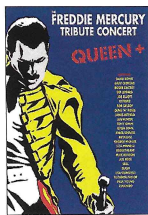


The Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert ★★★

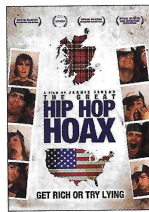
(1992) 270 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



This concert honoring the late Queen frontman and rock icon was a major entry in the age of mega-productions that began in 1985 with Live Aid. Organized by surviving Queen members Brian May, Roger Taylor, and John Deacon, the show marked the establishment of the Mercury Phoenix Trust for AIDS education and research (Mercury died from AIDS in November, 1991). Presented in April 1992 at London's Wembley Stadium before an audience of 72,000, the opening act included tribute performances by Metallica, Def Leopard, Guns N' Roses, and others, while the main show found Queen playing as the house band for the likes of Roger Daltrey ("I Want It All"), Robert Plant ("Crazy Little Thing Called Love"), Seal ("Who Wants to Live Forever"), Liza Minnelli ("We Are the Champions"), and others. The 30-plus performances of primarily Queen and Mercury compositions here are topped by a pair of duets: Annie Lennox and David Bowie on "Under Pressure" and Elton John and Axl Rose on "Bohemian Rhapsody." Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and LPCM stereo, extras include a 10th anniversary documentary, and rehearsal footage. Recommended. (T. Fry)

The Great Hip Hop Hoax ★★★1/2

(2013) 88 min. DVD: \$16.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

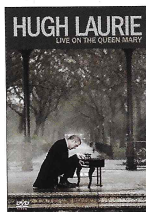


As a brazen act of defiance—fueled by desperate ambitions to transcend their boring lives—the titular hip-hop identity fraud perpetrated by the Scottish duo Silibil N' Brains definitely goes beyond faking a little street cred. Gavin Bain and Billy Boyd—best friends blessed with a fair amount of rhyming/rapping talent—initially have their dreams of stardom dashed: during a humiliating audition in London, record execs snidely dismiss them as the "rapping Proclaimers." But with their talent for mimicking American accents, Gavin and Billy set out to meticulously craft for themselves an image of snotty Eminem-type California rappers...and almost immediately begin to see doors opening. After a single gig, the pair attract major-label interest: nearly literally overnight their wildest visions of fame seem to be coming true. But will the industry out them as frauds? Although director Jeanie Finlay's *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* doesn't always show Gavin and Billy in the most sympathetic light, it's hard to fault the pair of gutsy Scots for effectively exposing the shallowness and gullibility of an industry that talks smack

about "authenticity" but thrives on fabricated image and fakery (phoniness embodied by one of the film's primary interviewees, Chris Rock of Island Records, a white Londoner who has remade himself in the image of a South Central L.A. gangsta). A fascinating and entertaining music documentary, this is highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Hugh Laurie: Live on the Queen Mary ★★★1/2

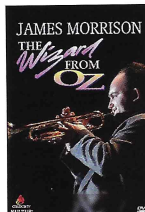
(2013) 106 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Like many actors whose celebrity has allowed them to indulge other interests, Hugh Laurie parlayed his success as the star of the Fox drama *House* for eight seasons into a side career as pianist and lead singer of a blues ensemble called the Copper Bottom Band. This PBS-aired 2013 concert is filmed on the Queen Mary in Long Beach, CA, where Laurie's idol, New Orleans blues legend Professor Longhair, recorded an album in 1975 that Laurie says changed his life. The 18-song set features mostly blues standards—including "Staggerlee," "Louisiana Blues," and "Swanee River"—interspersed with engaging remarks from Laurie. While reasonably pleasant entertainment, no one would seriously argue that Laurie is anything more than a competent keyboardist or that he has a great voice (it's no wonder that he turns over several numbers to his backup crew—singers and instrumentalists—who are excellent.) 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 an interview with Laurie. While it feels a bit like a vanity project, this will no doubt appeal to Laurie's many fans, making it a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

James Morrison: The Wizard from Oz ★★★

(1989) 54 min. DVD: \$19.99. Kultur International Films (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-0-7697-5061-3.

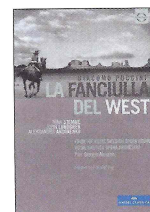


This engaging profile, which aired on Australian television in 1989, spotlights a unique musical talent. James Morrison is not only one of the rare antipodean citizens who have made a mark on the international jazz scene, he's also a multi-instrumentalist (playing the trumpet, trombone, and euphonium). This music documentary combines interviews and performance clips, including a session with Morrison's mentor, Don Burrows; an engagement with the World Superband in New York; and a concert at Switzerland's prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival. The horn player, who also races cars and pilots planes, hails from a musical family, who appear here to sing and play with

him at home and at church. As a teenager, Morrison studied at the New South Wales Conservatorium, where he so impressed Burrows that the band leader added him to his quintet (Morrison played with Burrows for six years before striking out on his own). Another influence, Dizzy Gillespie, proclaims Morrison "one of the best." As an entertainer, Morrison likes to joke around on stage, but he takes his music seriously. Other notable speakers praising his work include Australian guitarist Tommy Emmanuel and jazz critic Leonard Feather, who caught a gig at the Village Vanguard, and found Morrison to be "equally adept on the trumpet and the trombone." Presented in LPCM stereo, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

La Fanciulla del West ★★★

(2012) 140 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. EuroArts/Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



European directors appear to be more frequently adopting the idea of reframing operas in cinematic terms, which is the approach taken here by Christof Loy to Puccini's 1910 *Wild West* piece in this 2012 staging for the Royal Swedish Opera. The orchestral prologue is set to a filmed credits sequence aping the style of 1950s Westerns—complete with Monument Valley vistas—and projections mimicking the onstage action appear periodically against the rear of the stage. Fortunately, the concept doesn't overwhelm the story, which for the most part is presented in proper period costume (the sets are relatively spare, but some striking visual effects offer compensation). Happily, the musical side of the production is excellent, with Nina Stemme in powerful voice as Minnie, the barkeeper who rescues her lover, bandit Dick Johnson, from the clutches of Sheriff Jack Rance. John Lundgren cuts a menacing figure as the lusty lawman, and although Aleksandrs Antonenko seems a trifle weak as Johnson, the rest of the cast registers strongly, while Pier Giorgio Morandi leads the company orchestra and chorus in a committed reading that misses only the final measure of fire and passion. *The Girl of the Golden West*, as the title is usually translated, lacks the famous tunes of the composer's more popular works, but it's an expertly crafted piece, and this performance is preferable to the visually wacky mounting from the Netherlands Opera (VL-3/11). 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 is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Lucrezia Borgia ★★★1/2

(2013) 127 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$24.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America).

The prospect of hearing much-loved Renée