

and Nelly (plus female drumline). Among the highlights are a tribute to KRS-One (Boogie Down Productions), an eloquent poem from Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, and a pre-recorded all-star "cipher" (or verbal jam) featuring Wyclef Jean, Dizzee Rascal, Twista, Lil' Mama, and others. There are a few notable no-shows, such as Jay-Z and André 3000 of OutKast, but the latter's partner Big Boi picks up an award on the group's behalf. DVD extras include unaired rehearsal footage of Jean (a solo guitar version of "The Star Spangled Banner") and actor/rapper T.I., who didn't make it to the actual ceremony. As is the case with most awards shows, this one is uneven and will quickly date; however, this would still add bling to a well-dressed hip-hop collection, and should therefore be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Blue Man Group: How to be a Megastar Live!

★★★

(2007) 89 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$19.98 (audio CD included w/standard DVD). Rhino Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



A multimedia event, *Blue Man Group: How to be a Megastar Live!*—captured here in a 2007 show from Dallas—features the blue-hued trio deconstructing the traditional rock concert experience. During the show, the three percussion-playing performance artists (actually four altogether) front an eight-piece band that serves up a combination of techno, progressive rock, and experimental music, as the BMG's wordless presentation style draws from dance, comedy, and mime. Of the 18 selections here, 15 are originals, while the other three are covers of Pink Floyd's "One of These Days," Donna Summer's "I Feel Love" and the Who's "Baba O' Riley." For singing, they turn to guest vocalists, while a Big Brother-like narrator provides instructions from the "Rock Concert Instruction Manual" (how to head bob, fist pump, and the like) and indulges in intentionally clichéd stage patter, such as "Are you feeling good tonight?" and "Are you ready to rock?" Video screens alternate between short films, animated sequences, and fake infomercials featuring comedian Fred Armisen (*Saturday Night Live*). Although the audience participation segments throw off the pace, there's something here for music lovers of all ages, especially those who like things loud (presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo). DVD extras include a video for "I Feel Love," a spoof PSA called "Mono Makes a Plea—Save the TVs" (with Armisen satirizing a certain Irish rock star), the clip-heavy featurette "Inside the Tube" (in which the founders of the troupe recount their history), and a bonus 19-track audio CD. Recommended. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Blue Note: A Story of Modern Jazz ★★★

(1997) 91 min. DVD: \$28.98. EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America).



Referring to the hundreds of titles released by the label, an interviewee in *Blue Note: A Story of Modern Jazz* says simply, "Some sold a lot. A lot sold nothing." Either way, the Blue Note collection is distinctive, whether commercial triumphs like Lee Morgan's *The Sidewinder*, Horace Silver's *Song for My Father*, and Herbie Hancock's *Cantaloupe Island*, or one of the countless titles that never came close to making the charts. *Blue Note: A Story of Modern Jazz* is a tribute to founders Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff, two refugees from Hitler's Germany who came to New York in the mid-1930s with a profound love for and understanding of jazz and its African-American creators. Lion and Wolff handled every detail of their business, ensuring that the quality of Blue Note releases was remarkably consistent, from the sound (both technically and stylistically) to the look of the covers. Director Julian Benedikt has assembled live clips (including performances by Art Blakey, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, Hancock, and Freddie Hubbard), interviews, and archival materials to tell the Blue Note story, using—as in his excellent *Play Your Own Thing* (see pg. 95)—a skillful and poetic commingling of words, notes, and visual images. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

Composing the Beatles Songbook: Lennon and McCartney 1957-1965

★★1/2

(2008) 80 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Plenty of Beatlemaniacs out there will snap up pretty much any Fab Four-related product, whether it's good, bad, or indifferent. *Composing the Beatles Songbook* falls somewhere in the middle: fans will hear no new music, see no clips that aren't available elsewhere, or revel in any major revelations, but the presentation is first rate overall, with a solid roster of participants. Spanning the time frame from John and Paul's first meeting in '57 through the release of *Rubber Soul* in '65 (the filmmakers' unexplained decision to stop there means, of course, that songs such as "Eleanor Rigby" and "Hey Jude" go unmentioned), the documentary examines a variety of familiar topics: the different inspirations each brought to the table (Paul was the more outgoing and pop-oriented of the two, while John was more inward, subversive, and unpredictable), and the way those influences were revealed in their tunes (Lennon's "A Hard Day's Night" and McCartney's "Can't Buy Me Love" are contrasted); the influence of Bob Dylan on their writing, John's in particular; Lennon's

gradually more personal lyrical approach, and so on. Too-brief clips of Beatles performances from their concerts, movies, and TV appearances merely whet the appetite for the complete versions, but the real issue is this: as great as Lennon and McCartney were—and no other team, be it Brecht/Weill, Bernstein/Sondheim, Leiber/Stoller, Ellington/Strayhorn, or anyone else, surpasses them—their medium was the popular song, an artform that neither begs for nor much benefits from scholarly analysis, no matter who's providing it (here, including musician/producer Klaus Voormann, author Barry Miles, and critics Robert Christgau and Nigel Williamson). Overall, however, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Doktor Faust ★★★

(2006) 2 discs. 172 min. DVD: \$45.98. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



Many music scholars consider Ferruccio Busoni's 1925 *Doktor Faust* to be among the finest operas of the 20th century, an argument not bolstered by this dismally dull 2006 production from the Zurich Opera. The story is more than a little familiar—that wacky old Faust gets himself into the worst possible bargain imaginable and faces all eternity to rue his bad judgment. However, the well-worn tale receives a surprisingly stagnant retelling here, due in large part to director Klaus Michael Grüber's insistence on staging the proceedings with all of the speed and urgency of a George Romero zombie shuffle. Thomas Hampson as Faust at least tries to compensate for the stolid proceedings by rolling his eyes and frowning in the manner of a Mack Sennett villain, but Gregory Kunde as Mephistopheles maintains a near-motionless visage for too much of his stage time. Coupled with anachronistic costume and production design—Faust is first seen luxuriating in a Chinese-style silk robe and studying a bonsai tree while the students from Krakow arrive in cartoon-ish outfits that would be appropriate for the Joker's henchmen on the campy *Batman* TV series—Busoni's original composition barely survives, and that is only thanks to a subtle arrangement courtesy of conductor Philippe Jordan, whose baton action offers the only real sign of life here. Presented in DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo, DVD extras on this double-disc set include interviews with Hampson and Jordan. Not a necessary purchase. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Elvin Jones: Jazz Machine ★★★

(1993) 60 min. DVD: \$19.98. V.I.E.W. Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-8030-2346-4.

Born in 1927, drummer Elvin Jones became part of jazz history when he joined the John Coltrane Quartet in 1960. Not only was that