

mind. The full screen picture is in reasonably good condition for the most part, with sharp and relatively bright hues, and fairly accurate fleshtones. The monophonic sound is okay and the musical score is inevitably enjoyable. The full screen picture on *Weed* is more battered, but workable, and the monophonic sound is adequate. There is no captioning. Also featured are five trailers for drug-themed features, an 8-minute montage of ad materials for exploitation films set to the music of such films, a reasonably level-headed 18-minute educational short from 1967 entitled *LSD: Insight or Insanity?*, and a 22-minute educational film from 1969 about drug addiction, from caffeine to hard stuff, entitled *A Crutch for All Seasons*, which offers enjoyably acted case studies but few solutions beyond a recognition of the problem. The two shorts are in color, but are rather faded and battered.

We eat what we are

Few things are more scarier than clowns, and few clowns could be more frightening, on a witch-plumping-up-Hansel-and-Gretel level, than that demonic icon of corporate insidiousness, Ronald McDonald. Thus it was, with great trepidation, our pulse quickening as best it could through our plaque-infested arteries, that we spun up the two Warner Home Video releases, **McKids Adventures 1 Get Up and Go with Ronald** (UPC#01-2569596047, \$15) and **McKids Adventures 2 Treasure Hunt with Ronald** (UPC#012569596047, \$15). And suddenly he appeared—ahhh!—leaping out with his Freddy Krueger penal stripes, his ghost-white complexion and his blood-red permanent grin. Oh, the poor children he is beckoning! Trapped in what is clearly one of those deceptively enticing 'play areas' that are attached to many child-stuffing outlets (although the children later imagine that they are outdoors), the brainwashed babies turn to the camera with grins as horrendous as the clown's and introduce themselves, but the more they cooperate with his half-hearted pretenses of healthy activities, predicated upon the material consumption of sporting goods and such, the more the subliminal message screams out with frightening clarity—'McMuffin' 'McFlurry' 'McKids!'

Each 2006 program lasts a little over 30 minutes. The full screen picture has no greasy smudges or drink spills. The numbing stereophonic sound can hypnotize children in three languages, English, French and Spanish, and will trap audio-impaired youngsters with optional English, French or Spanish subtitles. 1, which includes a substantial mind-control music and dance sequence, has 3 minutes of background information on the show's production and a decent identify-the-musical-instruments game. 2, in which the children visit a 'library,' but only so they can read more about the joys of consumer materialism, and a 'zoo,' where it is demonstrated that eating is a natural process shared by all creatures, includes a 3-minute piece on the animals that might attack you in your backyard should you venture away from your television or local fast food emporium, and a minute-long segment on vocations, which begins, naturally, with the chillingly smiling, painted visage that personifies one of the world's largest employers. Truly, there is no escaping its grasp...

Demo-quality mix

An outstanding collection of what are in essence short films also creates a fairly definitive presentation of the work of avant-garde composer Earle Brown, especially when it is combined with a superb supplement about Brown's background on the Mode release, **Earle Brown: Tracer — Chamber Works 1952-1999 Ne(x)works/Christian Wolf** (UPC#7645930-17998, \$30). Running 74 minutes and mixed especially for the directional capabilities of 5.1-channel Dolby Digital and DTS sound, Brown's enigmatic pieces are performed by the Ne(x)works ensemble, but each is staged in a unique manner so that the 2007 program as a whole feels like it is a collection of different little movies exploring the dynamics of visual and audio juxtapositions. Okay, some of the pieces are initially indistinguishable from an orchestra warming up (and one, *Octet 1*, is just jumbled sounds delivered to a blank screen), but others have an immediate and accessible vitality, and it is from an appreciation of them that you then turn to the less coherent abstractions and begin to understand the clarity of their spirits. The music is truly aided by the visual presentation, however. Because of the complexity of the compositions, it is thrilling enough just to watch the musicians tackle them. No director is identified (Motria Sabat did the primary camera work and editing). The shifts from observing the musicians in whole to isolating aspects of their efforts, and the changes from standard camera angles to eccentric ones, don't so much guide you into the complexities of Brown's compositions as they create a kind of safety net to reassure you that there is meaning to the apparent madness. In one of the most striking segments, *Folio: March 1953*, a pianist rapidly works a few notes on one section of a piano's keyboard. When he shifts to a different section of the keyboard, the piano, in a quick dissolve, moves to a different part of the stage.

The full screen picture is very crisp and colors are accurate. The audio mix is outstanding, and if you are tired of showing off your stereo system with gunfights and explosions, then the DVD is an ideal demonstration program. The delivery is clear and separations are wonderfully distinctive. In some pieces, it was Brown's intention that performers be placed in the back or the sides of the auditorium, and the directional mix accommodates that wish. Also featured is an outstanding 37-minute conversation with Brown scholars

Susan Sollins, Cornelius Dufallo and Micah Silver, who talk about Brown's background, what Brown was striving for, and deconstructions of the various pieces.

A single double bass, twice

Occasionally hitting a button to bring on a burst of canned instrumental support, double bassist Miroslav Vitous performs his contemplative improvisations by himself for 55 minutes on **Live in Vienna Miroslav Vitous**, an MVD release (UPC#022891684190, \$20). Although his music has a strong linear drive, he is dexterous enough to sustain several levels of harmony at once, his fingers jumping up and down the strings in a determined and focused manner. A 2006 recording, Vitous' act is captured with a calm editing style and steady shifts between long shots and close-ups that accentuate the music effectively. 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 the dark background is solid, making it look a little like the clearly illuminated Vitous is playing in the center of nowhere. The quality of the stereo replication of the performance will depend upon the abilities of your sound system to sustain extremities, but tones are clear and the lowest notes do not appear to get too fuzzy. Also featured is a 4-minute interview with Vitous, who talks about his art.

Accompanied by Rebecca Woolcock on the piano, Duncan McTier explores the parameters of the double bass for 43 minutes on the MVD release, **Live in Vienna Duncan McTier** (UPC#022891683896, \$20), an appealing and contemplative concert program from 2005. The camera only seems to take in both his fingering and his bowing in very long shots that are too briefly inserted with the close-ups of one or the other, and even rarer are shots where you can see Woolcock's work while still viewing McTier (the best shots actually have McTier behind Woolcock's right, with the bow, through the tricks of telescopic lenses, looming back and forth above the keyboard, seeming to guide her hands). Nevertheless, the show is a peaceful exploration of harmony and melody, stripped down to the pleasantest of basics.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image is sharp and colors are accurate. The stereo sound has clear, effectively detailed tones. Also featured is a 2-minute interview with McTier and Woolcock.

Lewis clips

A 70-minute collection of film clips and interviews are presented on the Time Life release, **Jerry Lee Lewis Greatest Ever Performances** (\$20). The clips are organized by decade, and while they are in all likelihood not truly his 'greatest' performances, they are a choice collection of shakes, rattles and rock 'n roll, including clips from *The Steve Allen Show*, *The Dick Clark Show*, *Dewey Phillips' Pop Shop*, the British TV special, *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On*, and Ralph Emory's *Pop Goes the Country*. There are, inevitably, songs repeated in the collection, but enough chronological differential between the performances that viewers will appreciate the developments in Lewis' act. The interviews cover the basics of his childhood and musical interests, and the collection is closed out with a trailer for **High School Confidential**. The full screen picture is at the mercy of the archival sources, but is generally in good condition. The monophonic sound is solid and there is closed captioning.

Blues in a bar

A healthy collection of blues artists take turns on the stage of a crowded Minnesota bar in the vigorous 77-minute concert, **Blues Collection Live at Wilegbski's**, a Quantum Leap release (UPC#022891133896, \$20). Shot over several days, the 1984 program features John Lee Hooker, Dr. John, Lady Bianca, Valerie Washington, Archie Shepp & Ben Sidran (who seems to have a little trouble getting started, but makes up for it quickly enough), Willie & the Bees, and others, including what one assumes is a local group, the nerdy Minnesota Barking Ducks. Hooker's bit is probably the show's highlight, but every number gets your feet moving, even the rockin' Ducks. The full screen picture is aged but workable, with a mild haze and discernible fleshtones. The monophonic sound is solid. There is no captioning. Also featured are text profiles of the performers and essays on the blues.

Going in style

George Burns' last stage act, which he put together after he won his Oscar for **The Sunshine Boys**, was a combination of a few old songs, a few reliable jokes, and anecdotes about his recent filmmaking experiences, which would alter over the various months depending upon what he'd been working on. That basic show is what is presented on the Somerville House release, **George Burns Live in Concert** (UPC#880934124290, \$6), a presentation of a 1982 program shot in Hamilton, Ontario. The cadence of his patter is music in itself, and while there is plenty of humor in his words, it is the joy Burns manifests squatting on the penthouse of his towering show business career that represents the program's true appeal. He is old enough and spry enough to represent life itself, and to be envied, in a good way.

The full screen picture is a little yellowed and grainy, but workable. The stereo sound is mostly centered, with a very slight dimensionality. There is no captioning.