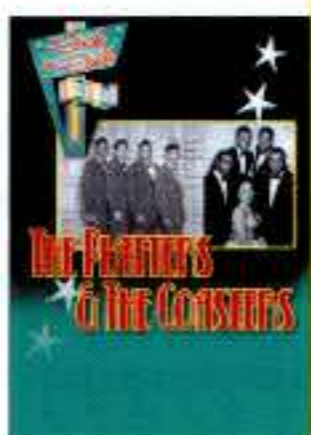


slightly longer than the main program itself. Recommended. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)

Rock 'n Roll Legends: The Platters & The Coasters ★★

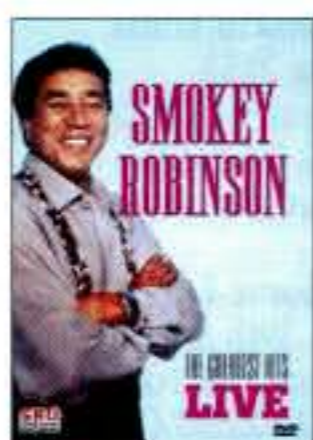
(2005) 60 min. DVD: \$12.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



As much as one might revere the music of these two vintage vocal groups—and there's much to love about classics like "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" (the Platters) and especially "Yakety Yak," "Poison Ivy," and "Charlie Brown" (the Coasters)—this dual performance is strictly a *caveat emptor* proposition, largely because the singers you see here are Platters and Coasters in name only. What with death, retirement, and lawsuits galore, the groups have repeatedly changed personnel since their '50s origins (the Platters alone have reconfigured so many times that it takes eight full pages of DVD text to document the different lineups). So what we end up with here is an adequate substitute for the nostalgia-minded but a far cry from the real deal, served up with tinny sound, slightly blurry video, and all the excitement of an off-Strip lounge show in Las Vegas. That's especially true of the four Platters (the original lineup had five), who turn in schmaltzy versions of "The Great Pretender," "Only You," and other hits, including a mere 40 seconds of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes"—an editing blunder that typifies the overall cheesiness of the package, which neglects to identify any of the singers (to their credit, the group does show some life on a humorous "Sixteen Tons" and an R&B-oriented "He's Mine"). The Coasters' set is better, if only because the material written for the group by producers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller is timeless rock 'n' roll. To be fair, the folks who crowded into the Rock 'N Roll Palace in Orlando, FL to dance the night away seem to be having a good time, but—apparently—you had to be there. Optional, at best. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Smokey Robinson: The Greatest Hits Live

★★★1/2
(1992) 84 min. DVD: \$14.99. SRO (dist. by Kultur International Films). ISBN: 0-7697-8434-8.

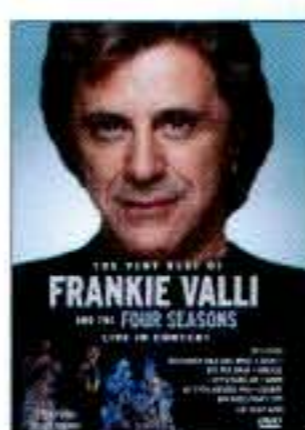


After making a smooth entrance onto the Desert Inn stage in Las Vegas for this 1992 concert, Motown maestro Smokey Robinson sounds a bit winded halfway through the opening number, "More Love." In fact, you wonder how this indispensable architect of pop-soul is going to make it through another 17 songs—including a lengthy medley—but by the fourth tune (a rousing take on his old Miracles hit, "Shop Around"), Robinson is warmed

up, and while not hitting the full range of notes as in his heyday, nevertheless dazzles with his trademark soulful voice. Backed by an outstanding band that takes a respectful but nimble approach to his classic arrangements on "You've Really Got a Hold on Me," "Tracks of My Tears," and "I Second That Emotion," Robinson builds a majestic vocal bridge between gospel-flavored funk glory and delicate orchestral constructions. "Ooh Baby Baby," "I Want a Love I Can See," and "More Than You Know" eventually lead to Smokey playing directly to the ladies in the audience with the touching corn of "I Love Your Face," while the closing "Just to See Her" and "Going to a Go-Go," take us from the wistful to the epic, reflecting the true range of Robinson's brilliance. Presented in Dolby Digital stereo, this is highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

The Very Best of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons: Live in Concert

★★★1/2
(1992) 76 min. DVD: \$14.99. SRO (dist. by Kultur International Films). ISBN: 0-7697-8432-1.



Back in the early '60s (i.e., before the Beatles arrived), the Four Seasons were one

of America's top vocal groups. And with good reason: under the guidance of producer-songwriter Bob Crewe and songwriter Bob Gaudio (also an original member of the group), the Four Seasons recorded a string of genuinely classic singles, including "Sherry," "Walk Like a Man," "Big Girls Don't Cry," "Dawn," "Rag Doll," and several others. But that was then. This 1992 Atlantic City concert finds Frankie Valli as the only remaining original member (there are four other "Seasons" on hand, but they're essentially Valli's backup band). The early hits ("Sherry," "Walk Like a Man," "Big Girls Don't Cry") are mostly delivered in perfunctory, truncated versions near the end of the 22-song set, while the group's '70s comeback is also represented by "December 1963 (Oh, What a Night)" and "Who Loves You" (both good songs penned by Gaudio), and there's a nice *a cappella* interlude with "Remember Then" and "Blue Moon" (doo-wop numbers that were originated by the Earls and the Marcells, respectively). That leaves Valli's solo hits—like "My Eyes Adored You," "Grease," and "Can't Take My Eyes Off You"—schlocky stuff that was definitely popular but doesn't hold a candle to the original Four Seasons' output. All in all, this slick and mildly entertaining (if largely routine) performance is a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)



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