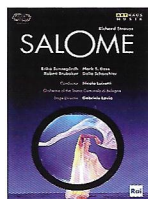


to jazz (on-again, off-again drummer Topper Headon), although other speakers point to the quality of the songwriting and the passion of the band's politics. Some praise manager Bernie Rhodes, but others believe he did more harm than good (Viv Albertine of the Slits dismisses him as "a rude, socially inept person"). While Strummer enjoyed a close relationship with Rhodes, he alienated so many others that the group fired him before eventually welcoming him back. The players' diverse interests would also cause problems, as Jones moved more into hip-hop, and Strummer gravitated towards rockabilly. When Headon became addicted to heroin, the band let him go. Strummer and bassist Paul Simonon followed up by firing Jones and bringing in new players (Vince White, Nick Sheppard, and Pete Howard) who only received a pittance for their efforts. When Strummer left, the band was essentially done, although Rhodes made a last-ditch effort to hire a new singer. Strummer (who died in 2002) and Jones would eventually make their peace—but not in time to save the Clash. A somewhat uneven account, this should still be considered a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Salome ★★1/2

(2010) 109 min. In German w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).

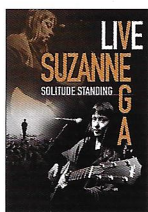


This innovative production of Richard Strauss's 1905 opera—inspired by Oscar Wilde's play—was staged by Teatro Comunale di Bologna and broadcast on Italian television in 2010. Stage director Gabriele Lavia opts for a modern-dress presentation, which works since the story's wild mix of envelope-pushing political, religious, and emotional obsessions carries a deep resonance in a contemporary world that is often terrified of ideas that dare to challenge the comfortable status quo. Set designer Alessandro Camera creates an astonishing opening sequence with a huge crack in the floor of the stage, symbolizing the pit where Jochanaan (John the Baptist to English-speaking viewers) is imprisoned—a scene suggesting that the complacency of Herod's court has been wrenched open by beliefs that the ruler futilely attempts to bury. Erika Sunnegårdh's Salome is a bold mix of physical sophistication and internal confusion: her fascination with the imprisoned Jochanaan (played with intellectual ferocity by a hirsute Mark S. Doss) and her inability to grasp his religious mania ignite a riot of feelings that ultimately leads to the famous sexually-charged dance that brutally seals the prophet's doom. The house orchestra shines under the baton of Nicola Luisotti in this fascinating interpretation of Strauss's celebrated work that boasts ample amounts of grace and style. Presented in

Dolby Digital 5.0 and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Suzanne Vega Live: Solitude Standing ★★★

(2003) 62 min. DVD: \$14.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



This intimate concert captures neo-folk singer Suzanne Vega live at the Rome Auditorium in 2003 (the same year that A&M released *Retrospective: The Best of Suzanne Vega*). While the two-story venue is large, Vega's calm, spare performance makes it feel more like a nightclub or coffee shop. To her 13-song set, Vega adds four poems, performing the latter a capella and the former with her own acoustic guitar, backed on bass by Michael Visceglia. Italian singer-songwriter Valerio Piccolo translates the poems, including "Italy in Spring" and "Anti-Hero," which are consistent with the imagistic lyrics found in songs such as "Small Blue Thing" and "Marlene on the Wall." Vega also performs the spoken-word torch song "Tom's Diner," to which the audience adds whistles and hand claps. Regarding the readings, Vega explains to the audience that she has previously gone on poetry tours through Italy and Spain, and there is actually little distinction between her conversational singing style and her soft, yet steady speaking voice. *Solitude Standing* offers a fine introduction to (or refresher course on) Vega, who here performs all of her best-known songs, including "Luka." Extras include a black-and-white slideshow that plays over a "Tom's Diner" remix, and an interview with Piccolo and Vega, who admits that, "the stage, for me, is like someone who is afraid of heights deciding to become a parachute jumper." Presented in stereo on DVD, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Turandot ★★★

(2013) 125 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



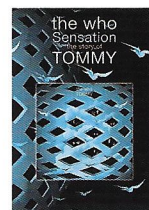
This 2013 production of Puccini's final opera from the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden is presented with the standard version of the score (completed by Franco Alfano), but is actually a revival of Andrei Serban's utterly traditional 1984 staging—newly directed here with little imagination by Andrew Sinclair. The sets and costumes remain impressive, but musically this is somewhat uneven. Lise Lindstrom possesses exactly the right sort of powerful and clear soprano voice to personify the cruel Chinese princess who uses riddles to condemn her suitors to death—and she masterfully conveys her character's steely resolve. Unfortunately, she's

paired with beefy Marco Berti, whose performance as Calaf—the man who eventually outwits Turandot and earns her love—hasn't improved much since his appearance in the Valencia production (VL-3/10). His tenor has the proper timbre but sounds oddly strained, and his acting is virtually nonexistent. The supporting cast is excellent (with Eri Nakamura a lovely, fragile Liù), and Henrik Nánási conducts smartly. If only it boasted a better Calaf, this would have been a stronger contender in a curiously weak field. Presented in DTS 5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD and Blu-ray, extras include a brief introduction to the opera, a behind-the-scenes featurette, and a cast gallery. As good a performance as most that are currently available, this is recommended, overall. (F. Swietek)

The Who—Sensation: The Story of Tommy

★★1/2

(2013) 113 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Vision (avail. from most distributors). 113 min.



Whether or not The Who's groundbreaking 1969 tri-fold double-LP was the first rock opera is debatable, but there's no doubt that *Tommy* instantly propelled the band to a new level of influence while sealing their legacy as rock pioneers. In this extended edition of a 2013 BBC TV documentary directed by Martin R. Smith, guitarist Pete Townshend and lead singer Roger Daltrey dig deep into their memory banks to tell the tale of their younger selves (accompanied by archival clips of the late other members—drummer Keith Moon and bassist John Entwistle). Townshend was tired of writing singles that he felt were underappreciated and wanted to steer the foursome toward a vanguard of progressive pop that blended his talent and intensely personal creative need. He poured multiple threads of his own life's journey into a compelling narrative suite about a "deaf, dumb, and blind kid" whose anguished existence is upended when he becomes a cult messiah. The exhaustive backstory presented here—including arcana about Townshend's tortured past and lots of insider info regarding the concept, composition, production, and impact of *Tommy*—is supplemented by talking-head remembrances from music critics and figures from The Who's inner circle, along with tantalizingly brief performance clips from their early career. These electrifying onstage moments make all the talk bearable but also leave one craving more of the real thing. Extras include footage from a 1969 *Beat Club* German TV episode (with studio performances and an interview with Townshend). Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is likely to appeal to only the most dedicated of Who fans. Optional. (T. Fry)