

Gash's best novel in the series, *The Judas Pair*, makes for a reasonably strong episode, about the search for a mythical pair of dueling pistols, although again there is a breakdown in logic on the screen that wouldn't occur on the page. When the viewer sees how the pistol is loaded—powder first, then the round—then the way it fires doesn't make sense. Another clue is left by a dead man in *To Sleep No More*, in the form of a small music box, and the hero has to decipher it before villains can grab it. The most entertaining episode is probably *The Real Thing*, as the hero encounters two different scams, one big and one small, and turns the tables on both of them. There is not much of a mystery in *The March of Time*, about the discovery of some old love letters in a clock, but it is a nicely executed story with well-conceived characters.

The final episode is the two-parter, *Death and Venice*, which is the most impressive episode in the collection. Not only is much of it shot on location in Venice, but the story has time to breathe and to develop its details and subplots. After a friend who had just purchased a well made fake painting is murdered while taking it home, the hero is offered a job by a wealthy man to travel to Venice and assist in making copies of Venetian antiquities. Noticing that there are similarities between those fakes and the fake his friend had purchased, he takes the job. Also featured on the third platter is an 8-minute interview with McShane about the show.

Martian holiday

Never has there been a more ideal opportunity to watch the enjoyably fanciful Walt Disney cartoon, *Mars and Beyond*, than as a warm up to the terrific IMAX-style documentary about the Mars landers, **Roving Mars**, especially since both programs are featured on the Walt Disney Home Entertainment DVD (UPC#786936292619, \$30). Running 40 minutes, the 2007 **Roving Mars** depicts the development and tweaking of the landers, their liftoff, their successful touchdown, the images they have transmitted and the discoveries they have made. Animation has been used to enhance the context of the material, but the real images that have been retrieved are enduringly fascinating, and the screen composition has a 'you are there' depth of focus.

Disney released *Mars and Beyond* once before, as part of the **Tomorrow Land** anthology (Jul 04), but while it was presented there as a free-standing featurette, it is presented on **Roving Mars** as a 1957 episode in the *Walt Disney Presents* program, running a total of 53 minutes. The opening and closing credits are in black and white, but Disney's introduction and the film itself are in color. Mixing extensive animation with some live action sequences, much of the piece is an overly imaginative speculation of what alien life might be like, but there is also a concise history of evolution and an equally succinct history of astronomy, as well as scientific certifications of everything that was known about Mars in 1957. To step from that into the realities of **Roving Mars** is to cross an acceleration of recent history with one leap, especially if you understand that the same minds that may have playfully postulated upon creatures thriving in the dust storms of the planet were also able to engineer, in just a couple of decades, the technology to get there and see the landscape first hand.

The picture on **Roving Mars** is available both in full screen format, and in letterboxed format with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, adding picture information to the left and right edges of the image. The color transfer is vivid. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track brings a full dimensionality to the Philip Glass musical score. There are alternate French and Spanish tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. Also featured is an excellent 25-minute production documentary that serves as well as an epilog as *Mars and Beyond* serves as a prolog.

Double bass jazz plus

MVD has issued more than its fair share of music programs featuring a double bass, but room must be made on the shelf for another one, now that they've released **Live in Vienna Kristin Korb** (UPC#022-891683797, \$20), because Korb doesn't just adeptly strum the instrument (which is taller than she is, and she's in heels), she sings at the same time. The 2005 jazz program ranges from standards, such as *Wouldn't It Be Lovely* and *Cheek to Cheek*, to more intense instrumentals, and makes for a highly satisfying and elegant 59 minutes. The picture is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image is sharp and smooth. The stereo surround sound is solid, and there is no captioning. A 5-minute interview with Korb is also included.

Webber revue

Do you think Andrew Lloyd Webber ever gets tired of having to sit through all of these tribute programs where famous entertainers fall over themselves to sing his songs to a black tie audience? Nahhh. The 1998 concert, **Andrew Lloyd Webber The Royal Albert Hall Celebration**, from Universal (UPC#025192093128, \$20), runs a full 128 minutes and features Donny Osmond, Antonio Banderas (doing not just *Evita*, but *Phantom of the Opera*), Elaine Page, Sarah Brightman, Bonnie Tyler, Glenn Close, Kiri Te Kanawa and many others, singing numbers from a dozen Webber musicals. It is the scope of the show that makes it appealing, as it just sort of wears down your resistance with one star after another trotting out on stage to sing, dance and, in the case of the number from *Starlight Express*, skate all over the place.

The full screen picture is crisp and freshly colored, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has an adequate range and dimensionality. There are optional English subtitles.

Hold onto the past

An opportunity for a whole bunch of long forgotten recording stars to pick up a little extra cash, **Soulvation The Best of Northern Soul**, a Wienerworld Classic release (UPC#5018755702952, \$20), is a 2004 compilation of music videos depicting the aging singers jovially reliving their brief moments of glory. Edwin Starr, Leon Hayward and The Platters are among the best known of those featured on the 69-minute program, but the real joys of the collection come from seeing the lesser known artists recreating their vocals and their moves to the best of their abilities, including Frank Wilson, Bob Brady, Brenda Holloway, Kim Weston, Sandi Sheldon, The Artistics, Richard Temple, Sidney Barnes, JJ Barnes, The Gems, Lee Andres, The Carstairs, Evie Sands, Jackie Ross, Betty Lavette, Pat Lewis and Tobi Legend. Some of the videos look like they were shot by the nephew of the artist at hand, in a backyard or a studio somewhere, but the collection is generally charming, featuring songs that are as terrific (Lavette's *Let Me Down Easy*) as they are forgotten.

The full screen picture quality varies from clip to clip, and as we implied, most look a little cheap, but are adequately delivered. The stereo surround sound has a basic but serviceable dimensionality. There is no captioning.

Twice Moore

A 29-minute concert in France is combined with an 18-minute set at the Rock 'N Roll Palace in Florida on **The Original Soul Man Sam Moore**, an MVD Visual release (UPC#022891667193, \$13). Shot in Cannes, the French set is the more elegant and serious of the two, Moore performing a nice range of blues numbers with a satisfying intensity. The Florida segment has a smaller back-up band and is more oriented to pop hits, but it adds perspective to the other show and gives the viewer a more complete sense of Moore's talent and history. Neither show is dated. On both, the full screen image is a little soft, but colors are fresh and the presentation is satisfying. On both programs, the sound is steadfastly centered and presumably monophonic. Tones are strong, however, and details are clear. There is no captioning. There are text profiles of Moore and the Stax record label.

Well, come on all of you forgotten rock stars

An impressive 97-minute concert shot in what looks like a garage or something on a pier in Britain in 2004, Country Joe McDonald doesn't milk the nostalgia of his act but instead stands as a representation for the arc of his generation on **The Original Country Joe Band Turned Up and Turned On**, an MVD release (UPC#022891458791, \$20). He plays the songs that he made familiar at Woodstock, and shouts out his familiar spelling call as well, but most of his music is striking because it is not familiar. Rather, it is a mature blend of folk, blues and country tunes, some protesting the war at hand and some speaking to events or life levels from the four decades between. The members of his band have grey hair, but they still rock for the whole set, and McDonald's voice, which in the past had a limited range, has held onto that range effectively so that time has taken his side. It is a rich, intelligent and captivating performance that defies the clichés of momentary fame and one-trick ponies.

The full screen picture looks just fine. The setting is weird and has minimal lighting, but the performers are clearly illuminated. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a pleasing dimensionality and sharp tones. There is no captioning. There is also a terrific 37-minute interview with McDonald—shot outside, on the pier—and a text profile.

Van Doren exposed

The poor man's Jayne Mansfield, Mamie Van Doren, stars in a 1964 burlesque comedy, **3 Nuts in Search of a Bolt**, from VCI Entertainment (UPC#08959053825, \$20), but more important than the feature is an undated 44-minute interview with Van Doren, in which she talks about her career, gossips about the famous, and shares many other aspects of her life and her personality. The interview is rewarding enough to make the occasionally amusing film a viable curiosity. Van Doren plays a stripper who pools her resources with two other people so they can hire a talented friend, played by Tom Noonan, to be a sort of 'co-op' patient with a psychiatrist who would otherwise be out of their price range. The friend conveys each of their problems as if the problems were his own, but the psychiatrist, unaware of the deal, thinks she has landed a professional jackpot, and goes overboard publicizing it to her peers. The premise, however, is cleverer than the execution, which is a conglomeration of skits and stripping sequences in a mix of black-and-white and color footage. Parts of it are tolerable, but other parts are juvenile to a fault.

The picture on the feature is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The color picture transfer is free of glitches and looks reasonably fresh. The monophonic sound is fine and there is no captioning. Along with the interview, the 78-minute program is accompanied by two trailers, text profiles of the cast, and a 5-minute montage of sexy promotional stills.