

electric guitarist/vocalist Johnny Winter during “Walking Thru’ the Park,” a song from *Hard Again*, their 1977 collaboration with harmonica player James Cotton. Remaining for the rest of the set, the Texas-born blues-rocker propels Waters and the band to new heights, stirring things with his barbed-wire guitar picking, taking over lead vocals for “Going Down Slow,” and then, joined by Mighty Joe Young, “You’ve Got to Love Her With a Feeling.” With the addition of legendary Chicago bluesman Larry “Big Twist” Nolan (Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows), Waters leads the full cast in a rousing rendition of his trademark tune, “Got My Mojo Working,” closing the 50-minute-plus set on an upswing. This release restores two tunes cut from the original broadcast (“She’s Nineteen Years Old” and “You’ve Got Love Her With a Feeling”). Unfortunately, black-and-white footage was substituted for the apparently lost original color film.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

THE GUITAR ARTISTRY OF DAVID BROMBERG: DEMON IN DISGUISE
Vestapol 13115 (2009)

David Bromberg is one of the finest exponents of the acoustic guitar, and in this intimate portrait, filmed in a studio setting, he talks about his influences and performs a wide selection of American blues, folk, country, bluegrass, ragtime, jazz, and contemporary compositions. In just under two hours, he plays such favorites as “Demon in Disguise,” “Mule Riding Blues,” “Maple Leaf Rag,” “Levee Camp Moan,” “Try Me One More Time,” “Spanish John,” “Shebeg an Shemore,” “Buck Dancer’s Choice,” “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” and a host of others. Between every song he speaks candidly about his influences, from old recordings of Blind Blake, Lonnie Johnson, Big Bill Broonzy, Marshall Owens, and Luke Jordan to contemporary recordings of the Weavers, B.B. King, Freddie King, and Albert King. His stories of these great musicians could make up a DVD just by themselves. He speaks with particular reverence about his mentor and guitar teacher the Rev. Gary Davis. The video is beautifully filmed, and because it is part of the Stefan Grossman’s Guitar Workshop series, the camera remains lovingly on Bromberg’s

hands throughout. While Bromberg does talk some theory and technique, this is not an instructional video in the usual sense. It is, however, a perfect example of how to learn great guitar technique by observing and listening.

— Lahri Bond (Leverett, MA)



WIJDAN
Possible Pictures MO103 (2007); ISBN 794881856794

Don’t let the comparatively short length (52 minutes) of this film fool you, there are decades of knowledge to be gained from it. The documentary centers mainly on the Gnawa people, who were exiled from the Malian empire and brought as slaves to Morocco in the 16th century. This tribal society is shrouded in mystery, especially pertaining to the captivatingly hypnotic music they created to induce trance states to commune with spirits for healing purposes. Filmmakers Bella Le Nestour and John Allen present an intimate portrait of the meeting between two men from vastly different, yet ultimately anciently linked cultures. Sirbiri Samake is a Bambarra musician and a traditional hunter from Mali who has mastered the kora, an African lute-harp, outside the usual Griot caste system. Brahim El Belkani is a Gnawa musician from Morocco who also came to his masterful playing of the bass-toned gimbri not through the usual apprenticeship, but through private practice and dreams. The film focuses on their historic meeting in 2000, resulting in the film’s title *Wijdan*, which in Arabic means “the meeting of souls.” Each musician carries a deep connection with the earth, and each is trained in the natural healing arts of his culture. Their meeting is touching and fascinating as they find both musical and

spiritual common ground. The film is also about the modernization of ancient cultures and the struggle to pass both music and ceremony to younger generations. The film concludes with a Parisian concert featuring musicians from both Mali and Morocco and leaves many questions where answers may become more clear with repeated viewings.

— Lahri Bond (Leverett, MA)

BILLIE HOLIDAY: THE LIFE AND ARTISTRY OF LADY DAY
Idem Home Video iDVD 1115 (2009)

Though Billie Holiday was gifted with a heart-melting voice that still resonates a century after she died in a New York hospital while under arrest for drug possession, she was plagued by never-ceasing demons her entire life, as shown in this too-short, half-hour documentary. The illegitimate daughter of Fletcher Henderson’s rhythm guitarist, who left her mother before she was born, Holiday was raped twice by the age of 14. When she wasn’t in reform school or imprisoned for solicitation, she walked the streets as a prostitute. When it came to music, though, it was a different story. Discovered by producer John Hammond while singing in a Harlem nightclub, she went on to become one the most distinctive artists of the 1940s, recording with Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Buck Clayton, and Count Basie, in whose band she met Lester Young, a tenor saxophonist and her longtime lover. On her own, she scored hits with “Lover Man,” “God Bless the Child,” and her haunting look at lynching, “Strange Fruit.” Comprising still photographs and clips from her rare TV and film appearances, *The Life and Artistry of Lady Day* explores the contradictions that continue to make Holiday such an enigma. Four full-song clips from the 1947 film *Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?*, featuring Holiday singing alone and with Louis Armstrong, are at the core of this long-overdue tribute.

— Craig Harris (Chicopee, MA)

FILLMORE: THE LAST DAYS
Bill Graham Memorial Foundation/Rhino R2 516386 (2009), reissue

After five years running venues in San Francisco and New York, rock impresario Bill Graham decided

to shut his legendary venues Fillmore East and West in 1971, citing expanding demands from artists and difficulty making ends meet in these relatively intimate venues. This long-unavailable film chronicles the final week of shows at the Fillmore West (the New York venue closed the previous week) intercut with reality show-style footage of Graham verbally jousting with musicians, light shows, and demanding managers as he hustles to pull off the closing week shows. The disc includes some great performance footage of the Grateful Dead, Santana, and Hot Tuna, along with generous screen time given to groups on Graham’s label such as Cold Blood, Elvin Bishop, and Lamb. The DVD release does not contain any outtake footage, but it does offer a vivid look back at what arguably may have been the perfect rock venue of its time, as well as profiling the first and most powerful entrepreneur of the modern rock ‘n’ roll business. Ironically, Graham fairly quickly moved back to promoting shows in his own smaller venues not long after the demise of the Fillmores, including his upscale remake of the original Fillmore Auditorium that gave his enterprises their name. However, the Fillmore West did not fare so well. It was converted into a storage room for cars above the San Francisco Honda dealership at Market and Van Ness.

— Michael Parrish (San Jose, CA)

JOHNNY WINTER LIVE THROUGH THE ’70S
MVD Visual MVDV4755 (2008)

Johnny Winter is certainly one of the undisputed masters of the electric blues guitar. Having ridden the blues boom of the late 1960s, along with the likes of Clapton, Beck, Hendrix, and Canned Heat, Winter was also a pioneer of the style of endless improvisation on old blues riffs. Throughout the 70s, he toured with an ever-revolving lineup of backing musicians, each providing him with a bedrock from which to soar.

This collection, like his many bands, is a mixed bag of great groups, performances, footage, and material. In some cases it may be historically important, but overall, it may be a little long for the casual few. For the die-hard Winter fanatics, this compilation is the treasure trove for which they have been waiting. One