

Captivity of the Jews in the sixth century B.C. Of course, there are embellishments: the Assyrian king is struck mad when he claims divinity, he struggles with his daughter Abigail over the crown, and a romance blossoms between a Jewish warrior and another Babylonian princess. Embraced by nationalist Italians as a thinly veiled call to arms against their foreign rulers, this 1842 opera cemented the composer's wider European reputation. Displaying the real beginnings of Verdi's mature style, *Nabucco* has retained a firm place in the repertory. Imaginatively conducted by Michele Mariotti—who fashions an especially refined reading of the famous choral lament “Va, pensiero”—this 2009 performance benefits from veteran Leo Nucci in the title role, slightly frayed of voice but still a powerful stage presence, as well as Dimitra Theodossiou as the hardhearted Abigail. The remaining principals are solid if unexceptional, the chorus is splendid, and the minimalist sets are serviceable. The only serious drawback here is the costuming, a bewildering mixture of period and modern garb. Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an introduction to the opera. Better than the 2004 staging in Piacenza (VL-7/06), this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

### Oberto ★★★

(2007) 124 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



The first in a planned series of all of Giuseppe Verdi's 26 operas, performed around Parma, near his birthplace, this is a 2007 performance of his 1839 debut, a formulaic romantic triangle about Riccardo, a nobleman who seduces lovely Leonora before casting her aside for Cuniza, who in turn rejects him after learning of his infidelity. Leonora's furious father, Oberto, thereupon challenges Riccardo to a duel and is killed, prompting the conscience-stricken younger man to leave Italy. Rarely performed today, this *Oberto* features the creative talent of the Teatro Regio di Parma, but was mounted at the tiny Teatro Verdi di Busseto. Since the stage is so small, director Pier'Alli had little choice but to opt for a very static presentation that often feels more like an oratorio with costumes. Nonetheless the orchestra—sounding like a reduced version of the Parma house band—is conducted with vigor and sensitivity by Antonello Allemandi, and the singing is uniformly fine, with the men—Giovanni Battista Parodi as Oberto, and Fabio Sartori as Riccardo—especially strong, although Mariana Pentcheva's Cuniza isn't far behind. Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an introduction to the opera. Fairly evenly matched with the 2007 perfor-

mance of *Oberto* in Bilbao (VL-1/08), this is recommended, especially for those who don't own the earlier release. (F. Swietek)

### Rinaldo ★★★1/2

(2011) 190 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Handel's 1711 opera, the first he composed after settling in England, boasts magnificent music but is extremely difficult to stage, since it is a huge crusading epic—filled with battle scenes and magic—pitting Christian heroes besieging Jerusalem against a wicked sorceress, the queen of Damascus. In this 2011 production from the Glyndebourne Festival, director Robert Carsen solves the staging problem by setting it at an English boys' school, where Rinaldo is a bullied, depressed student who imagines himself raising a force to defeat his tormentors—including the sadistic teachers. The concept works surprisingly well, especially when adopting a cheeky tone—such as Rinaldo soaring aloft on his bicycle, *E.T.*-style, or a gymnasium depicted as a torture chamber controlled by the dominatrix-clad “queen,” or sparklers set off in a lab to represent magical weapons. Under conductor Ottavio Dantone's vigorous beat, the period-instrument Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment plays crisply and sprightly, and the singing is outstanding across the board, with contralto Sonia Prina (Rinaldo), soprano Brenda Rae (Queen Armida), and countertenor Tim Mead (Rinaldo's friend Eustazio)—in particular—handling the demanding coloratura with incredible aplomb. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include separate interviews with Carsen and Dantone, as well as a cast gallery. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

### Rockwell: A Night of Legendary Collaborations ★★1/2

(2011) 66 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



This 14-track set presents highlights from a 2011 charity concert at London's O2 Arena in support of the Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy. Razorlight begins the show with an earnest brand of piano rock led by a front man who appears to have spent some quality time with the recordings of Patti Smith and Lou Reed. Robert Plant takes a more international approach by blending Eastern and African influences (tabla and kora) with conventional rock instrumentation for one cover and two Led Zeppelin classics, “Black Dog” and “Whole Lotta Love.” Joss Stone hits the stage in bare feet and form-fitting mini-dress to perform two numbers, including a

too-long version of “Free Me.” Consummate professional Tom Jones sings “It's Not Unusual” with customary charm, which helps to compensate for a lackluster showing in the vocal department, particularly on “Sex Bomb.” Jones and Stone also duet on the Isley Brothers' “It's Your Thing,” while David Gray joins up with the string players of Escala. The evening ends with a group sing-along on the Beatles' “Let It Be” (Jones refers to a lyric sheet, while Plant and Gray opt out). Like many multi-act highlights concerts, *Rockwell* is a mixed bag. Presented in PCM stereo, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Femmessy)

### The Rolling Stones: Charlie is My Darling, Ireland 1965 ★★★1/2

(1965) 65 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99. ABKCO Films (avail. from most distributors).



Rolling Stones devotees have every reason to celebrate the release of this chronicle of the band's 1965 tour of Ireland. Directed by Peter Whitehead and overseen by then-Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham, the hour-plus titular documentary adopts a format similar to *The First U.S. Visit*, the Maysles brothers' film about the Beatles' 1964 trip to America. The camera follows the Stones in the limo and on the train; mucking about in hotel rooms (where Keith Richards, who always has an acoustic guitar at hand, and Mick Jagger work on new Stones songs, as well as amusing, ad hoc renditions of “Eight Days a Week,” “I've Just Seen a Face,” and other Fabs faves); in interviews (dominated by the always self-conscious, camera-aware Jagger); and tuning up backstage. Best by far are the roughly half dozen songs performed live on stage, which—thanks to an impressive restoration effort—sound fantastic: “The Last Time,” “Time Is on My Side,” “Around and Around,” “I'm Alright,” and their then-smash hit (“I Can't Get No) Satisfaction.” The performances are viscerally exciting, as fans storm the stage. With the Stones marking their 50th anniversary, it's a pleasure to see the band in the days before drugs, arrests, and general depravity set in. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo on DVD and DTS-HD 5.1 and stereo on Blu-ray, extras include both the director's and the producer's cuts of the film, bonus interview clips, and a featurette on the restoration process. Considering how little footage exists from this era of the Stones' career (appearances on *The T.A.M.I. Show* and *Ed Sullivan* are about it, officially), this is highly recommended. (S. Graham)

### Romé et Juliette ★★

(2011) 177 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).

Charles Gounod's 1867 adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy about doomed young