

look at a man, a band, and a key music era. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

### Gray Matters ★★★

(2014) 76 min. DVD: \$24.95. *First Run Features* (avail. from most distributors).

Born to an Irish mother and English father, architect Eileen Gray (1878-1976) spent little time in either country as an adult. Her family was aristocratic and artistic, but this “mother of modernity” always remained true to her own unique vision. Filmmaker Marco Orsini’s *Gray Matters* describes Gray’s long life and career as a “rolling experiment.” Drawn early to Paris, where she worked in the bathroom of her apartment, Gray created eccentric household objects and furniture using various lacquers and layering techniques. Always ahead of her time in choice of materials, Gray also worked with chrome—making screens, moveable room partitions, adjustable tables, and other multi-functional pieces (some are still in production). Not all of her ideas were welcomed, with one critic describing her decorations as creating a “room of horrors.” Gray’s interest in how people interacted with their living spaces led her to an increasing attention to architecture, and an association with architect Jean Badovici and the artist Le Corbusier. Her non-conformist personality was evident in three houses that she helped design in the south of France, one with the unlikely name “E-1027.” Gray felt that homes should offer a protective shell from the often harsh conditions of modern life, and she designed with the aim of providing maximum sun exposure and allowing air to move freely through the house. Gray’s reputation in later years was obscured by the egotism of others, sexism, and her own agoraphobia, although her rediscovery has led to scholarly reevaluations and celebrations—and record prices at auction houses. Although some facets of Gray’s personal life (including her rumored bisexuality) remain a mystery here, this is a welcome and overdue tribute to an important tastemaker. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

### I Am Sam Kinison ★★★

(2017) 98 min. DVD: \$19.99. *Virgil Films* (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Thirty years after late comedian Sam Kinison (1953-1992) peaked in popularity on TV and in standup shows, this Spike TV-aired documentary answers an important question: was Kinison all that funny? Yes, and frequently so. From a contemporary perspective, it’s easy to lump Kinison in with misogynist poseurs from the same era such as Andrew Dice Clay. But while Kinison could go too far (phoning ex-girlfriends of guys in his audience to scream at them), and his jokes about gays were ill-considered, his broader sensibility about calling out repressed rage concerning relationships and the world’s absurdity struck a chord. While there are generous clips here of Kinison doing his act,

most of filmmaker Adrian Buitenhuis’s *I Am Sam Kinison* consists of recollections and impressions from other comedians, family members, and friends such as Charlie Sheen and Corey Feldman. Most poignant are the memories shared by Kinison’s older brother, who served as the star’s manager and saw him through good and bad times, and was present for Kinison’s final moments following a highway collision. Also covering Kinison’s years as an evangelical preacher, the honing of his comedy craft, and the emotional toll of a younger brother’s suicide, this biographical profile successfully makes its subject more of a sympathetic figure than one might have imagined. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

### Long Shot: The Kevin Laue Story ★★1/2

(2012) 93 min. DVD: \$19.99. *Virgil Films* (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

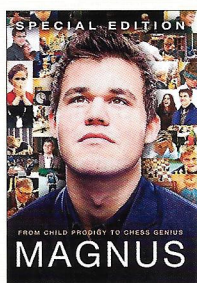
Franklin Martin’s documentary focuses on Kevin Laue, who became the first basketball player with only one hand to receive an NCAA Division I scholarship. Born without half of one arm, Laue grew to six-foot-eleven and worked endlessly to overcome his physical disadvantage and stand out as an athlete at Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton, CA, until he broke a leg and was sidelined for much of his senior year. Laue did a post-graduate stint at Fork Union Military Academy, where he was able to regain and surpass his earlier athleticism and gain interest from college recruiters. The film stresses Laue’s unresolved feelings towards his late father, who died when he was 10 and with whom he had a rocky relationship. But for most of the running time Laue comes across more like a teen (goofy or surly), a figure whose lack of star charisma is so pronounced that one of his peers wonders aloud why Laue is the subject of a film. And that is a problem: while Laue’s boundary-breaking story is inspiring, Laue

himself is not particularly engaging. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

### Look & See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry ★★1/2

(2017) 80 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$75; public libraries & high schools; \$250; colleges & universities. DRA. Tugg. PPR.

Filmmaker Laura Dunn’s documentary is in part an encomium to Wendell Berry, the highly-regarded Kentucky poet and novelist who is also a champion of the traditional American values associated with rural life and family farming vs. urbanization and agribusiness models of food production. Berry declined to be interviewed, but his wife Tanya and daughter Mary talk about him, and Dunn includes excerpts from audio recordings in which Berry reads from his work, as well as archival footage of the author in panel discussions. The film’s second emphasis is a more general portrayal of the difficulty of maintaining a small farming operation in today’s economy, with Kentuckian Steve Smith, among other locals, talking about increased costs of production and decreasing profit margins. Smith also discusses his adoption of organic production methods—a change that encouraged him to continue the work he loves but once considered abandoning. *Look & See* exudes a pastoral quality, enhanced by luminous cinematography and a meditative music score, and while some viewers might question the nostalgic glow of the archival footage when the crop shown being harvested is heavily-subsidized tobacco, this would likely appeal to Berry’s many admirers. But while it raises a significant socioeconomic issue—the decline of family farming—the prosaic treatment of that subject coupled with the poetic portrait of Berry makes for a somewhat unbalanced film. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



### Magnus ★★★1/2

(2016) 76 min. DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95. *FilmRise* (avail. from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)).

Dubbed the “Mozart of chess” because of his seemingly natural gifts, chess prodigy and current World Champion Magnus Carlsen doesn’t have the compellingly tormented charisma of a Bobby Fischer. Yet director Benjamin Ree’s documentary portrait is often fascinating, especially when exploring just what makes this Nordic super-geek tick. At the age of 13, Carlsen gained notoriety for playing champ Garry Kasparov to a draw, and from then on just kept getting inexplicably better, his mind working in ways that flabbergasted even the most astute experts. Although Ree’s conservative Scandinavian sense of detached objectivity occasionally threatens the film’s dramatic pacing—he’s often too reticent to probe into Magnus’s intensely inward-looking personality—thankfully there are enough dramatic set pieces of Carlsen besting his foes to give a good idea of his extraordinary capabilities. In one segment, Carlsen goes to Harvard and beats 10 of the world’s best chess players in simultaneous games—while blindfolded. And his centerpiece performance in the 2013 World Championships in Chennai, India, boasts high drama, marking one of the most extraordinary comebacks in the history of chess. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (M. Sandlin)