

Composing Outside the Beatles: Lennon and McCartney, 1973-1980

★★★1/2

(2011) 139 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



If you're one of those who contend that very little any ex-Beatle did on his own measures up to what they did together, then slogging through a two-hours-plus documentary about John Lennon and Paul McCartney's solo work in the 1970s will seem a daunting prospect. Still, this isn't half bad, partly due to the stature of the artists and their music, but also because of the presence of musicians who actually played with Lennon (bassist Klaus Voormann, a Beatle insider since their Hamburg days in the very early '60s) and McCartney (Wings guitarist-singer Denny Laine and drummer Denny Seiwell), along with veteran journalists like Robert Christgau, Anthony DeCurtis, and Paul Gambaccini. As the tale picks up in '73, the consensus is that Lennon's early work, including the classic *Plastic Ono Band* and *Imagine* albums, was far superior to Macca trifles like *McCartney* and *Ram*. But then Lennon fell in with the radical left, which led to *Sometime in New York City* (arguably the worst album any Beatle ever made), while McCartney and his band Wings, after early misfires like *Wild Life* and *Red Rose Speedway*, hit their stride with the gigantic hit *Band on the Run*. And so it goes, as every release—including obscurities like McCartney's *Back to the Egg* and Lennon's *Rock 'n' Roll*, along with various singles—is dissected here in sometimes numbing detail, coupled with some live footage, plus videos for songs like Lennon's "Inspiration" and McCartney's "Mull of Kintyre." Although there are surprising opinions doled out (*McCartney II* is generally praised for its electronic innovations), this is not hagiography; the critics agree, for instance, that had John not died the week it was released, *Double Fantasy* would have been regarded as uninspired and pedestrian. And when the doc ends with "I Want to Hold Your Hand," it's obvious that all agree on one point: it's the whole Beatles, not the sum of their parts, who will endure. A strong optional purchase. (S. Graham)

Diana Ross: Live in Central Park ★★★★★

(1983) 108 min. DVD: \$16.98. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-60399-733-1.



A night to remember: on July 21, 1983, Diana Ross took the stage to perform in NYC's Central Park before an estimated audience of 400,000, only to be met by heavy wind and torrential rain. Adopting a "show must go on" attitude, lady Ross sang the blues and more in the downpour until it became

evident that safety was an issue. She left the stage but vowed to return the following night, ultimately serving up a 20-plus song set of hits and medleys in front of an adoring capacity crowd. *Diana Ross: Live in Central Park* captures this magical two-night event, offering the complete storm-shortened concert as a bonus feature while the main show recaps the first night before launching into the full-length second appearance. Backed by a tucked-away band, the performance is all Ross, with the singer—dressed in a skintight purple jumpsuit (costume changes would follow)—commanding the stage with an equal mix of talent and ego, shifting between sexy strutting (with a rather strange set of Mae West jokes) and kitten-ish innocence as she delivers solo hits ("Family," "Home," "Mirror, Mirror," "Theme from *Mahogany* (Do You Know Where You're Going To)," "Endless Love," and "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"), a too-brief Supremes medley (with "Reflections," "Baby Love," and others), and one-offs (such as "Maniac," in which Ross channels her inner Jennifer Beals). Often, Ross appears to be wiping away tears—whether real, manufactured, chemically-induced (from false eyelash glue), or a physiological response to the wind is anybody's guess—but there are some genuine highlights here, including her moving rendition of "God Bless the Child" and her playful "Muscles" (forgettable song, but she turns it into a great crowd-pleasing interactive production, asking the men to take off their shirts and show her their muscles). Although this shot-on-video production looks only so-so (presented in its original 4:3 aspect ratio), the Dolby Digital stereo sound is surprisingly good, all things considered. Also featuring an audio commentary track by director Steve Binder, this sure-to-be-popular concert is highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Die Rote Zora ★★1/2

(2011) 114 min. In German w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$19.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).



Kurt Held's titular children's book is the inspiration for Elisabeth Naskes' "opera for families," filmed here in a 2009 performance conducted by Catherine Larsen-Maguire at the Komische Oper Berlin. *Die Rote Zora's* celebration of the triumph of the downtrodden against their exploiters reflects the composer's political views (Held was a socialist who fled into Swiss exile during the Nazi era). The title character, not coincidentally nicknamed for her red hair, is a fiery tomboy who leads a gang of four other orphans against their enemies—the town's rich, well-fed, fashionably dressed schoolboys. The poor kids are also mistreated by the wealthy townspeople and targeted by the bumbling local police, while some of the fishermen and less affluent shopkeepers come to their

defense. A subplot finds the mayor's daughter falling for the most recent addition to Zora's band. Unfortunately, much of the piece consists of long swaths of spoken dialogue in German, and while some of the tunes are catchy facsimiles of folk melodies from the Balkans (where the story is set), most are forgettable, and none of the orchestral playing or singing, including that of Olivia Vermeulen as Zora, rises above adequate. In fact, the only scenes boasting any visual magic are a couple of short interludes set underwater and populated by choristers costumed as fish and other aquatic creatures. Zora may be a popular child heroine in Europe, but this opera is unlikely to win her many North American fans. Presented in PCM stereo, this is an optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Dinosaur Jr. Live at 9:30 Club: In the Hands of the Fans ★★★★★

(2011) 62 min. DVD: \$16.95, Blu-ray: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



The result of an online contest—six fans film and interview the members of Dinosaur Jr.—this concert features the band playing the album *Bug* in its entirety at Washington, D.C.'s 9:30 Club in June 2011. What the group lacks in theatrics—drummer Murph and bassist Lou Barlow are all business, while guitarist/singer J. Mascis often hides behind his long, platinum-dyed hair—they make up for with ear-splitting sound. "Freak Scene," "No Bones," "They Always Come," "Yeah We Know," "Let It Ride," "Pond Song," "Budge," and "The Post" all wind through several phases, with Mascis working his whammy bar and effects pedals to pull extraordinary reverberations from his guitar. Barlow invites one of the fans on stage to sing the album's last track, "Don't," after explaining that he blew his own voice out on the first night of touring attempting to perform it himself. Two encores—"Sludgefeast" and "Raisans"—treat the crowd to favorite selections from the album *You're Living All Over Me*. Dinosaur Jr. weathered separations and bouts of animosity before coming together again, so its nice to witness their spirited playing and hear how well their psychedelic punk assault has aged. DVD extras include an interview with the band conducted by Henry Rollins, a backstage chat with the contest winners, and two bonus live tracks. Featuring both a 5.1 surround sound mix and a stereo soundtrack, this is recommended. (H. Seggel)

Doors—Mr. Mojo Risin': The Story of L.A. Woman ★★★★★

(2011) 103 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

In this hour-long documentary, band