

Austin City Limits Music Festival: Live from Austin, Texas 2004 ★★★

(2004) 2 discs. 124 min. DVD: \$19.98. Rhino Home Video (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



It's all about the music on this two-disc compilation from the 2004 live festival—inspired by the long-running public-television-aided musical showcase *Austin City Limits*—featuring 24 performers with as many songs, minimal stage banter, no interviews, no backstage stuff, and virtually no extras. One is left with two principal impressions from the performances culled from the three-day event: a) it was very hot, and b) the artists mostly lived up to the TV show's reputation for musical diversity. True, there's a lot of alternative and indie rock, especially on the first disc, where bands like Franz Ferdinand (overrated, to these ears), Sloan, The Soundtrack of Our Lives, and the Old 97's hold forth; but you'll also find the Blind Boys of Alabama doing their soulful gospel thing, Rosanne Cash reprising her country hit "Seven Year Ache," and Sheryl Crow's sunny "Light in Your Eyes." The more intriguing second disc includes the ever-funky Neville Brothers, a driving instrumental by former Phisherman Trey Anastasio, the reunited Pixies, Calexico's fine version of the Love classic "Alone Again Or," the Norah-Jones-with-grit Rachael Yamagata, and some other cool stuff. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo, this is recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Billie Holiday: The Ultimate Collection

★★★1/2
(2005) 60 min. DVD: \$14.98. Universal Music & Video (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.

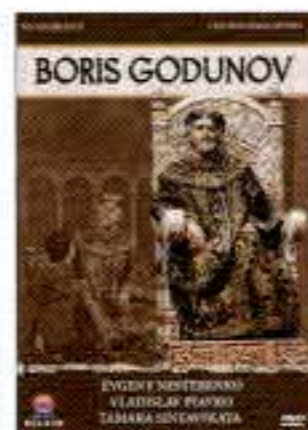


She didn't swing or scat like Ella Fitzgerald, and she lacked the operatic chops of Sarah Vaughan or the sheer power of Bessie Smith, but any jazzbo will tell you that Billie Holiday belonged in the same pantheon of vocal greats. Holiday's style and sound (characterized by singing behind the beat, a deep affinity for the blues, and a tendency to wear both her sophistication and her suffering on her sleeve) are well represented on this superb disc, which combines film and TV performances, audio clips, and an excellent set of bonus features. The eight filmed tracks chronicle the singer's path from lovely 20-year-old (a 1935 "music video" with Holiday acting and singing to the accompaniment of Duke Ellington's "Saddest Tale") to the drug-and-alcohol-ravaged casualty of 1958 (with a version of "What a Little Moonlight Can Do" from the long-forgotten TV show

Art Ford's Jazz Party). In between are two tunes with Louis Armstrong from the film *New Orleans*, three clips from the TV show *Stars of Jazz*, and what is no doubt Holiday's best-known performance on film, the 1957 "Fine and Mellow." The five audio-only performances, with Holiday leading her own orchestra and in various all-star settings, are also memorable. Bonus features include audio interviews (one from 1956 features Holiday and Mike Wallace), an exhaustive discography, and a beautifully rendered timeline that details her entire life, with links to photos and printed material. Only the omission of Holiday's renowned TV performance of "Strange Fruit" keeps this DVD from living up to its "ultimate" title. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Graham)

Boris Godunov ★★★

(1987) 165 min. In Russian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. Kultur International Films. Color cover. ISBN: 0-7697-7968-9.



At a time when most conductors favor one of Modest Mussorgsky's versions of this opera—about the rise and fall of an early 17th-century tsar who comes to power after murdering the true heir, but is ultimately overthrown by a monk pretending to be the dead man—it's rather refreshing to encounter Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's once-universally preferred but now neglected recasting, which may not be faithful to the more rugged original but has unmatched splendor, especially in the orchestral writing. Technically, this 1987 taping from Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre isn't "pure" Rimsky-Korsakov, since it reinserts the St. Basil sequence found in the Ippolitov-Ivanov edition, and reverses the order of the last two scenes in order to close with Boris' death. But even though all the tinkering in the world can't hide the fact that the piece is more a series of static tableaux than a successful drama, a performance as elaborate as this one effectively conveys *Boris Godunov's* monumental grandeur. Alexander Lazarev's conducting is powerful, the sets and costumes are impressive, and while bass Evgeny Nesterenko can't quite muster the punch he once did in the title role, he remains an imposing Boris. Unfortunately, apart from some of the other lower voices and the excellent chorus, the rest of the singing isn't nearly as strong—the female vocals are wobbly, and tenor Vladislav Piavko is strained as the pretender Dimitri. Still, this is an overall solid mounting of the Rimsky-Korsakov version, presented on an extra-less disc sporting decent Dolby Digital stereo sound. It's also a fine souvenir of the type of performance standards that prevailed in the waning years of the Soviet regime. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Buzzcocks: Live at Shepherds Bush Empire 2003 ★★★1/2

(2003) 96 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Although exhilarating in bite-sized doses, wall-to-wall three-chord punk can grow a bit tiresome over a 96-minute concert, even with the Buzzcocks, one of the best of the prototypical punk bands from the mid-to-late 1970s, captured live in this 2003 concert at London's Shepherds Bush Empire. Fronted by original members Pete Shelley and Steve Diggle on guitars and vocals, backed by Tony Barber on bass and Philip Barber on drums, the quartet take the stage for a blistering (if somewhat repetitive-sounding) 32-song set (drawn from over a quarter century's worth of releases, and featuring half the songs off their 2003 eponymous CD), with highlights including the early hits "Boredom," "Fast Cars," "You Say You Don't Love Me," and "Ever Fallen in Love With Someone (You Shouldn't Have Fallen in Love With)." Disappointingly, none of the synthesizer-driven songs from the Buzzcocks' 1999 release *Modern* are performed here (which would have added a touch of variety). Presented in reasonably clear Dolby Digital 5.1, the disc also boasts a 47-minute interview with Shelley and Diggle, an 18-minute behind-the-scenes of a Paris video shoot, a sound check, tour photo and poster montages, and a text bio. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Chick Corea: Rendezvous in New York ★★★★★

(2004) 10 discs. 459 min. DVD: \$99.99. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



At \$10 per disc, this massive set featuring Chick Corea, one of the finest jazz pianists of his or any other generation, and an array of outstanding players, is a major bargain. In celebration of his 60th birthday, Corea held court at New York's Blue Note over a period of several weeks, performing live with no less than nine different acoustic configurations: three duos, three trios, and a single quartet, quintet, and sextet. There are some wonderful combinations of music and musicians here, including delightful duets with Bobby McFerrin; the "Remembering Bud Powell Band," with an all-star lineup of Christian McBride (bass), Joshua Redman (tenor sax), Terence Blanchard (trumpet), 77-year-old drummer Roy Haynes, and Corea burning through three extended tunes by the late bop pianist; Origin, a sextet with younger, lesser-known players (including drummer Jeff Ballard and bassist Avishai Cohen from Corea's "new trio," who also appear on a separate disc),