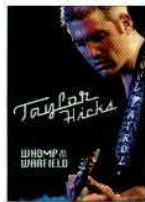


who danced the role of Prince Siegfried back in the '70s. Using the framework of the timeless Marius Petipa/Lev Ivanov choreography, and reinstating some rarely performed parts, this lavish undertaking features a fairy tale setting and exquisite costuming (updated from medieval times to the composer's 19th-century era). The story of the prince who falls in love with Odette (who must be released from an evil spell) but betrays her for the seductive Odile makes special demands on the ballerina, who must not only negotiate the choreographic challenges but also project opposing personae in the dual role of Odette/Odile. Marianela Nuñez does this to perfection, superbly supported by Thiago Soares as Prince Siegfried. Although the camerawork provides full-stage views, at times it feels like a top-balcony perspective—that being said, however, this is still consistently superior to other offerings (including those reviewed in VL-4/03, VL-1/06, and VL-5/07). Presented in DTS and LPCM stereo, DVD extras include an excellent interview with Dowell, a discussion among four prima ballerinas who have performed the role of Odette/Odile, a synopsis, and a cast gallery. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (J. Reed)

Taylor Hicks: Whomp at the Warfield ★★1/2

(2007) 84 min. DVD: \$19.98. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

Filed in May 2007, following his success in 2006 as *American Idol*'s fifth-season winner, Taylor Hicks performs an R&B-fueled set at San Francisco's Warfield Theatre. Drawing primarily from his self-titled major-label debut, the singer/guitarist is assisted by a solid back-up band that includes guitar, bass, drums, keyboards, saxophone, and backing vocals. Hicks has the right kind of voice for the material, recalling blue-eyed soul singers from Michael McDonald to John Mayer (unlike most *American Idol* veterans, he also writes some of his own material). Naturally, he works in a few shout-outs to the Soul Patrol, a pet name for his mostly female fan base. Despite the retro sound, Hicks' covers don't work as well as his originals, mostly because he tends to race through them, especially Ray Charles' "Lonely Avenue" and Eric Clapton's "Badge." As live shows go, *Whomp at the Warfield* is reasonable enjoyable—Hicks isn't doing much that McDonald and Steve Winwood haven't already done, but he's a solid performer. In the bonus interview, the Alabama native explains that "whomp music" represents a combination of styles, like a swamp (in which case, "swamp music" might have made more sense). Other DVD extras include two more numbers—"Son of a Carpenter" and the title track from Hicks' first record, *In Your Time*. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1



and stereo, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Turandot ★★★

(2008) 120 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$32.98, Blu-ray: \$45.98. Unilet Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).

Chinese film director Chen Kaige, best known for his 1993 *Farewell My Concubine*, undertakes his first opera with this lavish interpretation of the warhorse by Giacomo Puccini, which opened the 2008 Festival del Mediterrani in Valencia, Spain. Tiziano Mancini's video record of the production brilliantly captures the best of Kaige's vision for the work—a wonderfully elaborate Chinese pavilion set and a large chorus that is shrewdly assembled to enhance the illusion of the masses watching the bizarre melodrama unfold. This version of the story of the princess who will only marry a prince capable of solving her riddles jettisons the faux-Orientalism and cutesy touches that often make *Turandot* tiresome, as evidenced by the wise decision to play down the traditional minstrelsy in the second act involving the wily trio Ping, Pang, and Pong (Fabio Previati, Vincenç Esteve, and Roger Padulés, respectively). However, the camera also magnifies a central flaw: indifferent acting by Marco Berti as Calaf and Maria Guleghina in the title role. Separately, they have little charisma, and their scenes together lack any true spark. The real star here is Alexia Voulgaridou as Liù—her "Tu che di gel sei cinta" is a stunning testament to the power of love to conquer the worst that human cruelty can put forth. Ultimately, Kaige and conductor Zubin Mehta, leading the Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana, manage to camouflage the production's problems through visual sweep and stirring orchestration. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo, DVD extras include a making-of documentary. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)



The Zombies: Odessey & Oracle (Revisited) ★★★★★

(2008) 121 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

One of the best and most underappreciated of the British Invasion bands of the 1960s, the Zombies had already broken up when "Time of the Season" became their biggest hit. That meant that *Odessey (sic) & Oracle*, the album that spawned the single, went largely unnoticed—a real pity, as it was a post-Sgt. Pepper masterpiece. That wrong was finally righted when the four surviving members (guitarist Paul Atkinson died in 2004) got together in London in 2008 to perform the album in its



entirety—the first time they'd ever played the songs live. The first half of the concert, staged at the Shepherd's Bush Empire, consists of obscure tunes from the group's early days; singer Colin Blunstone's solo career; and Argent—keyboardist Rod Argent's post-Zombies band. But *Odessey & Oracle* is the main attraction, and with Argent, Blunstone, bassist Chris White, and drummer Hugh Grundy (augmented by additional musicians) performing, it is simply brilliant, with layers of rich, intricate harmonies, odd instruments (like a 19th-century pedal organ on "Butcher's Tale"), and literate, provocative lyrics. The Argent-White songwriting is uniformly superb, and the arty vibe of "Care of Cell 44," "A Rose for Emily," "Changes," and other tunes make them no less accessible. Notwithstanding the occasional crack in the upper vocal registers, the band is spot on, and when they end with "Time of the Season" and the immortal singles "She's Not There" and "Tell Her No," the standing ovation that ensues is richly deserved. Presented in 5.1 surround sound, this is highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

New to Blu-ray

Tristan und Isolde

(Naxos of America, Blu-ray: \$58.98). Richard Wagner's 1865 opera about a knight who falls in love with his king's betrothed (with tragic results) receives a solid mounting in this well-received 2007 production (VL-5/08 ★★★) that marked the first Wagner staging ever at England's Glyndebourne Festival.



Don Giovanni

(Naxos of America, Blu-ray: \$39.99). Presented live from Madrid's Teatro Royal, this 2005 production (VL-3/07 ★★★1/2) of Mozart's classic opera transposes the action from 17th-century Seville to post-Civil War Spain, an update that actually improves on the original Da Ponte libretto built around the ultimate seducing, raping, and murdering scoundrel.



Genoveva

(Naxos of America, Blu-ray: \$39.99). Like Beethoven, Robert Schumann composed only one opera, likewise centering on a wife's faithfulness. But unlike the repertory staple *Fidelio*, *Genoveva* fell into obscurity after a poorly-received 1850 debut. But it has found a modern champion in Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who conducts this 2008 production (VL-3/09 ★★★) from the Zurich Opera.

