

off the road when she sees him drive off with another woman and all three die in the crash. There are also interesting close-ups of exactly how strippers affix pasties to those critical portions of their anatomy, and a narrative piece about a woman who keeps killing her husbands so that the man she really likes will come to their funerals. But it is difficult to take any of the documentary seriously when the narrator is piping up with things such as, "Geneva, Switzerland, home of the Viking world..."

Both presentations are letterboxed, though without 16:9 enhancement. *Ecco* has an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, while *The Forbidden* is about 1.85:1. On both, the source material is a little battered but workable, with reasonably fresh colors, although it is the nature of both programs that the image quality changes from segment to segment. The monophonic sound is adequate and there is no captioning. Also featured are trailers for *Ecco* and three similar programs, a 4-minute montage of ad materials for mondo features set to radio ads for exploitation features, and a 32-minute black-and-white film about swingers with more softcore vignettes.

One fantastic moment after another

The old, grainy 16mm footage of the amazing all-star benefit staged by George Harrison in 1971, **The Concert for Bangladesh**, has undergone an outstanding image transfer on the two-platter Apple release (UPC6034-970480210, \$30). Yes, there is still natural grain in the full screen image, but the colors look so bright and fresh, details are so clear, and contrasts are so precise that the show seems like it was shot just yesterday. With equal dexterity, the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has also been sharpened and cleansed, conveying fantastic separation detail and power, which is even more precisely and powerfully rendered on the outstanding DTS track.

One of about a half dozen theatrical concert films that defined the music of its era, the 95-minute program gives way to one stellar artist after another, presenting familiar music executed with an assured spontaneity that is of equal or superior quality to studio recordings, pricked by the high-wire nature of the live performance. The 1972 feature is basically one fantastic moment after another, with Ravi Shankar, Leon Russell, Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan and more, jumping in to complete each other's songs.

There are optional English, French, Spanish and Portuguese subtitles for the banter between the songs ("On a oublié Billy Preston!"). The second platter has an excellent 71 minutes of retrospective documentaries, which include interview footage with Harrison and go over both the staging of the concert and the compilation of the film, and 10 minutes of every-scrap-is-precious unused performance footage.

Apple has also issued a *Limited Deluxe Edition* (UPC#603497-048120, \$50), which features the same programming material, along with a nice looking booklet, postcards and an original concert poster reprint as jacket inserts.

Ne regrette rien

Normally, 'tribute' concerts, where a relatively unknown artist attempts to evoke the lost glories of a great artist, are terribly embarrassing, largely because the works of that great artist are readily available on home video for virtual side-by-side comparisons, and the comparisons are never pretty. As stage programs, they seem to function as one step above a cover band and fill a certain need, but the moment the video camera gets turned on, someone should be merciful and turn out the lights. That said, **Piaf Her Story...Her Songs**, from Lionsgate (UPC#03139819441500, \$27), is tolerable entertainment. For one thing, there is not as much original material of Edith Piaf performing on film as there is of, say, Frank Sinatra or The Doors. The performer, Raquel Bitton, has a reasonably pretty voice, so that while she cannot imitate the emotional fluctuations that are an indelible part of Piaf's audio recordings, she can at least evoke the tunes themselves with a pleasingly melodic accuracy. And she is an enthusiastic Piaf fan, steeped in Piaf lore, which she shares with her audience between each number and which is supplemented, in the 94-minute program, by footage of her sharing tales with Piaf's former associates and visiting Piaf's former haunts. Every song, in fact, is separated from the next song by such material, but that allows each tune to linger a little longer in your brain before the next one takes over.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image is reasonably crisp and accurately colored. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has an adept clarity. The show is partially in English, but mostly in French and is supported by optional English and Spanish subtitles.

Punk performances

The punk rock band, The Plasmatics, often tended to emphasize performance art over musicianship, but they became a defining component of their genre anyway, and the significance of their contribution is borne out in the excellent MVD Visual release, **Wendy O. Williams and the Plasmatics The DVD Ten Years of Revolutionary Rock 'N' Roll** (UPC#02289145-2294, \$20). Indeed, if someone from Hollywood gets a hold of the disc, there could well be a biographical drama down the road a bit, as the story of Williams' climb to the top, her run-ins with law enforcement officials in various localities simply because she was an accessible physical representation of her music, and the basic cinematic appeal of her act (she would chainsaw guitars and blowup automobiles on stage, among other things), in the right hands, would make at the very least a solid cult movie

with lasting popularity among succeeding generations of the alienated and rebellious. Anyway, the DVD is terrific. Her death is not mentioned, but there is a comprehensive 119-minute documentary about the band, beginning with Williams' own background and the band's creation, and then moving through every major booking and recording the band had over the course of their decade (1978 to 1988) in the spotlight. The superbly designed program combines interviews and archival footage but also uses extensive text materials that are presented while something related but different is being spoken in voiceover. In other words, you may want to have your Pause button close by and it may take somewhat longer than two hours to get through the rich amount of material the program offers. There is also plenty of music in the program, presented in a solid stereo, with enough analysis that a viewer can readily look beyond the stage stunts and really begin to hear the legitimate forcefulness in the band's guitar work and even appreciate the design and energy of Williams' full-throttle vocals. The struggles the band had with record labels, prudish civic leaders, and their own intransigence when it came to compromise provides a solid narrative to the program and makes each chronological advancement fascinating.

Solidifying the DVD's authoritative scope, there are also 76 minutes of music clips, including live performances, music videos, and bootleg camcorder recordings, giving the viewer a full sense of the band's range and a solid idea of what their concerts were like. 5 minutes of interview outtakes are included as well. There is no captioning. The full screen picture varies in quality from clip to clip, but is in reasonably decent condition.

A somewhat more melodic punk band is showcased in the 1982 concert program, **Bad Brains Live at CBGB 1982**, another MVD release (UPC#022891449799, \$17). Not ska, but a genuine mix of reggae and punk, the first number in the 58-minute program seems utterly exhausting, with the dreadlocked lead singer screaming his lungs out and shaking like a rag doll in the mouth of a boisterous puppy, but then the band keeps going and going, shouting and rocking their way through almost two-dozen numbers, even slowing down for some reggae-like tunes, as fans climb onto the stage and then run and jump onto other fans, and otherwise shake and bounce in delirious collusion. Despite the apparent anarchy of both the crowd and the performances, the music sounds terrific, with a fantastic beat and genuine notations of melodic shifting. Even the vocals are precisely timed and modulated, so that the apparent exhaustion morphs quickly into unrestrained exuberance. If you can make them out, the lyrics are also inspired, with a strong political undertone. It's a wonderful show, and compared to Bad Brains, the Plasmatics look like wannabe posers.

The full screen picture is grainy but clear, with reasonably fresh colors. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a general dimensionality and is a decent replication of the numbed nature inherent in the venue's audio set up. There is no captioning. Also featured are 2 minutes of interviews with fans from 1982 and a 6-minute reggae-style number presented in audio-only format.

Life of Entwistle

A profile of the late bass player for the rock group, The Who, **John Entwistle An Ox's Tale**, is available from Act I Entertainment and Image Entertainment (UPC#014381185027, \$18). Running 78 minutes, the 2006 documentary goes over Entwistle's entire career and includes a healthy amount of interview footage with him that was shot shortly before he passed away. There are plenty of music clips, too, as well as great archival footage and testimonials by many other important pop music figures. The show isn't trying to be an exposé, but it does convey a reasonably clear picture of what Entwistle was like and what he contributed to modern culture.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The image transfer is sharp. The stereo sound is mostly centered, often replicating rare live recordings, and is reasonably strong. There is no captioning. Included as well are 30 minutes of concert footage from later in Entwistle's career, 7 minutes of him jamming in his living room, and a touching 5-minute interview with his son, Chris, who describes the last time he spoke to his father.

Dusting off old Cars

A small hardcover book of lyrics and pictures contains a DVD nestled into one sleeve and a CD nestled into the other on the Docurama release, **The Cars Unlocked** (UPC#767685983638, \$30). The 56-minute live performance CD is of lackluster quality. The 72-minute DVD presentation of what are generally the same concert numbers (there are some differences between the two), however, are more worthwhile, as a record of one of the founding New Wave bands, showing how audiences responded to their music and how the group's personality dynamics manifested in the music on the stage. The clips on the DVD range from 1978 to 1987. Without the elaborate music videos, the band looks and feels a little more like an average rock group and not one taking the pole position on a new track, but they do generate a visual excitement that accentuates their music effectively.

The full screen picture is often grainy and occasionally blurry, an indication of the general obscurity of the material. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound does not have the clarity of the band's studio recordings, but details are distinctive and there is a strong, general dimensionality. There is no captioning. Also featured are an additional 24 minutes of numbers not appearing in the main program.