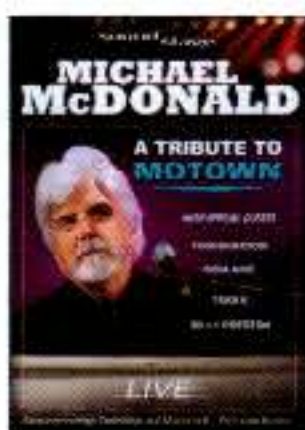


youthful for the title role of the girl whose romance with a boyish chevalier ends in disaster, Renée Fleming produces (especially in the later acts) a ravishing tone while handling the demanding coloratura with effortless aplomb. Fleming is nicely matched by Marcelo Alvarez as the chevalier, whose suave tenor is capable of both sensitivity and power, while the secondary roles are also well appointed, with a special nod to veteran Michel Sénéchal as Guillot. If the orchestral accompaniment under Jesús López Cobos is not perfectly refined, the music (presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo) is nevertheless rich and full. The staging by Gilbert Deflo is excellent as well—not a Eurotrash modernization, but rather defiantly traditional, with colorful costumes and handsome but never overly ostentatious sets. Even the ballet interludes, so often mere time-killers, come off well here. Unfortunately, this performance features some serious cuts (most notably at the end of Act I and the close of the first scene of Act III) that may lessen the appeal for anyone desiring a truly complete version of the opera. Aside from that drawback, this is easily recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Michael McDonald: A Tribute to Motown—Live ★★★

(2005) 68 min. DVD: \$19.99. E1 Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4172-3216-1.



Former Doobie Brothers lead singer and solo artist Michael McDonald has built a third career out of covering Motown classics. In this PBS-aired 2005 *Soundstage* tribute to the titular Detroit hits factory, the blue-eyed-baritone crooner serves up a solid 14-song set with guest stars including Billy Preston, India Arie, Toni Braxton, and the *a cappella* group Take 6. Drawing from his 2003 and 2004 *Motown* CDs, McDonald performs Stevie Wonder's "I Was Made to Love Her" and Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?" (both with Preston), as well as Gaye's "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," the Stylistics' "Stop, Look, Listen (To Your Heart)" (with Braxton), and Smokey Robinson's "Tracks of My Tears" (with Take 6), among others, steadily building up to a rousing three-song set with India Arie—Ashford & Simpson's much covered "You're All I Need to Get By," "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," and "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing"—followed by the audience-on-their-feet closer, Martha & the Vandellas' "Nowhere to Run." Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, this is a fine complement to the earlier *Soundstage* release *Michael McDonald: Live in Concert* (VL-1/05). Recommended. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Slaves to the Rhythm

★★★1/2

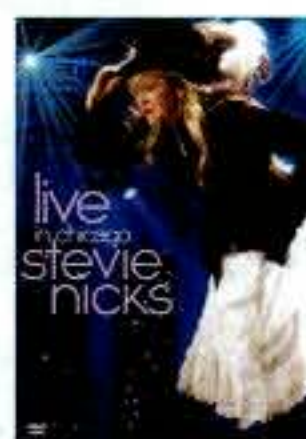
(2004) 170 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



This 2004 charity concert for the Prince's Trust, performed in London's Wembley Arena, pays tribute to the then-25-year-long career of producer Trevor Horn, who does triple duty here as host, bass player, and lead vocalist of the Buggles, whose famous MTV-launching anthem "Video Killed the Radio Star" kicks off the proceedings for this 23-song set featuring 13 acts. Hard to say what Prince Charles thought of the faux-lesbian Russian jailbait duo t.a.t.u. skipping across the stage performing "All the Things She Said," but fans of Brit pop will no doubt find something to appreciate here. Maybe not Dollar ("Give Me Back My Heart") or ABC (performing three songs, unfortunately) or Propaganda ("Dr. Mabuse"), but who can resist the Amazonian power of a fully-charged Grace Jones performing the title track or Seal (serving up fine renditions of "Killer," "Kiss From a Rose," and "Crazy") or Pet Shop Boys ("Left to My Own Devices" and "It's Alright")? Despite backing vocalist Paul Rutherford's defiant claim—"We are Frankie Goes to Hollywood"—the band's lead singer here sports impossible six-pack abs (that's because he's not Holly Johnson, but rather twentysomething fill-in Ryan Molloy). No matter: the crowd goes wild for "Welcome to the Pleasuredome," "Two Tribes," and Frankie's signature hit "Relax." And this may be your only chance to see Yes guitarists (of different eras) Steve Howe and Trevor Rabin share the stage for the mega-hit "Owner of a Lonely Heart." Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, DVD extras include a pair of featurettes: one behind-the-scenes, the other on the re-formed Frankie Goes to Hollywood. A mixed bag, to be sure, *Slaves to the Rhythm* is a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Stevie Nicks: Live in Chicago ★★★

(2008) 115 min. DVD: \$19.98. Reprise Records (avail. from most distributors).

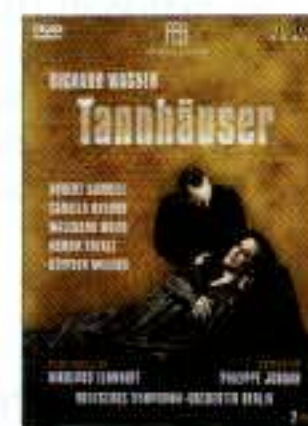


Sultry-voiced Fleetwood Mac singer Stevie Nicks serves up a solid and satisfying 17-song set for this 2008 PBS-aired *Soundstage* performance that finds pop rock's gypsy queen mixing Mac staples ("Rhiannon," "Landslide," "Dreams," "Gold Dust Woman") with selections from the chanteuse's impressive solo career ("Stand Back," "If Anyone Falls," "Edge of Seventeen"). Backed by a solid band (including Waddy Wachtel on guitar), Nicks interweaves a handful of choice covers throughout—including Dave Matthews' "Crash Into Me," Bonnie Raitt's "Circle

Dance," Tom Petty's "I Need to Know," and Led Zeppelin's "Rock and Roll"—as well as a few winsome anecdotes from the past (she wrote "Dreams" on Sly Stone's bed—nothing saucy here, Sly just happened to have a big bed in the recording studio). Although time (not to mention drugs) has taken its toll on the 60-year-old singer, this is no golden-oldies-dinner-circuit act: in the beautiful rendition of "Landslide," the refrain "I'm getting older too" may sound like a bittersweet acknowledgment of aging but it's delivered in that still-haunting dulcet voice. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo, this is recommended. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Tannhäuser ★★★

(2008) 2 discs. 205 min. In German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$39.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America). ISBN: 978-3-941311-12-1.



Richard Wagner's 1845 opera—essentially an allegory of the struggle between sacred and profane love portrayed in the longing of the titular knight for both the virtuous Elisabeth and the voluptuous Venus—is solidly performed in this 2008 production from the Baden-Baden Festival (using the 1861 Paris revision, with one insertion from the earlier Dresden version: Walter von der Vogelweide's contribution to the singing contest in Act 2). In terms of the music, the performance by the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin is vivid and powerful, while Philippe Jordan's conducting is strong. *Tannhäuser* is Robert Gambill's signature role—signaling his debut a decade ago—but now the effort shows, and with veteran Waltraud Meier in the role of Venus displaying similar strain, only Camilla Nylund, playing Elisabeth, demonstrates the sheer vocal freedom demanded by Wagner's writing. The staging, centered around a huge spiral staircase, is elegant but sometimes peculiar: the opening bacchanal, featuring dancers who appear to be dressed as larvae doing battle with a black bull, looks especially silly (in the bonus "behind-the-scenes" documentary, the symbolism is explained—somewhat unconvincingly). Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS, and PCM stereo, this is recommended, overall. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

New to Blu-ray

Lohengrin (Opus Arte, Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.99). Richard Wagner's 1850 operatic masterpiece (VL-9/07 ★★★1/2)—shines on Blu-ray in this excellent 2006 Festspielhaus Baden-Baden production. Also new to Blu-ray from Opus Arte are *Giselle* (VL-3/09 ★★★1/2) and *Giulio Cesare* (VL-11/06 ★★★★★).

