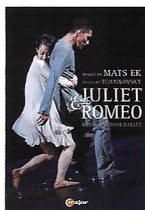


Bourne, who emphasizes the need for close collaboration between choreographers and film directors. *A History of Dance on Screen* serves up an eclectic mix, and while the clips might have been longer, the tantalizing glimpses presented of numerous works and performers might well encourage viewers to follow up on watching the films themselves. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Juliet & Romeo ★★★

(2013) 108 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. C Major (dist. by Naxos of America).

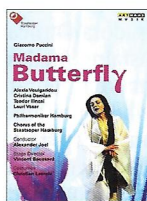


The title of Mats Ek's commission for the Royal Swedish Ballet clearly indicates his desire to be different, so it's no surprise that his 2013 version of Shakespeare's classic romantic tragedy elects not to use Prokofiev's score, instead cobbling together bits and pieces from Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, First Piano Concerto, *Capriccio Italien*, Variations on a Rocco Theme, and other works. And a stripped-down rethought tale it is: gone are the swordfights, Friar Lawrence, Juliet's sleeping potion, and Romeo's suicide. The setting isn't Renaissance Verona, although some of the costumes feel vaguely period—in marked contrast here to the prevailing jeans and hoodies, as well as Segways that characters ride around on. The ambience is more reminiscent of *West Side Story*, with the Duke striding about ominously through a spare set, terrorizing a glum populace with his street soldiers—apparently including Romeo and his comrades—who are considered beneath wealthy families like Juliet's. The dance moves also clash, veering abruptly from angular thrusts to graceful leaps. The performance itself is excellent, with Mariko Kida a delicate Juliet, Anthony Lomuljo an eager Romeo, and the remainder of the soloists also strong. Nor can one fault the company dancers or the playing of the Royal Swedish Orchestra under Alexander Polianichko. Although unlikely to displace more faithful adaptations of the famous tale of doomed young love, this is an intriguing new take. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray version), this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Madama Butterfly

★★★1/2

(2012) 137 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).

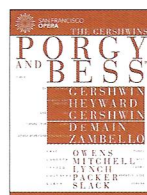


You might think that there's nothing new to be said concerning Puccini's much-loved 1904 tragic opera about lovely Cio-Cio San, the geisha who commits suicide after being abandoned—along with their son—by her husband, American naval officer Pinkerton. Vincent Boussard, the director of this 2012

Staatsoper Hamburg production, obviously disagrees—here turning the opera, which is traditionally presented as a straightforward tale of romantic betrayal and cultural prejudice, into a psychological drama that emphasizes the doomed heroine's dark demons. While the set—centered on a white spiral staircase—remains constant, video projections are used to indicate changes of season and mood, and a mixture of traditional and modern costumes lends a timeless feel to the tale. And by using a doll in the last act, Boussard suggests that Butterfly's child might not be real, but rather simply a fevered obsession. This is an intriguing, if not entirely persuasive, take on the well-worn piece, nicely performed by the cast, with Alexia Voulgaridou a moving, well-sung Butterfly, and Teodor Ilincai a decent Pinkerton. The remainder of the cast is also solid, as is the Hamburg Philharmonic under the baton of Alexander Joel. Presented in PCM stereo on DVD and Blu-ray, this effort can't displace previous entries—whether traditional (VL-11/11) or minimalist (VL-7/06)—but it does make for an interesting supplement, and therefore should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Porgy and Bess ★★★1/2

(2009) 158 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America).

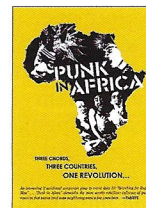


George Gershwin's popular masterpiece about the unlikely romantic triangle involving crippled beggar Porgy, "fallen woman" Bess, and her brutal lover Crown has always skirted the line between opera and musical theater, but this 2009 production from the San Francisco Opera shows that with the right sort of performance it fits easily into the former category. *Porgy and Bess* is presented here in the 1935 original form, restoring the omissions of later versions as well as the sung recitative that has often been replaced with spoken dialogue. The conductor is John DeMain, who helped reconstruct the score for the now-famous 1976 mounting at the Houston Grand Opera, here eliciting a galvanizing performance from the company orchestra and chorus that beautifully captures the work's combination of folk, jazz, and classical elements. Eric Owens makes a powerful Porgy, in both stature and voice, while Laquita Mitchell is a passionate Bess (their duets are among the high points of the production). For the most part, the secondary characters—including Lester Lynch as Crown—deliver impressive performances as well (only Chauncey Packer, as sleazy drug dealer Sportin' Life, is slightly disappointing). Peter J. Davison's set design, which makes Catfish Row a cavernous welter of corrugated metal walls, isn't as evocative as one might expect, but it's adequate for director Francesca Zambello's traditional

concept. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Punk in Africa ★★★

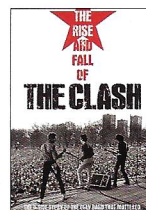
(2012) 82 min. DVD: \$16.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Punk in Africa bears an accurate, if slightly misleading title, since co-directors Keith Jones and Deon Maas concentrate on South Africa rather than the continent as a whole. To Benjy Mudie, A&R representative for WEA Records, 1976's Soweto Uprising provided fertile ground for punk as years of oppression and required military service had taken its toll on young people, black and white. Steve Moni of the Safari Suits also suggests that simple boredom played a role: with nothing better to do, punk turned out to be a great way to fill the time and to blow off steam. Nonetheless, most of the acts shown here are white, possibly because segregation remained in effect until 1994 (there are also few female players). The band National Wake featured mixed membership, however, although they would move in a reggae direction in years to come. KOOS, a group consisting of Afrikaans members, also stands out for their avant garde approach to composition and performance (KOOS actually comes across as more post-punk than punk for the way they integrated jazz and theater into their act). The directors chart the punk movement through the 1980s as apartheid comes to an end, Nelson Mandela leaves prison, and punk itself gives way to ska. The anger and energy fueling the early material mellows into the more party-oriented music of 1990s acts like Hog Hoggidy Hog and Sibling Rivalry. Outside of South Africa, the filmmakers also cover Pretoria's Sticky Antlers, Mozambique's 340ml, and Zimbabwe's Evicted. An off-the-beaten-path punk documentary, this is recommended. (K. Femmessy)

The Rise and Fall of the Clash ★★★1/2

(2014) 90 min. DVD: \$14.98. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors).



Although the title suggests a full reckoning, director Danny Garcia's *The Rise and Fall of the Clash* concentrates more on the second half of the equation, with friends and associates providing most of the commentary, since only guitarist Mick Jones and drummer Terry Chimes speak for the group (not counting the hired guns that joined the band at the end). Punk singer Pearl Harbour believes that the greatness of the Clash stemmed from each member bringing a different influence to the mix, from R&B (singer Joe Strummer)