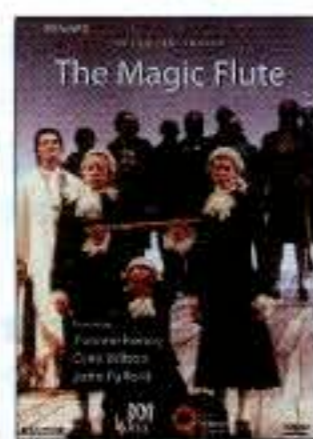


alry and paralyzing solemnity" while making it politically relevant—in practice it just looks silly. But the visual miscalculations don't solely ruin the performance, the substandard music helps. Granted, the orchestra of the Gran Teatre de Liceu in Barcelona plays well, even if Sebastian Weigle's conducting is rather rigid and metronomic, but the choral work is messy (perhaps as a result of all that running around), and the solo singing is mediocre to poor, with the four leads—especially John Treleaven in the title role—presenting voices that are pinched, wobbly, and slightly sour (a fine turn by Reinhard Hagen as King Heinrich is the sole exception). This production not only misses all of the nobility inherent in *Lohengrin*, but it also comes perilously close to travesty. Presented in DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM, this is not recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Magic Flute ★★★

(1986) 160 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films. ISBN: 0-7697-8582-4.



This version of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, recorded in 1986 at the Sydney Opera House for Australian television, quite rightly bears the translated title, as it is sung in English. But while purists might object, this is an otherwise faithful rendition of the "magical" opera about young Prince Tamino's quest for love while caught in a struggle between the forces of enlightenment and darkness, even preserving the original's depiction of the villainous Monastatos as a black character—something often altered, or at least underplayed, in today's politically correct environment. While the image and sound qualities are merely adequate—typical of broadcast standards from two decades ago—the singing is quite good, even if Richard Bonyngé isn't the most inspired of conductors. Although soprano Yvonne Kenny, as Tamino's love interest Pamina, is the only soloist with a major international career, the cast generally acquit themselves well, and the physical production, while spare, is serviceable for this vernacular version of *The Magic Flute* that lacks the visual delicacy of Ingmar Bergman's 1974 film (sung in Swedish) but is a reliable choice for those who want an English-language alternative to the German original. Unfortunately, subtitles aren't provided (even native English speakers may have some difficulty making out the words of the translation, which was originally prepared for the Welsh Opera), but musically this is a solid rendition of Mozart's late-career masterpiece. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Monteverdi Cycle ★★★★★

(2007) 7 discs. 566 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$129.99 (booklet included). Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) may

not have been the "father of opera" in the strictest sense—other composers before him combined music and drama—but his operas are the earliest still extant in the repertory. *Monteverdi Cycle* features the composer's three surviving masterpieces—*L'Orpheo* (1607), *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (1640) and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1643)—as well as his dramatic cantata *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624). Ears that are accustomed to hearing the melodic richness and ripe orchestrations of the 19th century will need time to adjust to the sparer pre-Baroque style, but once attuned will be privy to much glorious music here. The singers, instrumentalists, and conductors vary from work to work, but are generally fine (with a few exceptions among the vocalists). All four entries, dating between 1993-98, are productions of De Nederlandse Opera and feature stage direction by Pierre Audi, whose elegant stylization lends a strong visual unity to the series while also incorporating some fiery pyrotechnics (and even, at one point, a live falcon). While there are other DVD editions of these works featuring individual singers who might have a slight edge over their counterparts here, the standard throughout this quartet (presented on seven discs) is extremely high, captured with excellent camerawork, and presented with DTS and LCPM stereo sound options. DVD extras for each work include an illustrated synopsis and cast gallery, as well as a "making-of" featurette with remarks by Audi, the conductors, and several of the singers. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



The Original Country Joe Band: Turned Up and Turned On ★1/2

(2004) 135 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

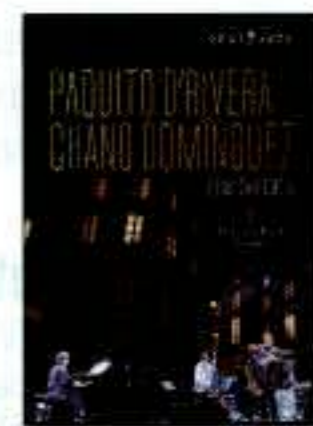


"I don't feel so comfortable with today's push and shove/I find myself wanting to be back in the Summer of Love." So sings Country Joe McDonald, but with that halcyon era now a full four decades in the rearview mirror, it may be time to finally put to rest the notion that its glories can ever be recaptured. Recorded in 2004 in Southsea, England, *The Original Country Joe Band: Turned Up and Turned On* finds four of the founding members of the band once known as Country Joe and the Fish (guitarist Barry Melton had the good sense to sit this one out) together again. The musicianship here is amateurish; in fact, the band comes across like a superannuated garage group who haven't picked up their instruments in years (in Melton's absence, the guitar playing, by McDonald and David Bennett Cohen, is particularly lame). The

presentation is perfunctory at best (way too much time is wasted tuning and standing around on stage), the audience response is appropriately tepid, and while the show may have been digitally filmed, the direction is unimaginative and the picture is too dark. As for the songs, McDonald's principal claim to fame was his appearance at the original Woodstock festival, where he led the muddy throng in a profane chant ("Gimme an F...") before launching into "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag," a silly but catchy anti-Vietnam War rant. Both are performed here in Dolby Digital 5.1 sound, as are many other relics of the hippie-protest epoch (the sentiments of which are, in sum: down with war, up with weed, the city's a bummer but the country's cool, the establishment sucks, love your brothers and sisters, save the whales). Quite honestly, however, it's hard to imagine that even committed nostalgists will want to sit through this overlong performance in need of serious editing. DVD extras include an interview with McDonald. Not recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Paquito D'Rivera & Chano Domínguez: Quartier Latin ★★★

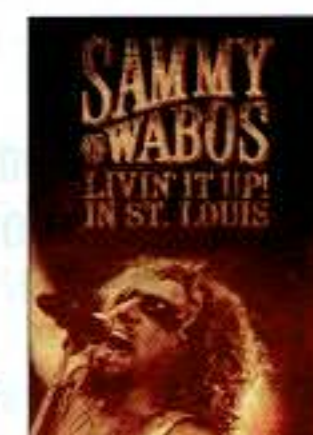
(2006) 95 min. DVD: \$24.99 (booklet included). Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Two of Latin jazz's best-known practitioners, Spanish pianist-composer Chano Domínguez and Cuban-born saxophonist-clarinetist Paquito D'Rivera, join forces for the first time in this 2006 concert recorded at the Teatro Real in Madrid. Backed by four able musicians, the pair take the stage on the Latin Quarter set from a production of Puccini's *La Bohème*, which explains the inclusion of an arrangement by D'Rivera based on one of the opera's arias. The eight other pieces include a bossa by D'Rivera, versions of songs by Duke Ellington and Nat Simon, and five pieces composed by Domínguez. Featuring fluid widescreen camerawork (captured on high definition video) and superb sound (with Dolby Digital surround and stereo options), this invigorating collection of jazz tunes with saucy touches of flamenco, bossa, bolero, and rumba should have wide appeal. DVD extras include a music-only option that omits the song introductions and verbal interplay between the players. Recommended. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)

Sammy and the Wabos: Livin' It Up! In St. Louis ★★★

(2006) 111 min. DVD: \$19.99. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Say what you will about Sammy Hagar as a singer and musician: for this 19-song 2006 set