

home, where the 65-year-old Crystal tells stories for the audience, bouncing through his early life with impressions of eccentric family members and re-creations of his own early attempts at tap dancing, telling jokes, and attempting sports as an undersized kid in a big world. This old-school Catskills humor is full of Yiddish interjections and instances of Crystal mugging it up, but—to be fair—he knows how to work an audience. Recorded for HBO during its Broadway revival in early 2014, this DVD release is an extended version of what was shown on cable. Recommended. Aud: P. (S. Axmaker)

The Desperate ★★★

(2014) 32 min. DVD: \$14.99. *Tolerance Through Knowledge* (dist. by Vision Video).

Based on a true story, this dramatic short film stars veteran character actor Peter Mark Richman as Dr. Blumenthal, a renowned Jewish surgeon incarcerated at a death camp during World War II. When the son of Nazi commander General Von Ulbricht (Greg Mullavey) is seriously wounded and lies dying in an infirmary, Blumenthal is tapped to save the young man's life. Blumenthal initially refuses, resisting Ulbricht's efforts at pleading, bullying, bargaining, and more, but eventually yields to his own conscience as a man of healing. Ulbricht winds up being reduced to making the cowardly I'm-just-following-orders excuse for his participation in the Holocaust, while Blumenthal is suddenly seen by the German as an actual human being. It's nice to see Richman—a constant presence on series television in the 1960s and '70s—playing a substantial role late in his career. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Jay Johnson: The Two & Only! ★★★

(2012) 114 min. DVD: \$19.95. *Music Video Distributors* (avail. from most distributors).

Ventriloquist Jay Johnson's Broadway show (winner of a 2007 Tony Award)—presented here in a 2012 performance from Thalian Hall in Wilmington, NC—finds the former *Soap* star surrounded onstage by suitcases filled with puppets as he presents a history of his vocation while also demonstrating his expertise. The word "ventriloquism," Johnson explains, hails from the Latin for "to talk through your belly." During the 1700s, the skill became associated with puppets and achieved some popularity, despite detractors who saw ventriloquism as a form of witchcraft or demonic possession (a notion furthered by the fact that some practitioners were simply grifters who supposedly removed curses for a price). Johnson's chronology also touches on the Oracle of Delphi, *The Wizard of Oz*, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Shari Lewis and Lamb Chop, and the radio show *Big Jon and Sparkie*, which served as an inspiration for his own act. Through practice, Johnson honed his abilities—using his little sister as his "permanent captive audi-

ence"—moving on to perform for audiences in Texas and California before transitioning to television. Johnson explains how the term "dummy" came into usage, joking that his performing companions prefer to be called Wooden Americans—companions including Amigo, a sensitive boa constrictor; Nethernore, an excitable vulture; and Bob, Johnson's sarcastic *Soap* costar. All in all, this is a pretty ingenious and entertaining show. Recommended. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Me, the Vinyl and the Rest of the World

★★★

(2010) 72 min. In Brazilian Portuguese w/English subtitles. DVD: \$80; public libraries & high schools; \$300; colleges & universities. DRA. *Third World Newsreel*. PPR.

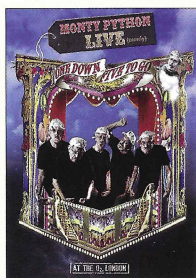
Brazil, which helped change the face of popular music with samba and bossa nova, also lays claim to a thriving hip-hop scene. In this lively film, directors Karina Ades and Lila Rodrigues document a São Paulo DJ contest that has been held since 1997, with the winner traveling to London to compete in the world championship. Contestants here explain how they got started: some work in metal shops and office buildings, while others spend their time spinning records at parties. Because the expenses for mixers and record needles add up, the men share resources (unfortunately, there are no female contestants). For DJ Erick Jay, his dad's Michael Jackson and Stevie Wonder records gave him the raw learning materials, but he would wait until his father wasn't around—lest his vinyl-scratching cause alarm. DJ Basim started out as a B-boy who would spin records to provide other break dancers with a soundtrack, but they kept encouraging his efforts, so he turned his ambitions from the

dance floor to a set of turntables. DJ Sleep, who originally called himself DJ Nap, says his nickname comes from his tendency to nod out "in inappropriate places" (he doesn't seem to be aware that this condition has a name, i.e. narcolepsy). Ades and Rodrigues give everyone a chance to share their skills behind the decks on-camera—and there's plenty of talent to go around. DJ Max sums things up for the lot—whether they spin on the side or as a full-time career—saying, "You have to sacrifice a lot. You really have to love it." An engaging documentary with solid beats, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Royal Paintbox: Artists of the Royal Family ★★★

(2013) 71 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-044-1.

Although the news is often met with surprise, prominent political figures have indulged in artistic endeavors on the side throughout modern history, from Winston Churchill to George W. Bush to Prince Charles, as we learn in filmmaker Margy Kinmonth's engaging PBS-aired documentary. The artistic inclinations of the Prince of Wales are at the center here: Charles shows off some of his watercolors and talks about how much he appreciates the meditative side of the undertaking (he even discloses that since his time when on tour is so limited, he takes along a painter as part of his entourage to produce a canvas or two recording the journey). Charles also acts as host in presenting sketches and paintings from the archives that display the talents of other royals, including Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, as well as the architectural drawings



Monty Python Live (Mostly): One Down, Five to Go

★★★1/2

(2014) 160 min. DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98. *Eagle Vision* (avail. from most distributors).

The surviving members of Monty Python's Flying Circus (Graham Chapman died in 1989) have aged, but "The Liberty Bell" march that serves as the troupe's theme song never gets old, and hearing it performed live before a rapturous audience here is a thrill. John Cleese, Eric Idle, Michael Palin, Terry Jones, and Terry Gilliam are well past their "When I'm 64" years, but they rose to the occasion for a series of once-(more)-in-a-lifetime reunion shows on July 20, 2014 in the U.K. Unlike the Marx Brothers in *Love Happy* or Laurel and Hardy in *Atoll K*, the Pythons have improved with age. They are in real life the ages of their fictional Four Yorkshiremen, a quartet of wealthy codgers who try to one-up each other on their impoverished childhoods, just one of the "greatest hits" here given a last hurrah. Some may carp that there is scant new material, but if you only have the Pythons for presumably the last time, you want to see "The Lumberjack Song," "Argument Clinic," and "Parrot Sketch." A new song might be amusing, but you'd much rather hear an especially spirited "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," which inevitably closes the show. Python muse Carol Cleveland is thankfully present—she's still a goer. (Know what I mean? Know what I mean? Nudge-nudge.) Extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Bottom line: say no more; highly recommended. Aud: P. (D. Liebenson)