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Documentary & Music Spotlight (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

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Mike Spring - Editor
DVDsnapshot

@murraymaker fair enough, but some of them do look pretty solid, in my opinion.
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I appreciate it. No hurry!
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@murraymaker Whatm seriously? I thought there was some pretty decent stuff in there! No pleasing some people...
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@daily_help I'll definitely check it out! Thanks!!
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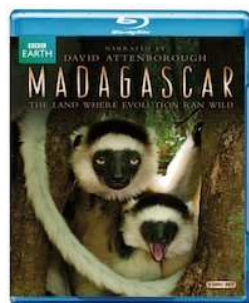
@Dan_Schiller Yeah, I do a theme every week. It's kind of my thing. #FFS
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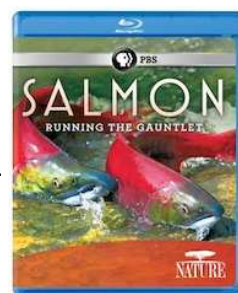


We have a ton of new documentary and music releases to look at this week. First up are a bunch of great new discs from our friends over at PBS and the BBC, which include: **Madagascar**, **Salmon: Running the Gauntlet**, **Japan's Killer Quake**, **Secrets of the Dead: China's Terracotta Warriors**, and **SOTD: Lost in the Amazon**.

Madagascar is a fascinating look at a truly mysterious land that is filled with so many kinds of wildlife that scientists are still discovering more every day. The documentary explains how the world's largest island separated from Asia thousands of years ago and, as a result some 80% of the species found there are found only in Madagascar and nowhere else. Throughout the film, we meet several of these species, and I'll tell you, there are some fascinating and amazing creatures.

The high def transfer serves the film well, but it's not the crispest or clearest presentation I've ever seen. Colors stand out nicely, but this isn't up to some of the other documentary transfers I've seen from The BBC.

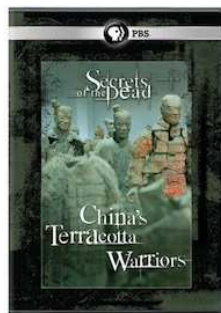
Salmon: Running the Gauntlet also looks and sounds good on Blu-ray, even if the program itself isn't quite as good as **Madagascar**. This documentary (also available on DVD) gives us an interesting look into the lives and habits of nature's most hardworking fish, the salmon. We learn about their swimming upstream to spawn, where they live, and how they live. Like I said, it's an interesting show, but it's still fish talk. Luckily, almost any nature doc can be good if edited well, and this one is.



Japan's Killer Quake is a Front Line special about the devastating Tsunami and Earthquake that struck Japan just a few short months ago. While certainly difficult to watch at times, there is no doubt this is an amazing program to watch. The benefit nowadays of 24-hour-news channels and everyone in the world carrying a cell phone in their pocket is we are privy to an unprecedented amount of footage of events like this. Be prepared for some truly amazing and stunning images here.

We also have two new entries in the excellent **Secrets of the**

Dead series: China's Terracotta Warriors and **Lost in the Amazon**. **Warriors** is another terrific program which looks at the immense amount of terracotta warriors created in ancient China and the insane resources used to create so many giant statues in such a short time. With the use of some cool CGI animation, this is a really fascinating look into one of the ancient world's most interesting mysteries. Meanwhile, **Amazon** details the ill-fated 1920s expedition into the Amazon by Colonel Percy Fawcett. The subject of a recent book, this lost expedition is thought to have finally been found, and this program reveals the infamous group's final fate. Both shows are excellent one-hour documentaries narrated by Liev Schreiber, and both of them are worth watching.



For those of you who were caught up in the recent Royal Wedding hoopla, **British Royal Weddings of the 20th Century** might be up your alley. Less of a documentary than just an insanely huge collection of footage from actual royal weddings, this three-hour program gives us photo and video footage of every major royal wedding since the advent of film. This includes Charles & Di's wedding, but not William & Catherine's. Unfortunately, many of the

footage sources are pretty poor, so the video quality on the whole is quite weak. For die-hard royals watchers only.

Our friends over at Music Video Distributors have released a ton of new music-themed discs this month, including **Radiohead: Arms & Legs**, **Kate Bush: A Life of Surprises**, **Neil Young's Music Box**, **Yesspeak**, **One Night Only: The A.I.M.S. Gala**, **Rick Wakeman: Made in Cuba**, and **Glenn Tillbrook and the Fluffers: Live in NYC**.

Radiohead: Arms & Legs, **Kate Bush: A Life of Surprises**, and **Neil Young's Music Box** are all

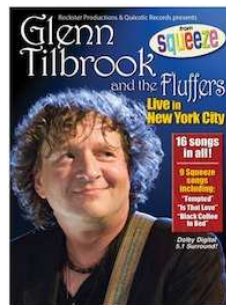
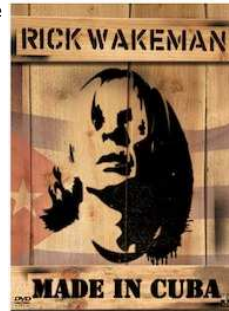
unauthorized documentaries of three musical powerhouses. Both Radiohead and Kate Bush's releases are two-disc affairs, while the Neil Young doc is only a one-disc. Each program has its pluses and minuses, the lack of authorization or participation by the band's being the principal among the minuses. Still, if you can't get enough info on Radiohead, Kate Bush, or Neil Young, these are at least interesting enough documentaries.



Meanwhile **Yesspeak** is a documentary that is fully authorized by the band. Shot on their 35th Anniversary European tour, this three-hour documentary features the band in all it's glory, including a full concert presented in audio form only. Unlike the previous documentaries, this whole disc is made up of the band talking, on stage, and sharing their story, making it a great release for their fans.

One Night Only: The A.I.M.S. Gala, **Rick Wakeman: Made in Cuba**, and **Glenn Tillbrook and the Fluffers: Live in NYC** are of more interest to fans, as they are actual concert discs.

Rolling Stone Bill Wyman formed A.I.M.S. (Ambitions, Ideas, Motivation, Success) to give up and coming bands a chance to record and perform and be discovered. During a Battle Of The Bands Wyman created, the finalists from the A.I.M.S initiative were at Royal Albert Hall. This disc captures the celebrity musician portion of that event, and includes performances by Ron Wood, Elvis Costello, Chrissie Hynde, Chris Rea and others.



Rick Wakeman: Made in Cuba will also please Yes fans, as the Yes frontman presents this concert with his new group from his 2005 tour in Havana Cuba. Yes fans will be especially excited that most of the set is older classic rock music from Wakeman's catalogue, not obscure newer numbers.

Glenn Tillbrook and the Fluffers: Live in NYC sees the former Squeeze frontman playing a small club venue in Manhattan to a crowd of adoring fans. The music is split pretty evenly between Squeeze tunes and Tillbrook solo material, and again, fans should enjoy this fairly recent set.

- Mike Spring
Editor



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