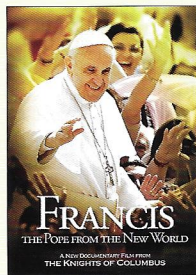


Francis: The Pope from the New World ★★★1/2

(2013) 51 min. DVD: \$19.95 (\$295 w/PPR). *Knights of Columbus* (dist. by Janson Media). Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-56839-480-0.

The enormously popular Pope Francis is the subject of this delightful and informative portrait of the Argentine pontiff from filmmakers David Naglieri and Michèle Nuzzo-Naglieri. *Francis* begins on a light note with the subject's first public statement as a new pope, in which he notes that his "brother cardinals went to the ends of the Earth to choose a new Bishop of Rome." That's not quite accurate, of course: Francis, born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, hails from Buenos Aires, described here as the Paris of South America, but also a city with a pronounced dark side of poverty and crime. An enthusiast of tango and soccer, young Bergoglio was a well-liked but unimpressive youngster who had a profound religious experience after spontaneously entering a church one day and giving confession. A subsequent, near-fatal health crisis strengthened his conviction that he was destined for the seminary, and he was ordained a priest in 1969. In time Bergoglio became the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and by 2001 was made a cardinal. Along the way, he impressed many by focusing on issues related to poverty, including the lack of economic opportunities for many people. Commentators discuss how Francis always "had the courage to stand up to power," even when his emphasis on economic inequality rubbed the aristocracy the wrong way. While the documentary underscores the most popular elements of Francis's personality and his populist approach to papal leadership, it doesn't say much about his firm commitment to church doctrine on divorce, gay marriage, and adoption, or the ordination of women into the priesthood. How Francis will evolve on these issues remains a question, but for now this profile nicely summarizes the life so far of this pope who has brought activism for good causes into his global leadership. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



Lens collects examples of Simon's work spanning five decades, organized into 12 chapters (within chronological and topical parameters). Simon discusses each photo as it comes up in the resultant slideshow, aiming for a sort of photo-autobiography set within a larger historical context. After a prologue discussing his relationship with his father, Simon uses pictures to guide us through his experiences as a student, involvement in the Civil Rights and anti-war movements, days in a hippie commune, work as a news photographer, contacts with music icons, and interest in the recent Occupy Wall Street movement. Simon also draws on photos to address his own addiction problem, and looks at his comfortable life on Martha's Vineyard. As a whole, the set offers an interesting snapshot of one Baby Boomer's life, but technically it feels homespun, with Simon simply talking into the camera as the slides come up. Some might also tire of child-of-privilege Simon's constant name-dropping. Extras include two bonus segments in which Simon offers rudimentary advice to aspiring photographers. Even with its flaws, this should still be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Revealing Mr. Maugham ★★★

(2012) 84 min. DVD: \$149 (\$349 w/PPR). *Kino Lorber Edu.*

W. Somerset Maugham's fame may have declined since his death in 1965, but Michael House's documentary reminds us of the quality of his writing, while also portraying the author as a troubled, ultimately rather tragic figure. Narrated in large part by biographer Selina Hastings, *Revealing Mr. Maugham* covers the writer's life from childhood to death in chronological fashion, with observations from academicians and dedicated readers who emphasize the enormous success Maugham achieved with his plays and novels during the first four decades of the 20th century (special attention is paid to Maugham's extraordinary skill in the short story form). But House balances this treatment of Maugham's remarkable literary career with a far darker portrait of his personal life, touching on Maugham's unhappy marriage to divorcée Syrie Wellcome, but more particularly concentrating on his homosexuality and long-term relationships with men—first Gerald Haxton, a gregarious American whose help in gathering material for stories proved invaluable but whose alcoholism led to his death, and then Alan Searle, who manipulated the author into disowning his family in order to inherit Maugham's estate for himself. A closing anecdote recounting how the elderly Maugham was shunned by fellow club members in London—after publishing an attack on Syrie in his memoir—provides a poignant conclusion to House's incisive portrait of

that she accompanied him on his Italian campaigns, after which she returned to Paris and used her charm to help pave the way for his rise to power. Even after their divorce in 1809, Napoleon treated Josephine well—he permitted her to retain the title of empress, and her children by her first marriage benefited from his patronage. Marked more by enthusiasm than scholarly depth, *In Search of Josephine* nevertheless serves as a pleasant introduction to a woman often known only by her name. DVD extras include a pair of bonus featurettes. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Mercedes Sosa: The Voice of Latin America ★★★1/2

(2013) 93 min. DVD: \$24.95. *First Run Features* (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

A sense of hagiography pervades Rodrigo H. Vila's documentary profile of Mercedes Sosa (1935-2009), an Argentine singer who became a voice of popular protest during the 1960s and '70s, but endured death threats and exile as a result. Vila serves up a mixture of archival footage, interviews with friends and family (conducted by Sosa's son Fabian), excerpts from recorded recollections by Sosa herself, and observations from many of her colleagues and admirers (including David Byrne). Essentially a straightforward chronological narrative, the film begins with Sosa's penurious childhood, continuing up through her unexpected victory in a singing contest at the age of 15, and her subsequent

emergence as a primary exponent of the politically charged *nueva canción* (literally, "new song"), which earned her the enmity of the military junta that came to power in 1976 and led to her flight to Europe, where she would gain a considerable following. The last section records her return as a hero in 1982 and the serious depression that marked her final years, which she poignantly speaks about in a lengthy interview. As a whole, the documentary paints a moving personal portrait, but ultimately fails to provide a coherent picture of the surrounding political context. Most impressive here are the numerous excerpts from Sosa's concerts and recordings, which show off her powerful, passionate voice to perfection (fans will especially appreciate a previously unknown private duet with Astor Piazzolla). A decent account of a remarkable woman, but one that could have been better, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Peter Simon's Through the Lens ★★★1/2

(2014) 2 discs. 240 min. DVD: \$24.95. *Music Video Distributors* (avail. from most distributors).

Son of Richard Simon—the co-founder of Simon & Schuster—and younger brother of singer Carly Simon, Peter Simon has been taking pictures since his school days. His photographs have been featured in many magazines as well as on LP album covers and in books. Celebrating his 50th anniversary in what the shutterbug calls personalized photojournalism, *Peter Simon's Through the*