

# Legends & Legacies

BY JOHN EPHLAND

Filmmakers around the world continue to be inspired by the life stories and hypnotic performances of icons such as Frank Sinatra, Nina Simone and Rahsaan Roland Kirk. Here's a look at some cinematic gems.



COURTESY MVD ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

Janis Joplin, as seen in the documentary *Janis: Little Girl Blue* (MVD)

**The Frank Sinatra Collection: *O! Blue Eyes Is Back/The Main Event* (Eagle Rock Entertainment 307699; 103 minutes ★★★★★).** This set combines two performances: a TV show (*O! Blue Eyes Is Back*) and a concert (*The Main Event*) from 1973 and '74, respectively. The NBC show was a return after Sinatra's "retirement" in 1971, and it features Hollywood star Gene Kelly. Songs include a medley and duet with Kelly, as well as "Street Of Dreams" and "I Get A Kick Out Of You." Tuxes notwithstanding, the ballads connect.

*The Main Event*, a concert at Madison Square Garden, was broadcast on ABC, and it includes announcer Howard Cosell, some celebrities amid the 20,000 on hand and Sinatra singing "You Are The Sunshine Of My Life," "My Way" and "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" (with audience members dancing in the aisles). There are also personal favorites like "The House I Live In," "Angel Eyes" and "My Kind Of Town." Don Costa conducts Woody Herman's Thundering Herd along with New York musicians and a string section. Also available in the series: *At The Royal Festival Hall/Sinatra In Japan* (chronicling concerts in 1970 and 1985) and *Happy Holidays With*

*Frank & Bing/Vintage Sinatra* (which captures a 1957 TV special with Bing Crosby that was broadcast in color, plus a compilation of black-and-white footage from the 1950s).

Ordering info: [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

***Pride And Joy: The Story Of Alligator Records* (MVD 7493BR; 87 minutes ★★★★★).** This Robert Mugge film (first released in 1992 and now on Blu-ray) is a nice slice of Chicago blues history. The film includes performance clips from the label's 20th anniversary tour in 1991, showcasing artists like Koko Taylor, Elvin Bishop, Lonnie Brooks and Lil' Ed & The Blues Imperials. Mugge also offers an inside look via interviews with the artists themselves as well as label founder Bruce Iglauer. The pacing is good, giving us a sense of the party-like feel to the label, as the music and words are intertwined. The bonus material includes audio of 10 more performances from the 20th anniversary tour.

Ordering info: [MVDshop.com](http://MVDshop.com)

***George Crumb: Voice Of The Whale* (MVD 7499D; 54 minutes ★★★★★).** This Robert Mugge film, which was first broadcast on PBS in 1978, offers an inside look into one of America's most original

composers. At certain points, the production feels almost like a home movie (it was "music filmmaker" Mugge's first on the subject, filmed with two color tints), and there are surprising moments that highlight other artists, including fellow composer Richard Wernick. Mugge examines the many sides of Crumb, a Grammy- and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer who combines his deep knowledge with avant-garde approaches, technical skills as a trained musician, and an interest in classical music, various forms of folk music and rural gospel tunes.

A bonus is a performance by the Penn Contemporary Players of Crumb's 1971 piece *Vox Balaenae For Three Masked Players*. Plus, Crumb's demonstrations of unusual sounds on exotic instruments add to our understanding of his unique aesthetic.

Ordering info: [MVDshop.com](http://MVDshop.com)

***All Things Must Pass* (MVD 8724D; 96 minutes ★★★★★½).** This is a history lesson covering the rise and fall of a beloved record store chain, Tower Records, from its early days in Sacramento, California, to opening stores worldwide. Taking its title from a song and album by George Harrison, director Colin Hanks (who worked on the project for seven years) gets at the core of Tower Records' charm. The film explores company founder Russ Solomon's successful, human-centered formula with extensive interviews with not only Solomon but also a number of key employees who stuck around for the ride.

Besides chronicling the rise and fall of various recording technologies and formats from the 1960s to pretty much the present day, the film features interviews with some famous loyalists: Bruce Springsteen, Elton John, Dave Grohl and David Geffen. Video clips and vintage photographs add to the sense of family and its impact on Tower customers.

Ordering info: [MVDshop.com](http://MVDshop.com)

***Rahsaan Roland Kirk: The Case Of The Three Sided Dream* (Arthaus Musik 109252; 107 minutes ★★★★★).** A labor of love by filmmaker Adam Kahan, this documentary provides a welcome look into the too-short life of saxophonist/composer Kirk through home videos, performance footage, interviews with former colleagues and a rare clip of Kirk performing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. That Sullivan appearance—which featured special guests Archie Shepp, Roy Haynes and Charles Mingus along with regular bandmates—came as a result of Kirk leading a revolt against broadcasters for under-representing blacks on TV; the film also examines an event wherein Kirk and fellow protesters as audience members disrupt *The Dick Cavett Show*.

This is a fascinating portrait of an artist who went blind at an early age yet developed innovative musical approaches, such as playing multiple horns simultaneously, and other techniques of playing—even after suffering partial paralysis. Viewers can experience Kirk playing "Black Classical Music" on

"plantation earth," in this film, which was named Best Documentary at the Pan African Film Festival. (The film can be seen online at monoduo.net.)

**Ordering info:** [amzn.to/2aAkOTm](http://amzn.to/2aAkOTm)

**Bill Evans: Time Remembered (87 minutes ★★★★★).** Bruce Spiegel's documentary reveals a side of Bill Evans that encourages an empathic view of the pianist. We get to see and hear how Evans' personal life contributed to his artistry, a story informed by vintage interviews with the pianist. Along with his addictions and troubled marriages, Evans had to deal with the anguish following the suicide of his loving, older brother, who had been an important mentor during his formative years.

The emergence of Helen Keane as Evans' manager is a pivotal moment. Following the success of his trio with bassist Scott LaFaro and drummer Paul Motian (and LaFaro's untimely death), Evans was able to not only continue creating but also to astound. The film covers the early years in good detail, including his fruitful alliance with Miles Davis.

Among the interviewees are bassists Chuck Israels, Gary Peacock and Marc Johnson; drummers Paul Motian, Jack DeJohnette and Marty Morell; producer Orrin Keepnews; and singer Tony Bennett, who collaborated with Evans during an important late-inning stretch before the iconic pianist died of various health problems in 1980.

**Ordering info:** [billevanstimeremembered.com](http://billevanstimeremembered.com).

**Janis: Little Girl Blue (MVDvisual 8304D; 105 minutes ★★★★★).** Director Amy J. Berg's film provides a truly sympathetic, glowing portrait of Janis Joplin, the rock-and-blues singer who took

the world by storm during the late '60s before her tragic death on Oct. 4, 1970, at age 27. Berg revisits the emerging rock scene in the San Francisco Bay Area during the era when a young Joplin was trying to tear herself away from her backwards life in Port Arthur, Texas. She had a difficult time dealing with fame and other issues, and much of her pain was conveyed through the letters she wrote home. The film addresses her temporary alliance with Ron "Pigpen" McKernan of the Grateful Dead, her decision to interpret Kris Kristofferson's "Me And Bobby McGee" (a major hit), the move to Columbia Records, her struggles with addiction, the back-and-forth with her bandmates, and, of course, her riveting performance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival.

This documentary, which was broadcast on PBS, features interviews with Kristofferson, Bob Weir, Pink, Melissa Etheridge and Joplin family members. It also includes deleted scenes that were not part of the PBS broadcast.

**Ordering info:** [MVDshop.com](http://MVDshop.com)

**What Happened, Miss Simone? (Eagle Rock Entertainment 307689; 116 minutes/60 minutes ★★★★★).** With a title from a quote by poet Maya Angelou, this DVD/CD package captures a significant chunk of the artistic and personal life of Nina Simone. Born Eunice Waymon in 1933, she was thwarted in her attempt to pursue a career as a classical pianist. Later she would mingle that aes-

thetic with her desire to play "civil rights music." Simone struggled to make ends meet, and eventually she wed her manager, Andrew Strand, who is interviewed here, as are her daughter, Lisa Celeste Stroud, and guitarist Al Schackman.

Other interviewees include Newport Festival impresario George Wein, music critic Stanley Crouch and comedian Dick Gregory, who, commenting on Simone's performance of her song "Mississippi Goddam," states, "We all wanted to say it. *She* said it." Performance clips include a visit to the Montreux Jazz Festival. Simone's own voice-over narrative was certainly a factor in this film being nominated for an Academy Award in the category Best Documentary (Feature). The film is bundled with a CD of music from the documentary as well as extra tracks. **DB**

**Ordering info:** [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)



**THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA**  
DIRECTED BY POOTY MARSHALL  
A VERY SWINGIN' BASIE CHRISTMAS!

**THE LEGENDARY COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA'S FIRST CHRISTMAS RECORDING!**

**INCLUDES 11 HOLIDAY TRACKS FEATURING SPECIAL GUESTS INCLUDING JOHNNY MATHIS, LEDISI, ELLIS MARSALIS AND CARMEN BRADFORD**

**MP3 - CD - VINYL**

**amazonmusic**

**Maggie Herron**  
Between The Music & The Moon

**Maggie Herron**  
**BETWEEN THE MUSIC AND THE MOON**

Produced by Bill Cunliffe and Maggie Herron.

Winner of the 2015 Hawaii Na Hoku Hanohano Award for Jazz.

"Right from the first smoky vocals, I was hooked on Maggie Herron's style and a few minutes later on her composing skills... I listened to this CD for two days straight."  
-MusicalMentor's Blog, WordPress

Available at CD Baby, Amazon and iTunes.  
[www.maggieherron.com](http://www.maggieherron.com)

**THE Frank Sinatra COLLECTION**  
HAPPY HOLIDAYS WITH FRANK & BING  
VINTAGE SINATRA

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS WITH FRANK & BING + VINTAGE SINATRA**

First aired in 1957, this is a timeless Christmas favorite featuring the magical combination of Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby in an early color television special. Vintage Sinatra combines footage from Frank Sinatra's 1950s television shows with commentary and reminiscences from his three children: Nancy, Tina and Frank Sinatra Jr.

**eagle vision** **UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP**