition in Milwaukee in 1948—and happily held it for half a century. Director Rees Candee delivers an affectionate tribute to Frank Yankovic (1915-1998), portrayed here as the figure responsible for bringing the polka into the mainstream of American popular music. Originally released in 1995, the film includes footage from 1993, when Yankovic was still performing (and renewing his relationship with his children, whom he neglected during his years on the road). Overall, it's a thorough biography, integrating narration by former Lawrence Welk player Myron Floren with archival stills, home movies, clips from stage and television appearances, and excerpts from interviews (with Yankovic, former band members, relatives, and fellow musicians) to trace Yankovic's career from the first time he took up the accordion in his family's West Virginia home through his huge success soon after World War II. And for fun, there's also material from his appearance with "Weird Al" Yankovic—no relation—in Hollywood. It's a pity that some of Yankovic's most famous recordings—such as the "Too Fat Polka"—aren't included, nor are any full performances. But even the bits of

favorites like the “Beer Barrel Polka,” the “Clarinet Polka,” “The Blue Skirt Waltz,” and his signature tune, “Just Because,” will still delight nostalgic fans. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (*F. Swietek*)

Oceans ★★1/2

(2008) 3 discs. 470 min. DVD: \$39.98. BBC Worldwide Ltd. (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4198-8490-5.



Featuring eight one-hour episodes spread over three discs, the BBC series *Oceans* feels almost as vast as its subject matter as it chronicles the experiences of four “underwater experts” (an explorer, a couple of scientists, and Jacques Cousteau’s grandson, environmentalist Philippe Cousteau Jr.) who spend a year traveling the world to the Indian, Atlantic, Arctic, and Southern Oceans, as well as the Sea of Cortez and the Red and Mediterranean seas (skipping the Pacific, the largest of all bodies of water). The expeditions are primarily scientific: we see the team exploring caves and shipwrecks in various locales, investigating the 95 percent reduction of the kelp forests off Tasmania, experiencing the extraordinarily pristine Red Sea near Eritrea (where marine life thrives in water as warm as human blood), diving beneath Arctic ice sheets, and observing stromatolites, the oldest life form on earth, off the Bahamas. *Oceans* also boasts some wondrous encounters with marine creatures, including Humboldt squid, sperm whales, a sixgill shark, and magnificent manta rays. Unfortunately, however, in trying to heighten the drama, *Oceans* too often feels like a scripted reality show, with the four principals issuing dire warnings about potential imminent disasters (which we know won’t happen) and artificially creating suspense over events (such as a hammerhead shark sighting) that will. With the BBC’s own magnificent *Planet Earth* series setting the bar very high, this is comparatively middling fare, albeit beautifully filmed, making it a strong optional purchase. Aud: H, C, P. (*S. Graham*)

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