

Marillion: Marbles On the Road ★★★1/2

(2004) 74 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



British progressive rockers Marillion perform all the songs from their 2004 album *Marbles* (their best in years) live before an appreciative audience at London's Astoria. Counting Pink Floyd, the Beatles, and the Who among their influences, Marillion delivers complex, protean arrangements offset by accessible pop grandeur and classic, garage-rock rhythms. "Marbles I" suggests a cheeky homage to Floyd's "Us and Them," while "The Invisible Man" fluctuates from brooding tone poem to flamenco quirkiness and beyond. Singer-frontman Steve Hogarth is particularly appealing in the earnest pop of "Don't Hurt Yourself" and the lush "Fantastic Place," and one of the group's encores, "Between You and Me," is a splendid, rock and roll blowout. A fine show, all around, for fans of and newcomers to Marillion. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, DVD extras include promotional videos for two songs, "Don't Hurt Yourself" and "You're Gone," as well as a funny promo piece for the *Marbles* CD. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

The MC: Why We Do It

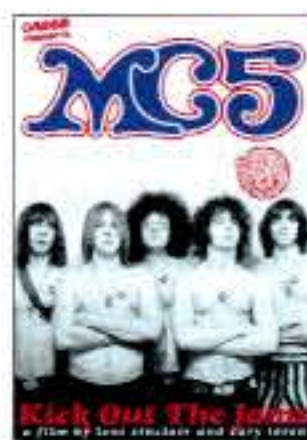
★★★
(2005) 77 min. DVD: \$19.99. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Narrated by Image award-winner Mekhi Phifer, Oscar-nominated filmmaker Peter Spiner's 2005 documentary explores the world of the illustrious MC (master of ceremonies), a.k.a. the person actually doing most of the talking on any given hip-hop track. Starting out with a condensed history of hip-hop (and breakdown of the four elements: DJing, breaking, graffiti art, and MCs), the program explores the evolution of emceeing and looks at the distinction between an MC and a rap artist. From geographical influences and the symbolism of "bling," to the preservation of hip-hop and the age-old query "Jay-Z or Nas?," *The MC: Why We Do It* features interview/archival footage of artists including 50 Cent, Twista, Common, James Brown, Ice T, LL Cool J, KRS-One (who pops up a lot and has his own freestyle segment), Eminem, Rakim, Kanye West, MC-Lyte, and more. Featuring exclusive performance clips and captivating interview segments, DVD extras include an "Artists Essentials" segment (on recommended albums), extended footage, PDF-format artist bios, and a photo gallery. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

MC5: Kick Out the Jams

★
(2005) 35 min. DVD: \$14.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



The cover blurb breathlessly describes this item as "an exploding kaleidoscopic mind-trip filled with sparkling surrealism that cuts to the heart of the musical-mystical-political-chemical nexus of the MC5 experience." Sounds thrilling. And now, here's a slightly more accurate take: *MC5: Kick Out the Jams* sucks—it's both unwatchable (the picture quality is godawful, and the "sparkling surrealism" is a lot of pretentious nonsense signifying nothing) and unlistenable. The Detroit-based band, renowned for its radical politics (yeah, right: their platform called for "rock 'n' roll, dope, and fucking in the streets"), may have been a powerful, even inspiring live act, but the sound quality—Dolby Digital 5.1 mix notwithstanding—couldn't be worse if it came from an 8-track cartridge your dog buried in a garbage bin. And then there's the music, which consists of relentless noise with nary a good tune within earshot ("audio performances were selected to complement the visuals"—meaning that the songs we see the band play are not the same ones we're listening to). The MC (or Motor City) 5 have been beatified since their late-'60s heyday as an "important" band that never got its due. But unlike others, including the Velvet Underground or Detroit's own Stooges, their reputation far exceeds their actual accomplishments. Still, there's one saving grace: *MC5: Kick Out the Jams* is only 35 minutes long, not including the incomprehensible 2003 bonus "interview" with John Sinclair, the rabble-rousing pothead who was also the group's manager. Not recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Moog ★★★

(2005) 70 min. DVD: \$24.98. Plexifilm (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Back in the day, it was pretty much impossible to say the word "synthesizer" without putting another word in front of it: "Moog." Since very little was known about the creator of the revolutionary new instrument, there were (and no doubt still are) many who thought "moog" was some sort of space age neologism. Correcting the misconception, writer-director Hans Fjellestad's documentary introduces viewers to genial, likeable Robert Moog, who—initially regarded as a suspicious maverick out to "destroy music"—has been working in the rarefied arena of electronic music for over half a century. Moog's synthesizer is not a computer; in fact, it's not digital at all, but rather an analog instrument with elec-

tronic components, and for Moog, it's about much more than voltages and currents: he senses a spiritual connection between human and machine, a philosophy that has clearly influenced not only his own work but that of the many, many musicians who have gradually transformed his synth from a novelty (originally used mostly for silly TV commercial music) into an amazingly versatile instrument used in virtually every musical genre, from classical (Walter, now Wendy, Carlos' *Switched-On Bach* was an important early milestone) to pop (the Beatles used it on *Abbey Road*). Brief performances by Keith Emerson, Yes' Rick Wakeman (who says that he used to compare playing the Moog to making love), P-Funk's Bernie Worrell, Nine Inch Nails' Charlie Clouser, and many others are nice, but it's Moog's engaging, unaffected presence that truly distinguishes this entertaining film. DVD extras include director's video notes, deleted scenes, interviews and additional performances. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

A Night in Havana: Dizzy Gillespie in Cuba

★★★
(1988) 84 min. DVD: \$26.95. Docurama (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. ISBN: 0-7670-8143-9.



As great a musician as the late Dizzy Gillespie was—and there is no argument about that—it's his ebullient, infectious personality more than his trumpet playing that really makes *A Night in Havana*. Not that there isn't some worthy musical content here: on the contrary, Gillespie's late-'80s trip to Cuba was more or less a return to his pioneering role in the creation of "Cubop" (the blend of Afro-Cuban rhythms and American jazz found in his late-'40s collaborations with musicians such as Machito and Chano Pozo, which resulted in classic tunes like "A Night in Tunisia" and "Manteca"). On this trip, the extended performance of "Manteca" at the Fifth International Jazz Festival in Havana is the musical high point, and Diz (who was then about 70) willingly takes a backseat to fellow trumpeter Arturo Sandoval, an amazing player with an impressive bravura technique. Although Gillespie still has plenty of chops, his offstage activities are actually more entertaining: he dances, he sings, he has an audience with Fidel Castro, he talks...boy, does he talk: "A trumpet sits in its (velvet-lined) case, surrounded by luxury...It lays there, waiting to mess somebody up when they pick it up to play it." Revealing that he doesn't know why his cheeks puff up like balloons when he blows, Gillespie does explain how he developed his instrument's distinctive, upward-angled look (he didn't want to anger some gangster types who wanted the horn pointed away from them); and as for technique, he says his power comes not from