

The Eyes Have It

DVDS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

By John Ephland

It's one thing to listen to this music, as I did when guitarist Pat Metheny's *Orchestrion* album came out in 2010. In a film by Pierre and Francois Lamoureux, we discovered what was missing—mad scientist Metheny in his “orchestrion lab,” surrounded by real and created instruments, from piano to marimbas to percussion to long vertical strips of metal used as slide synths to little lights with mechanical devices on them. He animates yet another (acoustic) guitar for his sweet, soulful “Sueno Con Mexico.” Animated by all things symphonic—primarily Metheny's signature Ibanez hollowbody electric)—*The Orchestrion Project* (Eagle Eye 305299; 110 minutes ★★★★★) starts with a simple, sit-down version of the tuneful “Unity Village.” Metheny eventually stands to walk and pluck to his fiery, frolicking “Orchestrion Suite” and the quiet “Entry Point,” and many other compositions, all of them shot over two days in November 2010 at a church in Brooklyn. With active and measured camera work, from simple to ornate, the film is a spooky yet fascinating sight.

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Recorded in May 2009 at the Mawazine Musique du Monde Festival in Rabat, Morocco, Al Di Meola's *Morocco Fantasia* (Inakustik 7003; 123 minutes ★★★★★) also serves as a travelog, interspersed with shots of the city, most of it altered with cropped shots of people and time-lapsed photography. All eight songs are written by Di Meola except for Astor Piazzolla's explosive “Double Concerto.” Beginning with the zesty “Misterioso,” we meet the band, World Sinfonia, straightaway: accordion player Fausto Beccalossi, second guitarist Peo Alfonsi, bassist Victor Miranda, drummer Peter Kaszas and percussionist Gumbi Ortiz. Special guests add instrumental touches such as violin, oud and additional percussion. “Siberiana” offers another compelling mix of nimble, agile guitar solo work amidst the song's tight arrangement, the band deft at turning on a dime. The sheet music is a giveaway as to the music's intricacy, written with a high degree of interactivity in mind. By the time we get to “Gumberia,” the groove has set in and there's a veritable swing vibe. Extra features include rehearsals, a soundcheck, the *Mawazine Suite* (four parts), even a rooftop solo.

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Not being a big Etta James fan, this reviewer is a convert. *Etta James Live At Montreux 1993* (Eagle Eye 392539; 160 minutes ★★★★★) is a mind-blowing visual tour de force, focusing primarily on a 1993 concert but also including clips

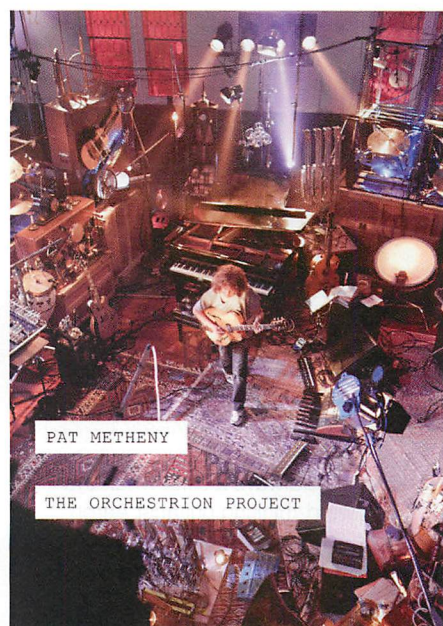
from five others. Beginning with the '93 concert, over 11 tracks, James' performance is a mesmerizing melding of sanctified church with rock 'n' roll. Her cutting tunes “A Lover Is Forever” and “How Strong Is A Woman” are definitive. By contrast, the earliest show finds James rougher, raunchier, the camp meeting now a bordello as she stares at her audience (and the camera), the personification of what she sings, with repeated moments of dwelling and letting the music simmer. With songs such as “Drown In My Own Tears,” “I'd Rather Go Blind” and a medley that includes “At Last,” each show finds James in the company of top-notch bands, featuring horn sections with Herbie Mann, David “Fathead” Newman, Lew Soloff and Howard Johnson. While every single song is not sung perfectly, it doesn't matter: This woman was in charge, leading her merry bands of men in a series of shows that define what it means to be a blues singer.

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From Straight To Bizarre: Zappa, Beefheart, Alice Cooper And L.A.'s Lunatic Fringe (Sexy Intellectual 568; 161 minutes ★★★★★½) is an in-depth look at Frank Zappa's early attempts at being an entrepreneurial A&R man. Beginning with Bizarre and going to Straight, we are treated to a large number of talking heads who either reported on the scene, are Zappa biographers, or were members of some of the bands. Zappa is featured with his Mothers of Invention and also in clips commenting on some of the bands he signed, like the all-female GTOs, Tim Buckley, Lenny Bruce, Lord Buckley, Wild Man Fischer and even the a cappella gospel collective The Persuasions. This was the late '60s and early '70s, a time when Alice Cooper was just getting started, Captain Beefheart was signing on to join his old friend Frank and Zappa himself was between labels. Rough edges abound, Zappa's endlessly getting distracted by his own career leading to the eventual demise of his experiment.

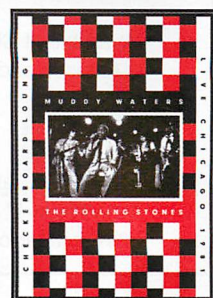
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Another vital piece of rock history comes a bit later, with the meetup of blues legend Muddy Waters and most of The Rolling Stones at **Checkboard Lounge Live In Chicago 1981 (Eagle Vision 305529; 106 minutes ★★★★★½)**. Also featured are blues legends Buddy Guy and Junior Wells. It's a long strip of live footage, the camera shots coming from behind the long tables that aim toward the stage. This footage goes places that Martin Scorsese's film of the Stones, *Shine A Light*, couldn't go, with all the rough edges and none of the slickness. Following opening cuts



PAT METHENY

THE ORCHESTRION PROJECT



from the backup band, Waters—and eventually Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Ron Wood (no Charlie Watts or Bill Wyman) and Ian Stewart—join up and kick ass through lively renditions of classics like “Mannish Boy,” “Got My Mojo Working” and “Baby Please Don't Go.” A big part of the fun comes from watching a party where anything could happen—and did.

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Savion Glover's **Fours: Live At The Blue Note (Half Note; 4553; 65 minutes ★★★★★)** is a film about the tap-dance monster's recent series of shows at New York's Blue Note club. Joining Glover in four separate segments are McCoy Tyner, Eddie Palmieri, Roy Haynes and Jack DeJohnette. Glover's offstage, engaging comments provide segues between sets. The first two performances feature a house band, while Haynes pares things down and saxophonist Marcus Strickland, DeJohnette and Glover go at it one-on-one. Lighting is a problem with all the performances, and the camera work early on makes it hard to focus. Glover's very percussive tap dancing doesn't get the attention it deserves until we get to the drummers, where simple face-offs accent why this project made sense. Haynes is hot and highly interactive, while DeJohnette and Glover end the film with the best segment overall. DeJohnette's sprawling drumset doesn't keep the two from uncanny eye-to-eye contact in a strong display of improvisation and passion. **DB**

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