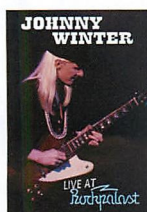


Sandner—at least in PCM stereo (the only format offered here). Julia Holewik's garish modern costumes and Thomas Dörfler's unattractive set—which features not only windows that the singers can open *Laugh-In* style, but also paintings of celebrities (Shakespeare, Verdi, and Pavarotti, among others)—only add to the disappointment. A better choice here would be the exuberant Glyndebourne staging (VL-7/10). Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Johnny Winter: Live at Rockpalast ★★1/2

(1979) 90 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Tall Texan Johnny Winter brings his rambling brand of blues-rock to Essen, Germany, in this 1979 *Rockpalast* TV-aired engagement filmed when the musician was on tour in support of 1978's *White, Hot & Blue*. Bassist Joe Paris and drummer Bobby Caldwell join the white-haired, nimble-fingered guitarist, who stalks the stage like a panther, blissing out for some bits, sitting down for others, and occasionally interacting with the boisterous crowd. Johnny is a decent but not great singer (less growling would be easier on the ears); fortunately, however, he prioritizes the instrumental passages over the lyrics here in a set heavy on classic blues tracks like "Messin' with the Kid," "Hideaway," "Walking by Myself," "Suzie Q," and "Jumpin' Jack Flash." During the epic rendition of "Mississippi Blues"—the highlight of this nine-song (plus a medley) concert—Winter plays so fast his right hand becomes a blur, while Paris joins in on harmonica. Paris also solos during "Divin' Duck" and adds a growl-free vocal to "Rockabilly Boogie," during which he and Winter play each other's instruments. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Le Songe ★★★

(2008) 101 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



Famous choreographers have utilized Mendelssohn's incidental music inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for ballets in the past, including George Balanchine's 1962 adaptation and Frederick Ashton's 1964 *The Dream*. But Jean-Christophe Maillot's version for Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo differs markedly. While the others adopted a traditional, conservative style, Maillot takes a modernist approach in décor, costuming, and dancing style. In addition, Maillot not only adds to the score other pieces by Mendelssohn (most notably the final movement of the Italian symphony), but sets some of the scenes to newly written, very contemporary-sounding music by Daniel Teruggi and Bertrand Maillot. While

one might question the tastefulness of some of his choices (such as the sexually suggestive poses the rustics strike in their catastrophic play-within-a-play performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*), it's impossible to deny the striking imagination displayed here, from the architecturally elegant set and eye-catching costumes to the mixture of comic slapstick, gymnastic athleticism, and classical moves Maillot has fashioned for the company. *Le Songe* is very much an ensemble piece in which no single soloist stands out, but in this 2008 performance the entire troupe proves up to the demands of Maillot's conception. Presented in Dolby Digital 4.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 4.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Louis Prima: In Person! His Wildest Performances 1936-1973 ★★★

(2010) 120 min. DVD: \$19.99. S'more Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



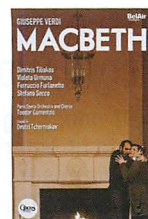
In honor of Louis Prima's centennial, Prima's son, Louis Jr., introduces this collection of 28 filmed and televised performances (drawn from *Toast of the Town*, *The Colgate Variety Hour*, and *The Ed Sullivan Show*, among other programs). Louis Jr. starts by recounting the singer/trumpeter's involvement in New Orleans, Chicago, and New York swing circles. Like Cab Calloway, Prima brought both musicianship and showmanship to his repertoire, using humor, charisma, and boundless energy to give audiences their money's worth. And they responded in kind with laughing, dancing, and applause (even his handmates seem amused by his routines). Early selections include "I'll Be Seeing You" (1949) and "That Old Black Magic" (1943), which Prima would rework in 1959 to great success. By the mid-1950s, he decided to scale back his 22-piece band, but he added vocalist Keely Smith (who became his fourth wife) and singer/saxophone player Sam Butera—changes that allowed him to stay relevant as rock 'n' roll began to invade the airwaves. After Smith left to strike out on her own, Prima added Gia Maione (spouse number five, and Louis Jr.'s mother). While there are plenty of highlights here, one of the best centers around "Sing, Sing, Sing," which features Jimmy Vincent in one of the world's most exuberant filmed drum solos. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, DVD extras include five additional performances, including *Swing It*, a short film from 1936. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Macbeth ★★★

(2010) 161 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).

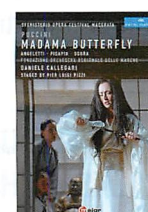
If you don't mind director (and set and

costume designer) Dmitri Tcherniakov's radical updating, this Paris Opera production of Giuseppe Verdi's first Shakespearean opera (mounted in conjunction with Novosibirsk Opera) is quite strong. The staging situates the medieval Scottish tale in a modern city—with satellite photos of an urban landscape gradually closing in on the scene where the betrayals and murders take place—and the characters are upper-crust types jockeying for power and social recognition. The result doesn't always avoid silliness (as when Lady Macbeth dons a top hat during her mad scene, for instance), and Tcherniakov's decision to enclose much of the action within a box and then place a scrim across the stage detracts from the crispness of the images. But the overall look is effective, with the clouds in the "outdoor" scenes adding an appropriate touch of foreboding. The Paris Opera Orchestra and Chorus perform with vigor and precision under Teodor Currentzis; baritone Dimitris Tiliakos makes a forceful but convincingly conflicted Macbeth; and Violeta Urmana matches him in both voice and dramatic skill as his more-than-supportive wife. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a "making-of" featurette. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Madama Butterfly ★★★1/2

(2009) 137 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$33.98, Blu-ray: \$45.98. Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



While it doesn't boast the star power of some rivals, this mounting of Giacomo Puccini's popular operatic tearjerker proves unexpectedly winning. From a visual perspective, this staging from the 2009 Sferisterio Opera Festival in Macerata is thoroughly traditional, but even though limited to a single elongated set, director Pier Luigi Pizzi nicely choreographs the action, and also adds a short ballet to the interlude of Act 2. And while the venue is a large outdoor auditorium where the acoustics must be tricky, the sound is rich and clear, with the Fondazione Orchestra Regionale delle Marche playing alertly and elegantly for conductor Daniele Callegari. Although in close-ups Raffaella Angetti hardly looks the part of a teenaged geisha, she copes successfully with both the lyrical and dramatic demands of the title role. As Pinkerton, the American naval officer who cruelly abandons Butterfly after getting her pregnant, Massimiliano Pisapia's ringing tenor sparkles, while Claudio Sgura's smooth, creamy baritone is perfect for the diplomat Sharpless. The result is a fine provincial per-