

Yes to Steven Soderbergh

A typically monotonous Yes concert is presented on the Image release, Yes 9012Live (UPC#014381255829, \$20), but it is in the 'Special Features' section. The primary 1985 concert program, which presents most of the same material (the bonus section concert runs 65 minutes while the primary presentation runs 68 minutes), enlivened with visual effects and inserts, is a great deal more stimulating and not monotonous at all, despite the band's music. Both were directed by Steven Soderbergh, and the 'Special Features' version is identified as the 'director's cut.' The inserts, some of which appear to come from archival educational films and such, are often playful and undercut whatever aura of seriousness the musicians are trying to achieve, giving the performance a lively and relaxed atmosphere. It is enough to keep a viewer intrigued and entertained, in the same way that the band's LP jacket art was always more compelling than the record inside.

The full screen picture is usually crisp and accurately colored, but when the lights go down too much, the image softens a little. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is strong and effectively detailed. There is no captioning. Also featured in the supplement is a good 24-minute concert production documentary also directed by Soderbergh, a 7-minute song that was left out of the film, and 35 minutes of good interviews with the band members, talking about their music, the perils of being married while touring, and their reputation. "Yes was always, kind of, the most boring band on the road. It's very well known for being a boring band."

Sixties New Age fusion

A 2005 reunion by the Sixties fusion band is presented on the Inakustik release, Soft Machine Legacy New Morning The Paris Concert (UPC#707787645874, \$20). Running 94 minutes, the four band members revisit their jazz-rock riffs with the same sense of exploration and higher plane attitude that they originated nearly four decades earlier, though perhaps with a slightly more relaxed beat that they utilized in the past. Viewers unaware of their history will assume that they have spent their careers playing at New Age venues together, because of the ease with which they pass ideas from artist to artist and the stimulating balance with which each speaks his own musical voice even as he is blending with the others.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The image and colors are sharp and vivid no matter how dark the stage becomes. There is a superb DTS track to support the carefully defined mix with power and precision, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track isn't bad, either. Also featured is a 22-minute interview with the band.

Cheesy Rat Pack

Maybe if you're in the audience, The Rat Pack Live from Las Vegas, an NBD TV Image Entertainment release (UPC#014381272826, \$25), has its charms, but on video, where original concert performances by Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis, Jr. are readily available, a 105-minute show with three actors imitating the famous singers is of limited value, unless one of those actors is your nephew or something. Every once in a while, one will nail a mannerism or a vocal inflection with a reasonable proximity to the original, but more often they provide bland renditions of the pop standards the three real singers made famous, and jokes that were stale even when Sinatra, Martin and Davis bantered them back and forth.

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 picture on the 2004 program is crisp and accurately colored. There is a solid DTS track that is fairly similar in quality to the reasonably strong and dimensional 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track. There is no captioning. Also featured are 12 minutes of additional numbers and a 5-minute clip of reasonably clever imitation backstage footage that is glimpsed in the show.

Everyone has to start somewhere

We all know that Bob Clark, director of the beloved Christmas Story, has made a few exploitation films in his day, such as Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things and Black Christmas, but did you know that in 1967 he made a film so beyond the mainstream that it has washed up as a Chiller Theatre Something Weird Video title? Yes, She-Man, the top part, as it were, of She-Man/Sins of Rachel (UPC#014381123524, \$20), was Clark's second film, a 64-minute black-and-white concoction about a dominatrix who talks the studly son of a prominent politician into becoming her cross-dressed slave. He meets some new friends at her Florida digs, however, and eventually rebels against her authority, although not against the lifestyle to which she has indoctrinated him. The show takes a while to get all of its pieces in place, but once the drama starts churning, it's a hoot. The full screen image is fairly soft and a bit battered.

Sins of Rachel, a 1972 color feature running 89 minutes, is a genuine murder mystery, with the debaucheries of the matronly victim depicted in flashback as witnesses relate what they know about the crime. The acting is as stiff as the camera angles, but the story, which has a Least Likely Suspect, is legitimate, regardless of how emotionally bizarre some of the flashbacks become (there is also a fairly decent gay subplot), and the use of an anti-Hollywood glamour archetype as the central female character is a gratifying touch, making the film legitimately entertaining, despite a few mawkish laugh-at-it-not-with-it moments. The picture is presented in

letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. There are flurries of speckles on the source material and the hues shift to various levels of fading, but most of the time the colors are discernible and the presentation is workable.

On both programs, the monophonic sound is tolerable, and there is no captioning. Also featured on the DVD is a collection of nine trailers for gay-oriented exploitation programs, a 3-minute black-and-white clip of a stage performance by female impersonator Jean La Rue, and three gay-oriented softcore 8mm shorts set to music, Going Native on the Beach from 1956 about a man fooling around by himself at the seashore in black and white, an untitled and undated 9-minute color piece about a guy with a rifle sunbathing on some rocks, and an undated 6-minute faded color piece entitled Warren Frederick about a fellow with a lot of muscles sitting on a bed and admiring himself, as fellows with muscles tend to do.

DVD Letter

To the Editor:

Harlan County USA is one of my all-time favorite docs... However Harlan County is NOT in West Virginia; it's in Kentucky (though quite near West Virginia as you head through the Cumberland gap...).

—Richard Huffman

Seattle WA

DVD News

ROBBY GETS ATTENTION: Warner Home Video is releasing an elaborate collector's edition of Forbidden Planet. The film will have a fresh picture transfer, 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound, outtakes, documentaries and two other Robby the Robot programs, The Invisible Boy and an episode from The Thin Man. Warner is also releasing elaborate presentations of all four Christopher Reeve Superman films to tie-in to its release of the new Superman film, and has restored director Richard Donner's original cut of Superman II, which was eventually taken away from him and handed to Richard Lester. The collector's edition of Body Heat will have several retrospective featurettes.

LONGER BUGSY: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment is releasing a 155-minute version of Bugsy, 13 minutes longer than the theatrical version, which will also be accompanied by deleted scenes and a retrospective documentary. Sony is also issuing a collector's edition of Brian DePalma's Body Double. It will contain several retrospective featurettes.

ALTMAN TALK: New Line Home Entertainment's A Prairie Home Companion will feature a commentary with Robert Altman and Kevin Kline, deleted scenes and more.

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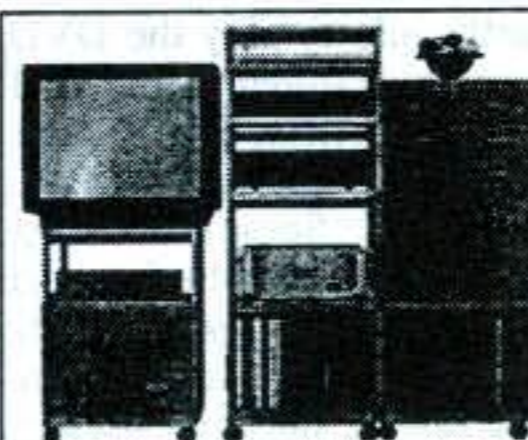
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