

## Chet Baker: Candy

★★★★1/2

(2009) 55 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

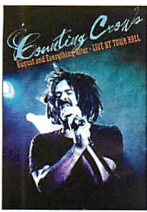


Recorded in the intimate confines of the library of a Swedish recording company in Lidingö in 1985, this session for the Sonet Records label matches the trumpeter Chet Baker (sometime vocalist, but only once here—on the title tune) with two excellent European musicians, pianist Michel Graillier and bassist Jean Louis Rassinfosse. A junkie for several decades, with stints in jail and various other woes ravaging both his appearance (Baker was once matinee-idol handsome) and his playing, Baker had to develop his embouchure all over again after his teeth were knocked out in a beating and replaced by dentures. But he sounds great here, with playing that is consistently lyrical, adept, and strong—swift when it needs to be and contemplative elsewhere. The repertoire is fairly stock, but interesting arrangements and tight ensemble playing help keep Great American Songbook standards like “Love for Sale” (distinguished by a five-note ostinato bass pattern and fine piano and trumpet solos) and “Bye Bye Blackbird” fresh, while renditions of Bud Powell’s up-tempo, boppish “Tempus Fugue-It” and Miles Davis’s “Nardis” coast along like improvised chamber music. Also included are some brief interview bits, with Baker gently prodded by expatriate bassist Red Mitchell (who also joins in on piano for the closing “My Romance”). Among other things, the two musicians discuss playing with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini’s son, a jazz pianist (who knew?). Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, this is highly recommended. (S. Graham)

## Counting Crows: August and Everything After—Live at Town Hall

★★★★1/2

(2011) 78 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



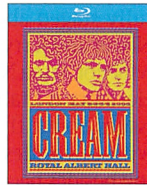
Filmed at NYC’s Town Hall in 2007, alt-rock faves Counting Crows perform their 1993 debut release *August and Everything After* in its entirety in a 10-song set that reimagines one of the seminal albums of the ‘90s. Singer/songwriter Adam Duritz sets the bar high from the start, singing in an intense almost-spoken-poetry style while throwing his whole body (especially illustrative hand gestures to act out the lyrics) into each number, starting with “Round Here/Raining in Baltimore,” which intertwines the CD’s opening propulsive track with its moody penultimate song. Duritz is joined by original band members David Bryson (guitar) and Charlie Gillingham (keyboards,

accordion, harmonica), along with Jim Bogios (drums), Millard Powers (bass), and accompanying guitarists David Immerglück and Dan Vickrey. Highlights include the beautiful “Omaha” (featuring Gillingham’s plaintive accordion), the rarely-performed “Perfect Blue Buildings,” the haunting “Anna Begins,” the mega-hit “Mr. Jones,” and the rockin’ “Rain King” (with nicely interwoven bits of Bruce Springsteen’s “Thunder Road”). Duritz’s emotionally introspective lyrics may not be for all tastes—some would call him the quintessential rock whiner—but rarely has musical heart been bared on sleeve with such raw but focused energy as here. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include interviews with Duritz and Gillingham. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

## Cream: Royal Albert Hall London May 2-3-5-6

2005 ★★★★★1/2

(2005) 167 min. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



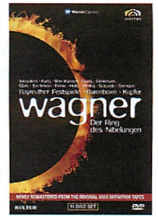
In 2005—37 years after their farewell concert—British power trio Cream did the unthinkable, reuniting for a historic four-night stand that began with Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker, and Eric Clapton stepping onto the stage of London’s Royal Albert Hall before a capacity crowd that included Sean Penn and Jude Law. This 19-song set captures highlights from the epic engagement, beginning with a buoyant “I’m So Glad” and ending with a triumphant “Sunshine of Your Love.” Although the legendary gentlemen don’t look exactly like they did in the 1960s (frontman Bruce appears a little frail), they demonstrate that they still have the musical chops. The compact Bruce represents the essence of soul, bringing a particularly rich performance to “Politician”; and the long-limbed Baker is as irrepensible as ever, offering a rare vocal on “Pressed Rat and Warthog” and a percussive tour-de-force on “Toad.” Then there’s Clapton, who remains as much a master of the guitar as of understatement. “Thanks for waiting all these years,” he quips after a slow-burning “Outside Woman Blues,” then adds, “We’re going to do every song we know.” The track listing is, indeed, generous, despite the absence of classics like “I Feel Free,” “Strange Brew,” and “Tales of Brave Ulysses”—and there isn’t a bad one in the bunch. Blu-ray extras include three alternate takes and interviews with the band. Highly recommended. (K. Fennessy)

## Der Ring des Nibelungen ★★★★★1/2

(2011) 11 discs. 924 min. In German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$99.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9134-0.

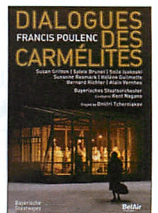
Presumably it was the proliferation of

new DVD and Blu-ray versions of Wagner’s enormous *Ring* cycle—good, bad, and indifferent—that induced Kultur to reissue Harry Kupfer’s classic 1991–92 Bayreuth productions, although whatever the reason, this comes very close to sweeping the field. Granted, the staging is minimalist, with stylized sets, props, and costumes sporting modern touches that occasionally generate a smile, while some of the effects—such as the laser-light show that depicts the underwater locale at the beginning of *Das Rheingold*—no longer look very spectacular compared to those in more recent versions, like the 2007 mounting in Valencia (VL-5/10). But musically this is an outstanding reading, as the Festival Orchestra plays with amazing power and refinement under conductor Daniel Barenboim, and the singers are uniformly strong, with John Tomlinson’s Wotan, Siegfried Jerusalem’s Siegfried, Günter von Kanten’s Alberich, Graham Clark’s Loge and Mime, Poul Elming’s Siegmund, Nadine Secunde’s Sieglinde, and Anne Evans’s Brünnhilde standing out among a sterling cast. Although the resonant acoustics of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus occasionally lead to a bit of muddiness, the engineers have used encoding technology to get the best from the original masters, and the result—presented with DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and LPCM stereo options—is impressive. The combination of a masterful performance, excellent restoration, and low price makes this a genuine bargain that wears its age lightly. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



## Dialogues des Carmélites ★★★★★

(2010) 152 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$33.98, Blu-ray: \$45.98. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).



This impressive 2010 mounting of Francis Poulenc’s 1957 opera by the Bavarian Staatsoper showcases refined, expressive playing from the Bavarian State Orchestra under Kent Nagano (a specialist in 20th-century French music), and firm, clear vocalism by Susan Gritton as Blanche de la Force, the noblewoman who joins a convent of Carmelite nuns as the French Revolution rages, only to be torn between commitment to her vocation and the instinct to survive when the new regime targets her community. Gritton is matched by Hélène Guilmette and Susanne Resmark as Soeur Constance and Mère Marie, respectively, who represent the choice between faith and doubt that confronts Blanche. Unfortunately, the fine musicality is compromised by the staging: Dmitri Tcherniakov’s decision to present the work in modern dress is debatable, but defensible; but he’s also chosen to