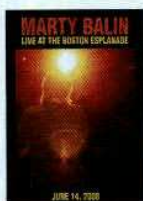


Still, it's the covers that stand out, especially a surprisingly swinging take on Leonard Cohen's "Dance Me to the End of Love," Serge Gainsbourg's "La Javanaise" (sung in perfect French), Elliott Smith's "Between the Bars," and Bob Dylan's "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go." DVD extras include a bonus hour-shy documentary (featuring archival footage and interviews with Peyroux and others), and five additional acoustic performances. Presented in DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital stereo, this is recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Marty Balin: Live at the Boston Esplanade ★★

(2008) 150 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

Back in the '60s, Marty Balin was one of the pillars of the Jefferson Airplane, teaming with Grace Slick and Paul Kantner to form a vocal triumvirate fronting one of rock's more radical bands. In the '70s, Balin and some of his mates moved directly toward the middle of the road (and up the pop charts) with the Jefferson Starship. These days he's just another aging rocker trying to relive past glories with performances like this one, recorded at the Hatch Shell in Boston in June 2008. Age 65 at the time of this gig, Balin has lost some range, and his voice is sometimes pretty ragged as he trots out some of the best of the Airplane (including "Volunteers," "3/5 of a Mile in 10 Seconds," "White Rabbit," and "Somebody to Love"—the latter two sung by Didi Stewart, who's unlikely to make anyone forget Slick); the Starship ("Miracles," "Count on Me," "Runaway"); and his solo days ("Hearts"), backed by a capable if undistinguished four-piece band. The technical quality of both the sound (which was remastered) and visuals is poor during the main concert, and the bonus tracks (mostly acoustic duets from various recent gigs with guitarist Mark "Slick" Aguilar) are even worse. Additional DVD extras include rehearsal footage and interviews with Balin and others, including Signe Anderson, the Airplane's first female singer. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, this is optional, at best. Aud: P. (S. Graham)



frenetic rather than effervescent. The staging, moreover, is based on the 1858 original rather than the 1874 expansion, which means that delectable material is omitted (although some of the later additions are incorporated). One can also quibble about the sets—awfully bare except in the second tableau, where the Olympian heights are presented as clouds and pillows—and the costumes, which vary from starkly modern to surrealistically odd. But the singing makes up for any visual lapses, with Natalie Dessay exhibiting both vocal agility and superb comic timing as Eurydice, and Yann Beuron making a suitably pompous Orpheus, while Laurent Naouri has Jupiter's bluster down pat. The lesser roles are also well done, with Jean-Paul Fouchecourt's Pluto, Steven Cole's John Styx, Cassandre Berthon's Cupid, and Etienne Lescroart's Mercury standing out. Some of the satire is bound to elude modern audiences, who may also be less familiar than 19th-century patrons were with the classical myths being parodied; and some of director Laurent Pelly's gags are pretty juvenile. But in a production as sprightly and funny as this, boasting good camerawork and sound, Offenbach's giddy romp can hardly fail to please. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS 5.1, and PCM stereo, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Queen Esther Marrow Starring with the Harlem Gospel Singers & Band: Let the Good Times Roll ★★★

(2009) 85 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-8885-2.

More than 50 years ago, Ray Charles was accused of blasphemy when he moved his music out of the church and onto the Chitlin' Circuit, creating modern soul music in the process. But times change, and with this gig, Queen Esther Marrow and the Harlem Gospel Singers bring it all back home in a rousing concert commingling the spiritual with the worldly. Mixing mediums is nothing new for the 69-year-old Marrow, a terrific singer whose recorded repertoire includes pop songs like "Walking in Memphis" and "Change the World." Marrow began her career with Duke Ellington and later performed with Ella Fitzgerald, B.B. King, Thelonious Monk, Bob Dylan, and Ray Charles. Recorded in Frankfurt, Germany in January 2009, this is a slickly choreographed, glossy show—the fact that the singers and musicians are performing for an audience instead of interacting with a congregation keeps the heat down—but there's still plenty to stir the soul. The opening numbers include joyous, rockin' gospel tunes like "Angels Watching Over Me," "Just as Soon as I Get There," and "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat." After a medley of spirituals (led off with "Great Camp Meeting"), the



troupe embarks on a lengthy (and decidedly secular) "tribute to the legacy of the blues," featuring classics like "St. Louis Blues," "Blues in the Night," "Going Down Slow" (with Marrow blowing some tasty harmonica), Charles' "Unchain My Heart," and "Stormy Weather," all featuring some serious wailing by Marrow and other talented vocalists. Presented in LPCM stereo, this is recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes ★★★★★

(2008) 85 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).

The collaboration between composer Igor Stravinsky and Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes was one of the most important in the history of modern dance, and this superb offering compiles two of their most famous works, brilliantly performed by St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Orchestra and Ballet under the energetic baton of Valery Gergiev. *The Firebird* (1910) features vigorous orchestral playing and masterful dancing by principals and corps (all set against sumptuous sets and costumes), but it's the mounting of *The Rite of Spring* (1913) that sets this disc apart. While Michel Fokine's rather traditional choreography for *The Firebird* was handed down, along with the visual designs, over the decades, Vaslav Nijinsky's innovative work for *The Rite of Spring* was lost. But this performance is based on the careful reconstruction of Nijinsky's original concept by dance historian Kenneth Archer and choreographer Millicent Hodson, backed by Nicholas Roerich's sets and costumes, allowing viewers to experience something close to the original and thereby gain a better understanding of why the piece—sporting a dissonant score and unconventional dance forms—was greeted with astonishment and anger by Parisians a century ago. Presented with exceptional sound (with Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo options) and fluent HD camerawork, DVD/Blu-ray extras include a highly informative half-hour interview with Archer and Hodson, and a featurette on the Ballets Russes (with rehearsal footage of the featured performances). Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



Orphée aux Enfers ★★★

(1997) 123 min. DVD: \$32.98. In French w/English subtitles. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).

Jacques Offenbach's bubbly spoof of the mythological story of Orpheus descending into the underworld to bring back his wife, Eurydice, receives a breakneck mounting in this 1997 taping from the Opéra National de Lyon; in fact, Marc Minkowski's conducting is so fast-paced that at times the piece becomes



Swan Lake ★★★1/2

(2009) 180 min. DVD: \$32.98, Blu-ray: \$45.98. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

Close to 1,000 performances of Tchaikovsky's classic ballet *Swan Lake* have been staged at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. This fine 2009 production by the Royal Ballet presents all four acts under the aegis of Anthony Dowell,

