

First Love: A Historic Gathering of Jesus Music Pioneers ★★★1/2

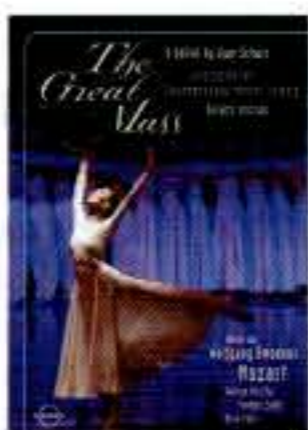
(2005) 2 discs. 211 min. DVD: \$34.95 (two bonus audio CDs included). Exploration Films (avail. from most distributors). PPR. Color cover.



Evolving out of the tumult of the Vietnam protest era of the late 1960s and early '70s, the "Jesus Movement" found born-again Christian rock and folk musicians singing about their newfound faith in a style initially known as "Jesus Music" (which later became contemporary Christian). The excellently-produced *First Love: A Historic Gathering of Jesus Music Pioneers* features 16 of these early artists, who met at a Southern California mountain retreat to share their music and conversion stories. Combining archival footage and stills of the musicians—including Randy Matthews, Annie Herring, The Second Chapter of Acts, Love Song, and Barry McGuire ("Eve of Destruction")—to lend historical and social context, the program features 30 performances as well as interviews with the artists themselves, who talk about the free-love and drug culture they abandoned. Filling a unique niche focusing on early Christian folk rock, the double-disc *First Love* also includes two bonus audio CDs. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (L. Stevens)

The Great Mass: A Ballet by Uwe Scholz ★★★

(2005) 130 min. DVD: \$32.98 (booklet included). EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.

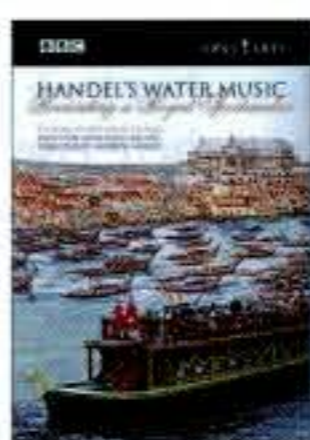


Operating on the premise that music, stripped of conventional forms of worship, can still move us spiritually, choreographer Uwe Scholz conceived this program combining Mozart's Great Mass in C minor (with Gregorian chant), the music of modern composers György Kurtág and Thomas Jahn, and the words of poet Paul Celan, to present "a ballet that dispenses with the gestures associated with the act of worship and yet repeatedly storms the gates of heaven itself." Filmed live at the Leipzig Opera in June 2005 in memoriam to Scholz (1958-2004), this performance features members of the Leipzig Ballet, the chorus of the Leipzig Opera (with soprano, tenor, and bass soloists), and the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig under the baton of Balázs Kocsár. *The Great Mass* offers a study in contrasts: dancers in the more ethereal movements are clad in white against a dark background, while those in the starkly modern movements wear black, with the lighting itself playing a role—forming symbolic patterns to great effect. The program concludes with a moving tribute to Scholz, in which the dancers return dressed in casual attire to express their sorrow and listen to a poetic tribute to the late

choreographer. Presented in PCM stereo, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (J. Reed)

Handel's Water Music: Recreating a Royal Spectacular ★★★1/2

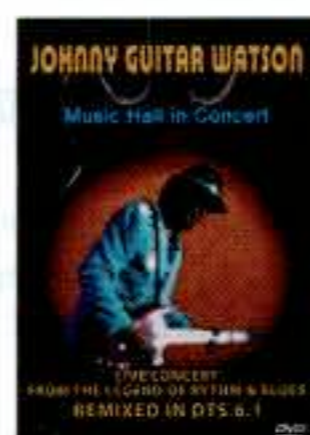
(2003) 78 min. DVD: \$28.98 (booklet included). BBC Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.



Legend has it that Handel wrote his *Water Music*—several suites of orchestral dance movements originally performed aboard a boat—in 1715 as a peace offering to King George I, whose Hanoverian court the composer deserted to seek greener pastures in England. It's a charming but apocryphal tale: as this BBC documentary reports, *Water Music* was probably composed for a royal procession down the Thames in 1717, designed to refurbish the monarch's public presence in the face of attempts by the ambitious Prince of Wales to overshadow his father. Whatever the reasons behind its creation, the score remains, along with *Messiah*, among the baroque master's best loved, so it isn't surprising that a group of British scholars and musicians should have attempted to recreate the first performance as accurately as possible floating along the original route. This film documents that project, following the research, designing of costumes, and building of an authentic-looking barge (along with such incidentals as candle-stands that wouldn't be extinguished by a breeze), culminating with the performance of some 20 minutes of the score—the parts suitable for outdoors, featuring trumpets and horns—by The English Concert, a fine original-instrument group, as they cruise down the river wearing wigs and dressed in 18th-century garb. Presented in both DTS and LCPM stereo, it's a pity that all of Handel's music isn't included, but apart from that the result here is both informative and delightful. DVD extras include three uninterrupted performances of the suite. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Johnny Guitar Watson: Music Hall in Concert ★★★1/2

(1993) 60 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.

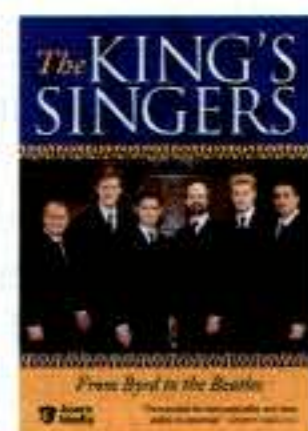


Born in Houston in 1935, Johnny Guitar Watson was given his first guitar by his grandfather, who reportedly admonished him not to play the blues; of course, inspired by fellow fret-wranglers T-Bone Walker and Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Watson promptly did exactly that. He later influenced the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa (Watson appears on his *One Size Fits All* album), was credited with pio-

neering the use of effects like feedback, and had his recordings sampled by Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre. Not that you'd glean any of that from this serviceable but less-than-inspiring German concert (recorded in 1993, three years before his death), which finds Watson and his very tight band performing eight tunes that are much closer to soul and R&B than the blues. Having adopted a pimp-like pose to match his funky musical approach in the '70s, Watson enjoyed a modicum of success with songs such as "Real Mother For Ya" and "Superman Lover," both of which are featured here (along with "Gangster of Love," which baby boomers may recognize from Steve Miller's cover version on the 1968 *Sailor* album). And while his blues-drenched playing is definitely legit, Watson doesn't spend a whole lot of time on guitar, preferring to yield the solo spotlight to his three fine horn players and a couple of keyboardists. All in all, *Johnny Guitar Watson: Music Hall in Concert* is reasonably entertaining but unlikely to set anyone's world on fire. Optional. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

The King's Singers: From Byrd to the Beatles ★★★

(2005) 93 min. DVD: \$19.99. Acorn Media (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. ISBN: 1-56938-865-2.



A live London concert featuring the *a cappella* male sextet (who sing parts from counter-tenor to bass) made up of former boy choristers at King's College, Cambridge, the music in *The King's Singers: From Byrd to the Beatles* runs the gamut from the baroque era to contemporary times. The program begins with English, French, and Italian religious and secular madrigals, moves on to 19th and 20th-century compositions by Kodály, Reger, and Kreek, and concludes with some of the group's signature pieces—close-harmony arrangements of spirituals, traditional ballads, and songs by the likes of Billy Joel and the Beatles, as well as a wordless version of the overture to Rossini's *Barber of Seville* that may remind you of the Swingle Singers. Inserted throughout are segments documenting the recording of a remarkable 40-part motet, *Spem in Alium*, by the 16th-century composer Thomas Tallis, a project that requires each man to sing numerous vocal lines, after which the individual tracks are overdubbed to form the whole (the entire piece is offered at the close, with split-screen effects used to show who's singing). The expertise of the performances is evident even when—like the Tallis piece, or the encore "Masterpiece" (consisting of comic movements in the styles of composers from Bach to Cage)—they seem a bit of a stunt. Presented in DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo, this is warmly recommended. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)