

20th Century Masters: The Best of Joe Jackson

★1/2
(2005) 21 min. DVD: \$7.98. Universal Music & Video (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



20th Century Masters: The Best of Smokey Robinson ★1/2

(2005) 24 min. DVD: \$7.98. Universal Music & Video (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.

In these half-hour-shy music video compilations from the *20th Century Masters* series, New Wave pioneer Joe Jackson and romantic soul crooner Smokey Robinson are showcased in five numbers each. *The Best of Joe Jackson* opens with the best cut: a no-frills live 1983 performance in Utrecht of Jackson's breakout 1979 hit "Is She Really Going Out With Him?" (off his landmark *Look Sharp!* album) performed a cappella with backup singers. The remaining four songs—"I'm the Man" and "It's Different for Girls" from 1979's follow-up *I'm the Man*, and "Steppin' Out" and "Breaking Us in Two," from Jackson's 1982 career redefining *Night and Day*—are all excellent songs (with the first two emphasizing Jackson's punk/New Wave roots and the last two sporting the lush smooth sound that the eclectic musician adopted in the early 1980s), but they're hampered by cheesy dawn-of-MTV storylines and/or primitive video effects that are now commonly found on even entry-level camcorders. *The Best of Smokey Robinson* is no better: of the five post-Miracles soul ballads featured here, the best is "Being With You" from the titular 1981 album, and the worst is "Ebony Eyes," a collaboration with the late Rick James from the latter's 1983 *Cold Blooded* album (the music video is a nonsensical and badly acted piece that finds Robinson and James crash-landing a WWII-era plane on a desert island and then being magically reunited with their main squeezes). The other three—"One Heartbeat" and "Just to See Her" from 1987's *One Heartbeat*, and "Everything You Touch," off 1990's *Love, Smokey*—are all musically solid and visually so-so. Even at \$7.98 each, these are disappointing compilations—presented in PCM stereo on extra-less discs—that in no way justify the "best" moniker, either in an audio or video sense. Neither title is recommended. [Note: also newly available in the *20th Century Masters* series are *The Best of Bobby Brown* and *The Best of the Cranberries*.] Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Antikrist ★★★★★

(2002) 95 min. In Danish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. Dacapo (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.

An unconventional opera by an obscure Danish composer might not seem an inviting prospect, but this strange, powerful piece by Rued Langgaard (1893-1952), writ-

ten and revised during the 1920s, proves an unlikely masterpiece. More modern mystery play than conventional narrative (and staged as such by Staffan Valdemar Holm), *Antikrist* resembles a liturgical exercise, with sequences portraying the initial unleashing and final destruction of the Antichrist bookending five scenes that spotlight his attributes—doubt, vainglory, despair, lust, and strife—before concluding in a heavenly chorus. Langgaard's text, which frequently uses neologisms and near gibberish, is clearly a critique of modernity's arrogance and loss of moral values, and the opulent music, oddly reminiscent of both Richard Strauss and Carl Nielsen, condemns contemporary artistic excess while also partially emulating the same. This 2002 production from the Royal Danish Opera, which came on the heels of its world premiere in Innsbruck three years earlier, was mounted in a perfect space—the Ridehuset in Copenhagen, a riding school specially converted for the purpose—and it's brilliantly sung and played by the Danish National Symphony under Thomas Dausgaard's inspired direction. More oratorio than opera, *Antikrist* is an extraordinary work that is likely to be embraced by adventurous music-lovers, especially those intoxicated by the idiom of Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Franz Schmidt, and Franz Schreker. The fluid camerawork and sound recording (with DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo options) are unfailingly superb, and the fine DVD extras here include a running audio commentary by Holm and Dausgaard, a briskly authoritative documentary on the opera's history, and the only known film of Langgaard—a snippet showing him directing a cathedral choir. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



Barrage: Vagabond Tales

★★★
(2005) 90 min. DVD: \$22.98. DPTV Media (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. ISBN: 1-933028-33-5.

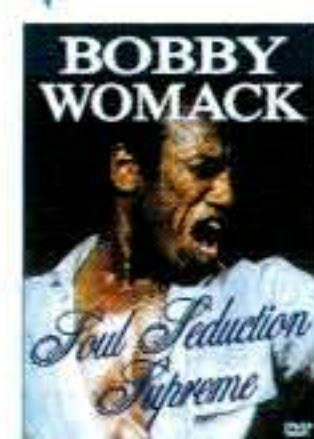
Developed by theatrical producers Barrage, this high-energy, PBS-aired show about two feuding Gypsy tribes features dance, song, and masterful performances from the 11 musicians/actors (including seven violinists) who evoke a broad range of characters, human and animal, to tell the story of *Vagabond Tales*. Although one might expect the show to maintain an Eastern European flavor, one of the pleasant surprises here is the seamless incorporation of popular classics such as Ray Charles' "Sweet Georgia Brown," Weather Report's "Birdland," and the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby," into the overall (albeit loose) narrative. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, this



14-song stage production featuring a versatile troupe of musicians-actors-dancers is sure to appeal to fans of *Riverdance* and similar shows. DVD extras include a behind-the-scenes documentary. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Bobby Womack: Soul Seduction Supreme

★★★
(2005) 77 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Soul star Bobby Womack blows away a thrilled audience with his raw vitality and mature vocal style in this concert filmed during the late '90s at London's Town & Country Club, marred only by tedious, life-on-the-road documentary segments inserted between the nine songs. Despite the constant loss of momentum, however, *Soul Seduction Supreme* offers some very fine moments, including the energetic R&B excitement of Womack's classic "Lookin' for a Love," the sensual funk of "Woman's Gotta Have It," and the epic "Harry Hippie" (a fine duet with Alltrina Grayson). The snap of "It's All Over Now," the midnight confessions of "I Wish He Didn't Trust Me So Much," and the overwhelming power of "How Can It Be?" also help make this Dolby Digital 5.1-backed concert a solid title for fellow soul survivors. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Buddy Rich: The Lost Tapes ★★★★★

(1984) 115 min. DVD: \$19.99. Lightyear Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



When the highlight of a concert video is a drum solo, that usually signals big trouble: but not when the stick-slinger in question is Buddy Rich. Though apparently not one of the most likeable guys around, Rich, who died in 1987 (a few years after this show was recorded), was arguably the greatest jazz drummer who ever lived, boasting a resume as a sideman (with such legends as Lester Young, Art Tatum, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, and many, many others) that would have assured his fame even if he'd never led his own band. *The Lost Tapes* (so named because the masters were thought to have been destroyed in a fire; recovered in 1990, they were painstakingly restored for this release, with fine DTS and Dolby Digital stereo sound) finds him on the bandstand at age 67, playing brilliantly just two years after heart bypass surgery. Rich was not a composer (tunes here include Duke Ellington's "Cotton Tail" and Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight"), and neither his arrangements nor his musicians were as good as, say, Basie's or Ellington's. But all is forgiven when the band launches into the