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or two with an artistic eye for imagery but none with any real knack for narrative. Other fledgling directors working elsewhere, apart from this movement, managed to parlay daring short subjects into major movie careers (John Waters and David Lynch, for example), but the Transgressors did not. However, the notoriety associated with the Transgression cachet allowed certain members to segue to solid careers in other fields, such as Jon Spencer in music and Richard Kern in still photography for adult websites. The notably less talented Zedd continued floundering about, eventually finding a niche creating X-rated satires of work by genuine auteurs, such as his 2002 project *Lord of the Cock Rings*.
—Gregory Nicoll

Billie Holiday – The Life and Artistry of Lady Day

[Idem Home Video]

The uncanny allure of Billie Holiday's voice is due in part to its contrast: That sweet and almost child-like tone emerges from the throat of what's clearly a heartbroken woman-of-the-world. The fog around this mystery lifts slightly when we learn she was jailed for prostitution at age 14. In the less-enlightened times of the 1930s, Holiday bore the twin burdens of being black and female, often using pot and booze to cope until she eventually discovered heroin; yet she rose above these addictions (at least for a couple more decades) to such a degree that she earned the regal nickname "Lady Day" because of her sheer elegance.

The new DVD release packaged as *Billie Holiday – The Life and Artistry of Lady Day* gathers an assortment of videos and information documenting all the phases of Holiday's career. There are song lyrics, list of compositional credits, a picture gallery showing the covers of books about her life, and a long discography, although all these website-like features can be somewhat cumbersome

to navigate using a DVD remote instead of a computer mouse. The centerpiece of the disc is a 29-minute documentary entitled *The Life of Billie Holiday*, which curiously carries no production credits. Judging by the unidentified narrator's voice, it's quite possibly a British production.

Although relying heavily on photo montages to tell Holiday's story, the documentary also contains an impressive assortment of vintage film clips. The haunting standout among these is from *Symphony in Black*, an early movie appearance in which Holiday, portraying a spurned lover, is flung face-down onto a sidewalk by her former beau and then, slowly raising her head, begins to sing. The parallel with her life experiences is tortuously apparent.

Squeezing a generous quantity of songs into its brief running time, the documentary also shows kinescoped performances from early TV broadcasts. There's live footage of Holiday singing her signature "God Bless the Child" with remarkably good sound quality, as well as a stunning rendition of "Strange Fruit" (her eerie anthem about the aftermath of a lynching), which is unusual in that it's shot almost entirely in full close-up, a chilling and confrontational performance undiminished by the occasional video glitches inherent in the original telecast.

The narrator informs us Holiday was uncomfortable being cast in the role of a maid for the 1947 Louis Armstrong feature *New Orleans*, a fact which is not evident from the brief glimpse included in the documentary. However, the DVD extras contain a separate section of clips that extract and catalog all of Holiday's sequences from *New Orleans*, and her discomfort is painfully evident in the early domestic scenes. She's fully redeemed in the subsequent nightclub numbers, though, and this bonus feature – a time-capsule view into the smoky Crescent City beer joints of over 60 years ago – is alone worth the price of the disc.
—Gregory Nicoll

