

9, and *Beethoven: Symphonies 4 & 7*. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Blondie ★★★

(1979) 41 min. DVD: \$14.99. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Whether this 1979 concert filmed at Glasgow's Apollo Theatre came at the "peak of Blondie's success" or not (for my money, the New York band's finest hour didn't arrive until the release of the masterwork LP *Autoamerican* in 1981—but that's admittedly a minority opinion), there's no denying the infectious foot-tapping (or pogo-ing, if that's your style) appeal of "Dreaming," "Union City Blue," "Atomic," "Heart of Glass," and "Hanging on the Telephone." Fronted by signature platinum blonde singer Debbie Harry, the band serves up 12 tunes altogether, mostly drawn from their third and fourth albums (1978's *Parallel Lines* and 1979's *Eat to the Beat*). Looking and sounding a little zombie-ish for the first third of this rather short 41-minute set, Harry eventually loosens up both physically and vocally, engaging the appreciative crowd for a strong closing that features the bagpipe-introduced "Sunday Girl." Notably absent here are "One Way or Another" and "Die Young Stay Pretty," and the Dolby Digital stereo is serviceable but no better. Still, given Blondie's importance as one of the fore-runners (and most commercially successful) of the New Wave '80s bands, combined with the low price, this nostalgic blast from the past is recommended. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Celia Cruz: Azucar!

★★★

(2003) 2 discs. 109 min. DVD: \$24.99. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Known as the "Queen of Salsa," Cuban-born singer Celia Cruz died in July 2003, but not before she was able to attend and take part in this lengthy, glittery tribute to a career that spanned over 50 years and at least that many albums. In truth, many mainstream popular music fans will know little or nothing about her (other than her brief role in the '91 film *The Mambo Kings*, maybe), but in the Spanish-language music world Cruz was a legend, a fact borne out by the appearances of some of the genre's biggest names, ranging from hosts Marc Anthony and Gloria Estefan to established stars such as Jose Feliciano, Ana Gabriel, Luis Enrique, and American pop divas Gloria Gaynor and Patti LaBelle (hell, even J. Lo delivers a taped homage). One's appreciation for this lavish, two-disc set will no doubt be in direct proportion to one's love of Latin music (indeed, almost everything is in Spanish, with English subtitles), but the

producers certainly didn't skimp. The tribute concert (presented in excellent Dolby Digital 5.1 sound as well as stereo) lasts nearly two hours and contains some 20 songs, including what's touted as Cruz's final live performance; meanwhile, the DVD bonus features occupy an entire disc of their own and include endless artist tributes, rehearsal footage, Oscar-style red-carpet interviews before the show, etc. A lot of this stuff is way too slick for this particular reviewer's taste, but Latin lovers of both genders and all ages will enjoy. Recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Così Fan Tutte ★★1/2

(2003) 2 discs. 179 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. TDK (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.



A very modern staging is tied to a decidedly old-fashioned reading of the score in this 2001 performance of Mozart's wonderful 1790 *dramma giocoso* from the Berlin Staatsoper. Director Doris Dörrie has updated the frothy plot—concerning two fellows who, on a bet, test the fidelity of their sweethearts by disguising themselves and romancing each other's fiancées—to the "free love" 1970s, with the men portrayed as businessmen who take on the role of hippies to fool (and attract) the girls. Visually, the result is a garish operatic version of *Hair*, and while it hardly goes as far, the viewer may still be taken aback when Guglielmo strips down to his underpants at one point or Ferrando unbuttons Dorabella's dress to scrawl an initial on her bra (which Guglielmo later brandishes as a trophy of conquest). On the podium, however, Daniel Barenboim takes an approach that might charitably be described as traditional, favoring slow tempi and such heavy ritards at the close of individual scenes that some final chords sound positively elephantine (the recitatives are also taken at a very ponderous pace). The singing is generally good, though the Despina is a bit pallid, and the sound—with DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo options—is generally fine, although the voices recede badly when the singers amble to the right and left reaches of the crosswalk surrounding the orchestra. Overall, this is a performance that lacks fizz, and the staging might encourage you to close your eyes while listening (hardly a great selling point for a DVD). An optional purchase, at best. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Cramps: Live at Napa State Mental Hospital ★★

(1978) 20 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



On June 13, 1978, psycho-billy punk rock band The Cramps performed a free concert

before an apparently appreciative audience at the Napa State Mental Institute. The warning on the back of the box says: "this is rough punk rock footage! Includes some audio-visual distortion." Translation: looks and sounds godawful (the burned-in obnoxious "Target Video 1984" copyright that runs throughout doesn't help). Led by Lux Interior (Erick Purkhiser), a lanky anemic-looking Elvis channeler, the Cramps—who would not really arrive on the punk scene until 1979—blaze through a mercifully short (20 minutes) six-song set that includes later hits (relatively speaking, of course) such as "Human Fly," "The Way I Walk," "Domino," and "Love Me," and if the two inmate groupies hanging on Lux during "Twist and Shout" are any indication, love him they do. During the final credits, we're told that what we've just witnessed is "strictly a documentary [sic]." DVD extras include an additional 32 minutes of Target-embellished video of a handful of no-name acts like the "legendary [sic] group" Throbbing Gristle. Not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (R. Pitman)

Dave Gahan: Live Monsters ★★★

(2004) 78 min. DVD: \$19.99. Warner Strategic Marketing (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Recorded live at the Olympia in Paris, France, this July 2003 concert features Depeche Mode frontman Dave Gahan performing a 15-song set, presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo. Dressed in a pinstriped black vest (which he later strips off because "it's getting hot in here!"), and ready to sweat, stagger, and gyrate, Gahan looks a bit drained and lean (not surprising after beating a heroin addiction and an attempted suicide), but his haunting, distinctive vocal style definitely gets a workout. Against effectually dramatic and minimal lighting, Gahan and a crisp, clear backing band (including former Porno for Pyros bassist Martyn LeNoble) tackle all 10 tracks from *Paper Monsters*, including "Hold On," the pretty, soulful "Bitter Apple," and the harmonica-backed "Black and Blue Again." Imploring the crowd to chime in a bit more often than necessary (especially annoying during choruses), Gahan's stage antics include ground-writhing, clapping, and mike theatrics; yet, even though he can't quite hold the same notes as in his younger days, Gahan's singing ability cannot be denied, especially when he dips into his reserve tank for a dynamic rendition of the classic "Personal Jesus," as well as two solid encores (DM's "I Feel You" and "Never Let Me Down Again"). DVD extras include a three-song acoustic set and the short film "Live Monsters," with band member interviews. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams)