

An enchanted evening

A half-acted recital of almost the complete stage show is presented on **Rodgers & Hammerstein's South Pacific in Concert from Carnegie Hall**, a Rhino release (UPC#603477163120, \$20). Contrary to the jacket cover, the program runs 112 minutes, not 172 minutes, but there are significant chunks of dialog presented along with the songs. You have to imagine the palm trees, and most of the cast are in tuxedos and gowns, but they hug and kiss and otherwise play out their characters for the audience. Reba McEntire stars, with Brian Stokes Mitchell, Jason Danieley, Lillias White and, gamely trying to keep up with the singers, Alec Baldwin. McEntire is unable to convey the vocal pluck so familiar in Mary Martin's original cast recording, but she is the hardest working and most enthusiastic member of the ensemble, and readily erases those memories of Glenn Close that can still make you cringe every time you reach for a bottle of shampoo. With all of the stage business backing up the performances, the program is visually appealing—and Baldwin's expressions as he works his way around the lyrics of his songs are priceless. The extensive Orchestra of St. Luke's also gives the show a sense of weight and grandeur it would be unable to achieve in a standard Broadway theater.

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 vividly sharp. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a thorough dimensionality and rich tones. There is no captioning.

Roll over, Beethoven

The concert sequences on the Image Entertainment release, **Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll** (UPC#014381308020, \$50), are outstanding. Berry is jaggedly sharp in the 1987 program, and each chord he plays is searing, and yet his vocals flow over the top of the music like mercury, following every contour. He is also backed by an incredible array of all-stars, including Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and others. But the 120-minute feature goes well beyond just a simple concert program. The director, Taylor Hackford, follows Berry around his hometown and gets a good feel for his personality and his past, while others reflect upon their experiences with him and analyze the nature of his music. Hackford also supplies a 4-minute introduction, discussing the challenges of trying to pin Berry down and elicit his cooperation. The picture is presented in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. It looks like it was shot yesterday. The image is vivid and hues are precise. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is equally crisp, with outstanding separation detail, and there is a DTS track with even more power and definition. There is no captioning. A trailer is also included.

If that weren't enough, there is a second platter featuring 54 minutes of rousing concert and rehearsal sequences, and 66 minutes of fascinating retrospective interviews that further describe the challenges of sustaining Berry's cooperation over the course of the shoot.

Jazz clips

A clip or two has shown up on DVD before, but for the most part, the excerpts from films, shorts and TV broadcasts collected in the MVD **Jazz Voice** series are as rare as they are captivating, and even the others are well worth watching again. In fact, although they have split the collection in two, it is difficult to imagine obtaining **Jazz Voice The Ladies Sing Jazz Vol.1** (UPC#022891805991, \$20) without getting **Jazz Voice The Ladies Sing Jazz Vol.2** (UPC#0228918097, \$20) as well. The 61-minute **Vol.1** contains eight songs from Billie Holiday (the highpoint of both DVDs, she sits with a band and sings several numbers), six from Dinah Washington, six from (a very young) Nina Simone, two from Anita O'Day and an Ethel Waters number. **Vol.2** runs 68 minutes and contains six numbers from Sarah Vaughan, three from Ella Fitzgerald, four from Carmen McRae, three from June Christy, two from Peggy Lee, two from Lena Horne and one from Helen Humes. Often, the singers are backed up by major bands and performers, ranging from Benny Goodman to Dizzy Gillespie. The sources of some of the clips are identified, but most are not. Most of the full screen clips are in black and white, but a few are in color on **Vol.2**. Generally the picture quality is workable, though it always seems like the most worn down segments are also the most precious. The monophonic sound is usually a little scratchy or otherwise aged, but not to the point where it interferes with your relaxation. There is no captioning.

It is harder to relax with MVD's **Jazz Shorts from the East Coast, Vol.1** (UPC#022891805298, \$20), not because each clip isn't terrific, but because the collection is so eclectic that the styles of the musicians don't really mesh all that well. For example, there are clips of Keith Jarrett following clips of Duke Ellington. Nevertheless, there are so many valuable segments in the 92-minute anthology that it is worthwhile to play the DVD, even if it is just a segment or two at a time. The artists featured include Bill Evans, Thelonious Monk Trio, Oscar Peterson, Johnny Griffin, Phil Woods, Ahmad Jamal, Jimmy Smith and Roland Kirk (who is kind a one-man jazz band with a half dozen instruments slung on his shoulders). Some of the clips are in color and some are in black and white, with the same caveats that guided the **Ladies Sing Jazz** programs. There are not too many vocals, so the emphasis of the programs are more on being able to see the musicians and their fingers, making the blurrier clips a little more taxing, but only because

you so desperately want to experience the magic of the performances as totally as possible.

Two hours with Hammond

Sitting on a stool with a guitar and a harmonica, John Hammond performs for close to two hours on the Inakustik release, **John Hammond New Morning The Paris Concert** (UPC#707787645775, \$20). Recorded in 2004, he sings more than two-dozen bluesy folk songs in the 116-minute program, blending his clear-spoken acoustical playing with thoughtful and stimulating singing. The program is also aided by the excellent recording, which is delivered in 5.1-channel Dolby Digital or with even more precision and detail in DTS. The picture is clear and unblemished, and is presented in letterboxed format with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. There is a 10-minute interview with Hammond, who talks about his career and his music. There is no captioning.

"Hello, Poland."

Jazz singer Jeanie Bryson performs for 70 minutes in a 1991 concert on the Am@do DVD-Jazz release, **Jeanie Bryson Live at Warsaw Jazz Festival** (UPC#4028462600350, \$20). Her set includes such standards as *I've Got a Crush on You*, *Our Love Is Here to Stay*, *Body and Soul* and *He Might Be Your Man Blues*, and delivering smooth, well-toned vocals as her band explores the melodies behind her. The full screen picture is a little soft but viewable and colors are reasonably accurate. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a workable dimensionality. It is not as fresh as a recent recording, but the separations are viable and the range is fine. There is no captioning. Also featured is a 24-minute performance by a Latin band, Kenia Band, which may have been the opening act.

"That's a load of bullocks about him not being a good drummer"

A man who must have kicked himself every day of his adult life, despite his protestations to the contrary, is the subject of a comprehensive profile on the Lightyear release, **Best of the Beatles Pete Best: Mean, Moody and Magnificent** (UPC#085365470422, \$20). The central program on the DVD is a decent 120-minute documentary about Best's life, and particularly about the time he spent as the Beatles' first drummer. There have been many documentaries about the Beatles, and what the 2006 program does is to give you an alternate perspective, as if you were observing the other programs from backstage. It is mostly supportive of Best and the raw deal he received from Fate, but there are many anecdotes and explorations that would end up on the cutting room floor of most Beatles documentaries, but are appropriate here because Best is more central to their narratives. The show also promotes Best's more recent attempts to cash in on what notoriety he has with a band of his own, but after the proliferation of so many cover bands and imitations, his effort to evoke the Liverpool sound of four decades previous has a spark of legitimacy that others cannot deliver, and you can feel it in at least some of his music.

The picture is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. This masks picture information off the top and bottom of the screen for some of the home movies and other archival material, but it is never a real detriment. There is a nice collection of footage and snapshots, not just of Best and his family, but of the Beatles in their formative years. The stereo sound has a basic but effective dimensionality, and there is no captioning. There are also 70 minutes of additional featurettes, going over material from the past in more detail than the documentary does and providing an extensive look at Best's band.

The cream of Cream

The 1968 milestone rock music program, **Cream Farewell Concert** has been reissued by Image Entertainment as a *Special Extended Edition* (UPC#014381285925, \$15). The DVD contains the original 48-minute broadcast version that was presented on Image's first release of the title (Feb 99) and the initially conceived 80-minute version. The longer version has more interviews and more of the quaintly patronizing narration, but it also has more music (including *Crossroads*, *Steppin' Out* and *Sitting on Top of the World*) and is unquestionably the preferred presentation of the program. The full screen picture is actually a bit more colorful on the earlier release, and both transfers have the same aged and grainy image. The sound, however, has been remastered for 5.1-channel Dolby Digital and DTS, while still offering the original mono track, as well. While the dimensional audio tracks are a little on the blunt side, even the mono track is sharper and stronger than the audio on the earlier DVD. There is no captioning.

The Tops keep turning

The aging Four Tops are joined by other legendary stars in the All Channel Films Image Entertainment release, **The Four Tops: 50th Anniversary Celebration** (UPC#014381305623, \$20). Aretha Franklin, Ashford & Simpson, The Temptations, Mary Wilson and Paul Rodgers take part in the 101-minute performance, which was shot in 2005. They sing a good two-dozen Motown favorites with a confidence and ease that only age can provide, and yet the show is so top-loaded with stars that the songs seem as fresh as when they were first recorded. It is also fun watching everyone interact with each other and understanding the history behind them. The full screen picture is sharp and flawless. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a concert mix, with a passable dimensionality and clear tones. There is no captioning. The program is accompanied by some text background notes.