

Festival, but this 2016 mounting directed by Annabel Arden marked the first new production there in 35 years. In design it emphasizes the Spanish setting, although the costumes are not period in style: Count Almaviva, who effectively steals the lovely Rosina from her elderly guardian (and would-be husband) Bartolo with the connivance of roguish Figaro, wears a metallic overcoat, and Bartolo's maid Berta sports a tweed suit, while Rosina is decked out in lovely gowns, and Figaro is clad in rumpled workman's garb. Arden also adds absurdist touches to the staging: Figaro appears in unexpected ways (initially bounding out of the orchestra pit), pianos move across the stage and sometimes disintegrate, and pompous music teacher Basilio fumes so much during his aria that smoke literally rises out of his robe. But the effort to elicit laughs often degenerates into mere mugging, sometimes at the sacrifice of vocal accuracy, especially by Danielle de Niese as Rosina and Alessandro Corbelli as Bartolo. Taylor Stayton, however, is a stylish Almaviva, genuinely amusing in his guises as a drunken soldier and unctuous cleric, and Björn Bürger offers a robust baritone while cutting a strapping figure as Figaro. Enrique Mazzola's treatment of the score takes a while to catch fire, but by the second act his tempos have reached breakneck speed and the London Philharmonic responds with playing that possesses genuine fizz. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an audio commentary by Mazzola and de Niese, a "making-of" featurette, and a cast gallery. Although somewhat uneven, this still has enough strengths to merit being recommended. (F. Swietek)

Il Trovatore ★★1/2

(2016) 138 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Dynamic (dist. by Naxos of America).

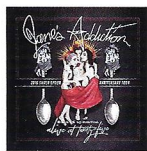


The clanging of the Anvil Chorus may be the most instantly recognizable moment in Verdi's classic 1853 opera, but despite its absurdly complicated plot (gypsy curses, infants switched at birth, brothers battling over the same woman, deaths by poison and burning at the stake, all set against a backdrop of civil war), *Il Trovatore* remains one of the master's most popular thanks to a succession of red-blooded arias and ensembles that Caruso once said required nothing but the four greatest singers in the world to do them justice. This 2016 production from the Macerata Opera Festival hardly boasts such a quartet, but the two female leads—Enkelejda Shkosa as the vengeful gypsy Azucena, and Anna Pirozzi as the beautiful but doomed Leonora—are both exceptionally fine. The men—Piero Pretti as the titular troubadour (and rebel leader) and Marco Caria as his

brother the duke—are serviceable but just not in the same league. Daniel Oren conducts the company orchestra with passion, while director Francisco Negrin uses the wide but shallow stage of the Sferisterio outdoor stadium intelligently, deftly blending past and present scenes. The sets are spare (two banks of tables) and the costumes are almost uniformly black, but both serve to enhance the mood of grim fatalism, while the use of fire as a motif adds flashes of brilliance. Other DVD and Blu-ray versions boast greater star power and visual splendor, but this one is overall a musically impressive take on this repertory warhorse. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Jane's Addiction: 2016 Silver Spoon Anniversary Tour ★★★

(2016) 85 min. DVD: \$24.99 (audio CD included), Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99 (audio CD included). Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



This 2016 concert at Irvine Meadows, CA, finds Jane's Addiction marking the 25th anniversary of their hit 1990 album *Ritual de lo Habitual* while also performing songs from their self-titled debut, and *Nothing's Shocking*, their first major-label album. As the film stock changes from black-and-white to color and back again, front man Perry Farrell sings alongside guitarist Dave Navarro, drummer Stephen Perkins, and bassist Chris Chaney (taking over from Eric Avery). Although Farrell spent years overseeing Lollapalooza and fronting Porno for Pyros, he hasn't missed a nostalgic step. The dreadlocks are gone, but he remains a lithe, wiry figure, here clad in a moiré pantsuit and neckerchief. The band opens the 13-song set with the electrifying "Stop!", which gives Navarro the chance to shine, and ends with the Velvet Underground-inspired hit "Jane Says." Anyone who didn't like their music in the 1990s probably won't like it now—especially when Farrell scats and slips into a French accent during "Been Caught Stealing"—but the band does justice here to their patented brand of metallic alt-rock. And if the addition of two scantily-clad dancers seems like a regressive move, it's also true to the band's intentionally tawdry Sunset Strip aesthetic, which extends to the *Ritual* album cover (in which a papier-mâché figure of Farrell cavorts with two nude women). When it comes to stage patter, Farrell sometimes connects with the audience, sometimes not: they're happy to hear about the band's early days, but express little enthusiasm for his riff on cable news. But then again, they came to rock, and Jane's Addiction certainly delivers on that front. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1, extras include a bonus audio CD. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Madonna: Rebel Heart Tour ★★★★★

(2015) 119 min. DVD: \$21.98 (audio CD included), Blu-ray: \$26.98 (audio CD included). Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



You've heard the phrase "you had to be there," but in the case of this Showtime-aired concert—filmed during Madonna's 2015-16 tour promoting her latest release—being there was only part of the show, as this post-production-enhanced filmed version illustrates. A meticulously-crafted presentation from its precisely-edited opening-to-closing frames, *Rebel Heart Tour* is pure spectacle (and often characteristically provocative)—a whiplash-paced, 24-song, two-hour set in which the musicians are almost never seen onscreen. The production features smart camerawork (with spot-on slo-mo touches), a giant video background wall, a troupe of skilled dancers performing intricately-choreographed routines, and an array of detailed stage sets—including an auto body shop and a Cirque du Soleil-level aerial ballet with dancers swinging on poles. Speaking of poles, many viewers will be offended by the scantily-clad, wimple-wearing nuns who pole-dance during the blasphemous-to-many song "Holy Water" (which includes the repeated line "Yeezus loves my pussy best."). But this is Madonna—or as one song title puts it "Bitch, I'm Madonna"—so there is very little Judy-Garland-Wizard-of-Oz wholesomeness to be found here (also on the likely to peeve scale is the song "S.E.X.," featuring couples—including gay—gyrating in obvious sexual fashion on a series of beds). While often shocking, the general vibe here is one that clearly celebrates tolerance and inclusiveness. Longtime Madonna fans will also appreciate the early hits, which include "Like a Virgin," "Dress You Up," "Material Girl," and the rousing finale "Holiday," the latter with guest stars (filmed over multiple shows) such as Amy Schumer, Katy Perry, Ariana Grande, and Anderson Cooper. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a bonus audio CD, a bizarre "Tears of a Clown" black-and-white segment featuring a profanity-spewing Madonna in clown makeup interacting with an audience and singing "Don't Tell Me" and "Borderline," and a bonus performance of "Like a Prayer." Nearly 60, Madonna remains a sexy, cutting-edge, multi-talented, physical performer who not only continues to command a stage, but also outshines many younger contemporary artists. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (R. Pitman)

Midsummer Night's Dream ★★1/2

(2015) 97 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99. Bel Air Classics (dist. by Naxos of America).

Choreographer Alexander Ekman's 2015