

Al Di Meola—Speak a Volcano: Return to Electric Guitar ★★1/2

(2006) 120 min. DVD: \$19.95. Inakustik (dist. by Music Video Distributors).

Thirty-plus years ago, Al Di Meola was a prodigy. Emerging on the jazz-fusion scene as a member of Chick Corea's Return to Forever at the tender age of 20, his technique was matched only by John McLaughlin and a very few other electric guitarists. "Prodigy" no longer applies these days—he was 52 when this 13-song concert in Leverkusen, Germany was recorded in November 2006—but Di Meola still has more chops than a steakhouse, and his musical palette has broadened considerably, with various Latin, Mediterranean, and world influences playing a major role. The fact remains, however, that Di Meola's appeal is still somewhat limited; musicians and guitar freaks will marvel at his bravura playing, but the casual listener is less likely to be moved. That's not to say that his tunes universally lack feeling or melodic interest: "Red Moon" (a fiery, flamenco-flavored workout with an extended guitar-percussion duel) and "One Night Last June" (think Santana on speed) are proof of that. But he's nowhere near as interesting a composer as, say, his contemporary Pat Metheny. Indeed, the most interesting pieces here are five written by Argentine tango master Astor Piazzolla—presented in a format that's more like a classical recital than a concert, with Di Meola playing a nylon-string acoustic (so much for that *Return to Electric Guitar* title hype)—including "Double Concerto," an exquisite duet with his keyboardist. This terrific-looking, great-sounding DVD (with DTS and Dolby Digital 5.1 options)—which also includes an interview with the guitarist as well as a brief demonstration of his technique—is unlikely to win Di Meola many new fans, but should be considered a strong optional purchase nonetheless. Aud: P. (S. Graham)



Bon Jovi—Lost Highway: The Concert

★★★
(2007) 84 min. DVD: \$24.95. A&E Home Video (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-0093-2.

Although the word often has a pejorative connotation, being labeled a "journeyman" isn't such a bad thing (heck, Eric Clapton once used it as an album title). So calling Bon Jovi a journeyman band is more than just damning with faint praise: these guys may never warrant their own chapter in the rock 'n' roll bible, but they've sold zillions of records over the past quarter century or so, fill stadiums with ease, and have produced hits on a steady basis. And so it is with their latest effort, 2007's *Lost Highway*, performed



in its entirety (all 12 songs) in this relatively intimate Chicago concert (filmed in high-def, with terrific Dolby Digital 5.1 sound). Singer Jon Bon Jovi, guitarist Richie Sambora, and the other band members (augmented here by four additional musicians) call it their "Nashville record," but touches of violin and pedal steel guitar do little to alter the basic Bon Jovi sound, which relies on catchy tunes with anthem-like chorus hooks and classic rock guitar solos (a formula perfectly embodied in the title song, as well as the rousing "Any Other Day"). On the lyrical side, Bon Jovi are no threat to, say, fellow Jerseyite Bruce Springsteen—"I'll be standing right beside you if you can't make it on your own" (a line from "The Last Night") is typical of the generic (and universal) sentiments expressed. The bonus set includes the hits "It's My Life" (arguably the band's best song, along with "Livin' on a Prayer"), "Wanted Dead or Alive," and "Who Says You Can't Go Home." DVD extras include interviews with the band and set design sketches. Recommended, especially for the faithful. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Captain & Tennille in New Orleans ★★1/2

(1978) 50 min. DVD: \$14.98. Retroactive Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Is the world really ready for a Captain & Tennille revival, or is the release of this DVD just another sign of the coming cultural apocalypse? Just kidding: husband and wife team Daryl Dragon and Toni Tennille might have seemed corny to those of us preoccupied with other things during the 1970s, but these talented musicians brought true showmanship to their TV series (1976-77) and specials, as well as live engagements. For this 1978 TV special shot in the heart of New Orleans' French Quarter, the pair perform songs such as "You Never Done It Like That" and "I'm On My Way," and are joined by special guests Fats Domino and Murphy Campo's Jazz Saints, in addition to non-musical guest stars Hal Linden (*Barney Miller*) and comic John Byner. Serving up a solid 50 minutes of pop, jazz, ragtime, and blues, *Captain & Tennille in New Orleans*—presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 sound—is a fine special (once you get past those clothes!). DVD extras include new audio commentary by Tennille and Dragon. Recommended. [Note: this is also available as part of the three-disc set *Captain & Tennille—The TV Specials!* (\$39.98), which also includes the separately available *Captain & Tennille in Hawaii* and *Captain & Tennille: Songbook*.] Aud: P. (E. Hulse)



Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci ★★★

(2007) 2 discs. 201 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.98 (booklet included). Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

For more than a century these comparatively brief works by Pietro Mascagni and

Ruggero Leoncavallo, respectively, have served as a common double-bill in opera house performances and on recordings. Both *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* are examples of the early *verismo* (or realistic) style that characterized Italian opera beginning in the 1890s, and both are tales of jealousy that lead to violence and tragedy among ordinary folk. Often, as in this 2007 production from the Teatro Real in Madrid, the prologue to *Pagliacci*, a sort of manifesto of *verismo*, is performed initially, leading into *Cavalleria*, which is then followed by the remainder of Leoncavallo's work. And while both composers were what might charitably be called one-hit wonders—each wrote other operas, but none were popular—there's no denying the impact of these nearly indestructible warhorses. Happily, the performances here are solid: Giancarlo del Monaco's mounting is sometimes unorthodox but effective, Jesús López Cobos' conducting is sensitive as well as alert, and while the vocalism isn't always marked by finesse, the singing is consistently engaged. From the technical perspective, the fadeout at the close of *Cavalleria* is too abrupt, and one might quibble with the need for a two-disc set, as the operas are completely contained on the first, while the second is devoted to relatively brief interviews with the director, conductor, and singers. But these are minor drawbacks—the sound is excellent (with DTS and Dolby Digital stereo options) as is the camerawork—and this is easily recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



Così fan tutte ★★1/2

(2006) 2 discs. 210 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$39.99 (booklet included). Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

A modern production that eschews the Eurotrash approach in favor of old-fashioned elegance, this version of Mozart's delectable 1790 comedy—in which two besotted lovers unwisely accept a bet to disguise themselves and swap girlfriends in order to test the fidelity of their sweethearts—was mounted by Nicholas Hytner for the 2006 Glyndebourne Festival, and is perfectly attuned to the house's intimate stage, with sets and costumes that are simple but unfailingly attractive, and comedy that is carefully calibrated to be funny but not raucous. The musical side is very nearly as fine: the young vocalists are strong across the board, with voices that blend beautifully—especially important in a work with so many ensemble pieces. The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment isn't quite in the same league—a fine original instrument group, overall, but sounding a mite heavy here (particularly in the winds). That

