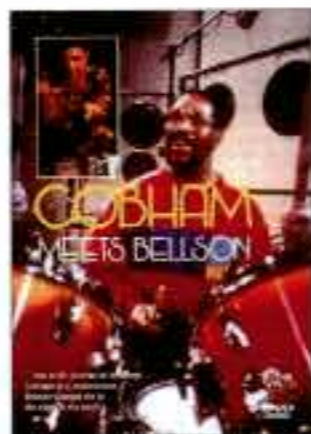


during "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," but by and large this is no more than an average gig, sometimes hampered by a thin audio mix (notwithstanding that it is in Dolby Digital 5.1). Of course, median-level Johnny Cash is still a whole lot better than plenty of other artists at their best, so consider this a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Cobham Meets Bellson

★★★1/2

(1984) 37 min. DVD: \$19.98. V.I.E.W. Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-8030-2303-0.

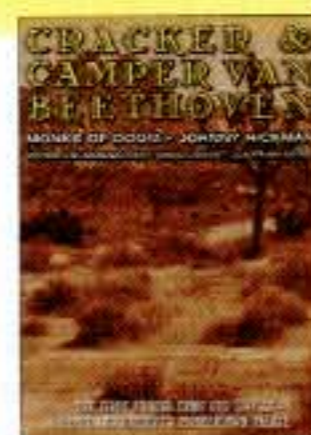


Billed as "an epic drum battle between jazz titans," this 1984 concert featuring rock-fusion heavyweight Billy Cobham (Mahavishnu Orchestra) sitting in with the Louie Bellson Big Band is clearly aimed at dyed-in-the-wool drum freaks. The where and exact when of this show is never made clear, but the concept—the old master meeting up with the young lion—is intriguing. And when the two trade four-bar blasts, leaving the band behind, things get pretty thrilling. Cobham is absolutely at the top of his game, but the much older Bellson doesn't seem to have trouble keeping up, never breaking a sweat or doffing his Mickey Mouse pullover. Their duet playing with the band is fun, as well, but things drop off fast during a long, improvised "conversation," where Bellson seems all too willing to follow Cobham's lead, while a persistent audio hiss leaves the viewer straining to hear when the drummers go from crash-and-bang to tap-and-touch. Both, however, appear to be having the time of their lives, and fans of kit drumming are likely to enjoy seeing two wildly talented drummers showing off, despite the technical limitations of this Dolby Digital stereo presentation. DVD extras include a bonus clip and text bios. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (M. Moore)

Cracker & Camper van Beethoven: The First Annual Camp Out Live

★★★★

(2005) 129 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



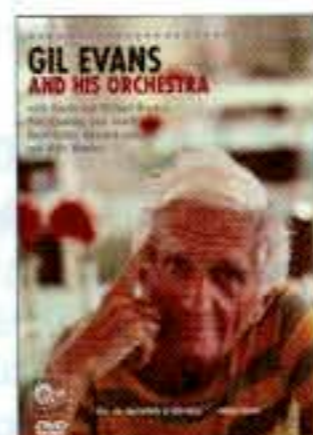
You've gotta love a band with song titles like "Take the Skinheads Bowling." Still, the loose, politically-flavored rock of Camper van Beethoven and Cracker isn't everyone's cup of tea—only Cracker's "Low," which closes out that band's set, ever received much airplay. So, the uninitiated might have a tough time getting through this September 2005 concert filmed at the two-day Camp Out at Pioneertown, CA, when past and present members of founder/guitarist David Lowery's two most famous bands, plus numerous offshoots and side projects (notably Monks of Doom), as well as collabo-

rators, joined together for a series of indoor and outdoor shows that culminated with a jam session affectionately titled "Porchstock," featuring Lowery, Cracker guitarist Johnny Hickman, and a few others bluegrassing it up on the back porch. Featuring wonderfully spirited performances of 20-plus songs that feature various combinations of alternative, country, blues, and rock, the visuals are a bit bumpy for this down-and-dirty film but the Dolby Digital 5.1 sound is solid. Even if you're not a particular fan of Camper van Beethoven or Cracker, there's enough musical diversity running through this ragged rock 'n' roll offering to keep things consistently interesting. Recommended. Aud: P. (M. Moore)

Gil Evans and His Orchestra

★★★1/2

(1990) 57 min. DVD: \$19.98. V.I.E.W. Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-8030-2301-4.



Gil Evans (1912-1988) was an important figure in the development of American big band jazz—not only as a pianist, composer, and arranger—but as a bandleader as well, and this live concert of him and his orchestra (stellar performers all) is certainly a significant record of his artistry. Taped in Switzerland (precisely where and when isn't spelled out: the original copyright is given as 1990, but since Evans died in 1988, the concert obviously occurred some years earlier), there's some discrepancy between the track list noted on the DVD box and menu and what's actually included on the disc: the listed "Gone" and "Eleven" are nowhere to be found, so there are only eight distinct numbers overall, including "Hotel Me," "Stone Free," "Copenhagen Sights," and "Variation on the Misery." Given the quality of the music, it's a pity that the Dolby Digital sound and visuals are substandard (the sound lacks richness and focus, while the camerawork is rather blurred and washed-out looking). Still, this is an "historical" release with some unavoidable technical limitations, so viewers familiar with V.I.E.W. Video's series of jazz DVDs will undoubtedly make allowances. DVD extras include text bios. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)

John Prine: Live on Soundstage 1980

★★★★

(1980) 60 min. DVD: \$19.98. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 0-7389-3674-X.

John Prine, a respected songwriter who would've been labeled "alt-country" if the term had existed during his 1970s heyday, serves up a fine baker's dozen set in this archival 1980 episode from the PBS-aired concert series *Soundstage*. Backed by a fine band, Prine's first few songs, interrupted by footage of him driving around his native Maywood, IL, lack a little fire, but things

amp up nicely with an intense performance of his hit "Angel from Montgomery" (later covered by John Denver and Bonnie Raitt, among others). Prine's between-songs banter reveals just how personal his lyrics are, and how much of Maywood is featured in the songs—such as the retirement-home ladies who inspired another Prine hit, "Hello in There." The band is joined for two songs by rockabilly crooner Billy Lee Riley, who paired with Prine on the then-current album "Pink Cadillac," but the draw here is definitely Prine alone with his band, rocking on songs like "Ubangi Stomp" and "Saigon," while also serving up a riveting rendition of "Bruised Orange." Offering a good illustration of what Kris Kristofferson meant when he said, "If God's got a favorite songwriter, I think it's John Prine," this Dolby Digital 5.1 sound-enhanced concert is recommended. Aud: P. (M. Moore)



La Bohème

★★★★1/2

(2006) 2 discs. 149 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$39.99 (booklet included). Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

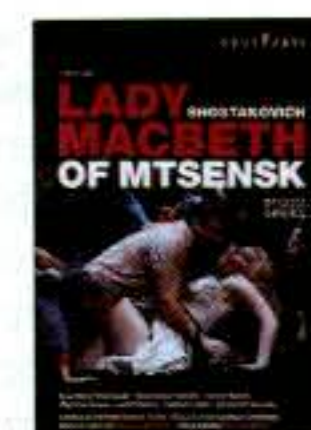


Filmed at Madrid's Teatro Royal, this entertaining 2006 production of *La Bohème*—Puccini's popular tale of struggling artists coping with life and love—updates the action to the turn of the 20th century. The familiar story of the artist Rodolfo and his tragic love affair with the seamstress Mimi features charming and authentic sets, an attractive cast with fine acting as well as singing talent, and direction that effectively brings out the comic elements of the plot, all presented in a lively, fast-paced production. Aquiles Machado as Rodolfo, Fabio Maria Capitanucci as Marcello, David Menéndez as Schaunard, Felipe Bou as Colline, and Laura Giordano as Musetta, are all strong, and Inva Mula as Mimi delivers a truly riveting performance (beautiful, frail, and boasting a vocal purity that makes her simplicity touching). Ably supporting the cast is the Madrid Symphony Orchestra under Jesús López Cobos. Presented in DTS and LCPM stereo, DVD extras include a cast gallery, synopsis, and interviews. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (J. Reed)

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk

★★★★

(2006) 2 discs. 236 min. In Russian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$45.98 (booklet included). Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Dmitri Shostakovich's 1934 opera holds an important place in Soviet history as it ushered in the regime's