

Viktor Ullmann (an assistant to Zemlinsky in Prague during the 1920s, Ullmann died in a concentration camp in 1944), is a witty comedy about a judge (James Johnson) assigned to hear a case concerning a family heirloom that he himself destroyed while trying to seduce the owner's daughter (Melody Moore). The lush music in both pieces is very well played by the house orchestra under the baton of James Conlon; the vocalism is consistently excellent; and Ralph Funicello's sets and Linda Cho's costumes are elegantly attractive. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this introduction to two rarely performed but fascinating 20th-century operas is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

### An Evening with Tito Puente and Della Reese

★★1/2

(1993) 52 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9030-5.



For this "Evening of Jazz" aboard the S.S. Norway in 1993, bandleader/percussionist Tito Puente shares the bill with actress/vocalist Della Reese, both appearing on behalf of the Charlie Parker Memorial Foundation Lifetime Achievement Awards, but playing separate sets. Puente's Latin Jazz All-Stars—piano, bass, saxophone, trumpet, slide trombone, flute, and two additional percussionists (the closing credits neglect to cite them by name)—present three numbers, including the well-known "Oye Como Va." Throughout the performance, Puente stands while hitting cymbals and timbales, scatting, and dancing. For her part, Reese sings jazz standards, including a Cole Porter medley ("You Do Something to Me," "I Get a Kick Out of You," "What Is This Thing Called Love," and "Just One of Those Things"), with tasteful backing from a trio of piano, bass, and drums (guest Clark Terry adds trumpet to "Any Way You Look at It, Ain't That Still Called the Blues"). Resplendent in shades of purple and fuchsia, Reese appears in more of a nightclub setting (the venue may be the same, but the room is darker). Although she doesn't have much of a range, Reese uses her charisma and acting skills to deliver the lyrics effectively. Unfortunately, not much can be said in favor of the amateurish camerawork, which is marked by abrupt zooms, focus delays, and unsteadiness, although the LPCM stereo soundtrack is solid. A strong optional purchase. (K. Femmessy)

### Graham Parker & the Figgs: Live at the FTC ★★★

(2010) 100 min. DVD: \$19.98 (audio CD included). Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Emerging in the '70s on the cusp be-

tween the "pub rock" and New Wave eras, English singer-songwriter Graham Parker, seen here in a 2010 concert recorded in Fairfield, CT, has never enjoyed the renown or commercial popularity of successors like Elvis Costello and Joe Jackson. But he has had what he somewhat wryly describes as "a viable career" that is still chugging along as he turns 60. Erstwhile angry young man Parker (1979's "Mercury Poisoning," probably his best-known tune, is a diatribe aimed at his then record label) is older now, but the fire still burns—numbers such as "Turn It into Hate" don't exactly reek of contentment—on this consistently energetic and entertaining set of 20-plus songs. Parker and his four-piece band, the Figgs, favor their 2010 album, *Imaginary Television*, but fans will enjoy plenty of earlier stuff as well, all of which plays to Parker's strengths as both a writer with an effortless knack for catchy choruses and a singer whose edgy voice perfectly suits his material. Parker also displays an easy, self-deprecating wit; after assaying a jaunty little guitar solo in "Bring Me a Heart Again," he plays it a second time, "just to show you how lame it is." Presented in DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital 5.1, DVD extras include an interview with Parker and a bonus audio CD. Recommended. (S. Graham)



### INXS: Mystify ★★1/2

(1997) 105 min. DVD: \$14.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Sydney dance-rock purveyors INXS played this concert for the German TV music series *Rockpalast* in 1997, co-headlining Loreley's Open Air Festival along with Simple Minds. That same year, they released *Elegantly Wasted*, their final CD featuring the group's original lineup. As was often the case, singer Michael Hutchence commands most of the attention, although he plays no instruments. Instead, he struts and shimmies, much like Mick Jagger, while also smoking, swearing, and shaking the camera. His band mates include Andrew Farriss (guitar/keyboards), Tim Farriss (guitar), Kirk Pengilly (guitar/saxophone), Garry Beers (bass), Jon Farriss (drums), and backup singers Jane Dobbins and Shelley Preston. Not surprisingly, INXS's 1980s material, such as "New Sensation" and "Need You Tonight" (from 1987's *Kick*), works best, since they were running low on inspiration by the '90s, but with the exception of 1985's "What You Need," the band plays few early hits during the 18-song set. Still, Hutchence is a charismatic performer, and his voice is in good form here, although it's hard to tell whether he's drunk or playing around with the "elegantly wasted" concept. Five months

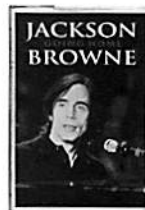


later, he was dead (drugs and alcohol were involved, although the death was ruled a suicide). Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS 5.1, and Dolby Digital stereo, extras include six bonus tracks from a 1984 Rockpalast Club Concert in Hamburg, in which a mullet-haired Hutchence performs radio staples including "Original Sin" and "Don't Change." A strong optional purchase. (K. Femmessy)

### Jackson Browne: Going Home ★★★

(1994) 90 min. DVD: \$14.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

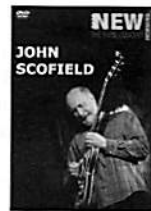
Originally produced by the Disney Channel in 1994, this documentary chronicles more than 25 years in the career of prolific singer-songwriter Jackson Browne, known not only for hits such as "Running on Empty" and "Doctor My Eyes" (both included here), but also for songs he wrote for the Eagles and others. While some may lament the absence of more up-tempo fare like "Redneck Friend" and "Somebody's Baby," there are plenty of other familiar tunes here, including "The Pretender" and "For Everyman," not to mention covers of Jimmy Cliff's "You Can Get It If You Really Want" and Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower." The songs are presented in a variety of settings: in addition to the *Soundstage* concert that forms the centerpiece of the program, we hear "Your Bright Baby Blues" from a gig with the Eagles in '74, a backstage duet of "Take It Easy" with stringmeister David Lindley, excerpts from the MUSE (Musicians United for Safe Energy) benefit shows at Madison Square Garden in '79, and more. Lindley, David Crosby, Graham Nash, Bonnie Raitt, Jennifer Warnes, and Don Henley are among those on hand to praise Browne, who details the origins of several songs—including "Birds of St. Mark's," written about Velvet Underground chanteuse Nico, with whom Browne enjoyed a brief collaboration in the late '60s. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, this is recommended. (S. Graham)



### John Scofield: New Morning—The Paris Concert ★★★

(2010) 135 min. DVD: \$19.95. Inakustik (dist. by Music Video Distributors).

Former Miles Davis sideman John Scofield guides his jazz quartet through a 12-track set for this low-key 2010 performance at the New Morning club in Paris, conjuring up a gentle, groove-oriented sound with Michael Eckroth on keyboards, Ben Street on acoustic bass, and Bill Stewart on drums. Lost in the music, guitarist Scofield closes his eyes during much of the set—which lasts more than two hours—coming out of his reverie to introduce



a few numbers, like Dizzy Gillespie's "Woody 'n' You" and "My Foolish Heart," a song he says he's "loved for a real long time." Eckroth, Scofield's former student at NYU, takes the spotlight on "I Want to Talk About You," alternating between piano and organ. The audience clearly enjoys the show, breaking into spontaneous applause when Scofield solos, as on "Lost, Found, and In Between," or whenever the players are particularly in the groove. Easy on the ears, this is sure to please fans of jazz guitar. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS 5.1, and PCM 2.0 stereo, DVD extras include the featurette "Soundcheck Sketches," which combines backstage footage with commentary from Scofield. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

### Johnny Winter: Live Through the '80s ★★

(2010) 114 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Johnny Winter, a skinny, tattoo-laden, cross-eyed albino musician born in 1944 in Beaumont, TX, has never quite assumed the mantle of greatness bestowed upon other blues-rock guitarists from the Lone Star State, despite a career—now well into its fifth decade—which has had its share of high points, including his partnership with Muddy Waters in the late '70s, a collaboration that helped bring the legendary bluesman back into the spotlight. Winter's shortcomings are readily apparent throughout this compilation drawn from one promo video and six concert performances (at Toronto's Massey Hall; a Swedish television studio; the Pistoia Blues Festival in Italy; the Roskilde Festival in Denmark; the Capitol Theatre in Passaic, NJ; and the Casbah in Nashua, NH) recorded between 1983–88. The problem is not that Winters can't play—far from it—but he plays too much, treating every solo as an opportunity to unleash the kind of ultra-loud, high-speed riffing that quickly becomes wearisome to all but the most devoted guitar freaks. Among the selections included are "Unseen Eye," "Sweet Papa John," and one of Winter's signature pieces, "Mojo Boogie." The material occasionally strays into rock-and-roll—his set at Roskilde includes "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Highway 61," and "Johnny B. Goode." But Winter's singing is perfunctory, his backing band is unexceptional, and the technical quality of the recordings is average at best. Optional. (S. Graham)

### Kaguyahime: The Moon Princess ★★★

(1994) 69 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9026-8.

Jirí Kylián's work during his long and distinguished tenure (from 1975–2004) as artistic director of the Nederlands Dans Theater has been featured in numerous DVD offer-

ings (including *Nederlands Dans Theater Celebrates Jirí Kylián* [VL-3/08]). Kylián's ballet *Kaguyahime: The Moon Princess* was choreographed to a score commissioned from Maki Ishii, who also conducts this 1994 performance. Presented in an impressionistic, nonlinear fashion, the story is based on a Japanese fairy tale about the enigmatic Moon Princess Kaguyahime and various human subjects, including the kings and nobles who seek union with her and compete to achieve it. But the plot is a secondary concern; Kylián's primary aim is to evoke the awe and mystery inherent in the relationship between the heavenly and terrestrial realms, and in this he largely succeeds. The music, which blends pounding percussion with Japanese wind instruments, alternates highly energetic sequences with quieter, more reflective passages, providing ample scope for Kylián to demonstrate his skill in both solos and massed movement. His conception is beautifully realized by the dancers, particularly Fiona Lummis as Kaguyahime and Paul Lightfoot as Mikado, while the design and lighting by Michael Simon, as well as Ferial Simon's stylish costumes, also form important elements. *Kaguyahime* is a challenging work, hampered further by dated visuals and less-than-sterling LPCM stereo sound, but as a major piece by one of the most significant figures in modern dance, this is definitely recommended. (F. Swietek)



### La Fanciulla del West

★★★1/2  
(2010) 159 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$32.98, Blu-ray: \$45.98. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Set against the backdrop of the California Gold Rush, Puccini's 1910 opera has been called the world's first spaghetti western. In this 2009 mounting from De Nederlandse Opera, conductor Carlo Rizzi leads a solid reading of the score, which may not rank with the composer's best but is still engaging. Soprano Eva-Maria Westbrook is a standout as Minnie, the saloonkeeper who rescues bandit lover Dick Johnson from Sheriff Jack Rance and the locals who threaten to hang him. Westbrook not only handles the considerable vocal demands of the part, but displays considerable dramatic skills as well. Unfortunately, neither Lucio Gallo as Rance nor Zoran Todorovich as Johnson are in the same league. What truly undoes this performance, however, is Nikolaus Lehnhoff's staging, which situates the action in some temporal neverland, with modernized outfits (many in black leather) and garish contemporary sets (including a neon pink room in Act II and what appears to be an auto junkyard in Act III). Added to

this are periodic allusions to Wall Street trading—mostly via contemporary film footage screened against the rear of the stage—and an oddball moment at the close when Minnie appears decked out like Marilyn Monroe, striding down a staircase with the MGM logo projected behind her. Despite fine sound (DTS 5.1 and LPCM stereo on DVD; DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray), Lehnhoff's production choices fatally undermine this presentation. Extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette and a cast gallery. Optional. (F. Swietek)

### Lionel Hampton International Jazz Festival 1997 ★★1/2

(1997) 85 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-9009-1.



Established in 1967, the Lionel Hampton International Jazz Festival—annually held at the University of Idaho in Moscow—has attracted more than a few world-class musicians over the years. This outing from 1997 is no exception, with headliners including singers Diana Krall and Lou Rawls, saxophonist Joshua Redman, trombonists Carl Fontana and Bill Watrous, trumpeters Randy Brecker and brothers Pete and Conte Candoli, and Hampton himself, mostly backed by a "house quartet" consisting of drummer Elvin Jones, his brother Hank on piano, guitarist Herb Ellis, and bassist Brian Bromberg—surely one of the finest ad hoc rhythm sections ever assembled. The years have clearly taken their toll on some: Hampton, one of the first and greatest jazz vibraphonists, is pushing 90 here, and it shows—led gingerly on stage by Rawls, his playing, including on the signature tune "How High the Moon," is halting and frail. The several septuagenarians in the bunch—including both Joneses, Ellis, and the Candolis—mostly fare better, with the trumpeters' bluesy, amusing take on the chestnut "Willow Weep for Me" being the highlight of the set. Thirtysomethings Krall ("The Nearness of You") and Redman ("Angel Eyes") acquit themselves nicely, as does Brecker, but this is pretty stock stuff overall—the tunes are standards, the arrangements unimaginative, and both the Dolby Digital stereo sound and image are less than stellar. An optional purchase. (S. Graham)

### The Nutcracker ★★★1/2

(2009) 127 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$45.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

While many versions of Tchaikovsky's classic holiday ballet—about young Clara, who for Christmas receives a nutcracker that turns into a handsome prince—are available on DVD (see reviews in VL-11/92, VL-11/01, and VL-1/05), this 2009 film of Peter Wright's traditional staging at London's Royal Opera