

former wrestler Joanie Laurer, who plays the villain, give absolutely terrible performances. Both women are trying to be funny, with Smith affecting the mannerisms of a two-year-old and Laurer just trying to appear discombobulated, but both fail so miserably that the movie becomes grating whenever they are on the screen, and all of those great car crashes and explosions and other gags are just a waste of filmmaking resources. The 96-minute program is rated 'R,' but contains no nudity whatsoever.

The picture is presented in full screen format only, with a serviceable picture transfer and a generally centered 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack. There are optional Spanish subtitles, but no English captioning. The film comes with 13 minutes of deleted scenes, including a segment in which Smith tries her hardest to improvise for comedy with a vibrator, and an interesting 11 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage that don't always paint a rosy picture of the production and leave you wondering about the level of Smith's mental stability. There is also a commentary track featuring director David Giancola, producer Mary Beth French and screenwriter Ben Coello, which was recorded after Smith had passed away. They describe the problems confronting the production, identify the extraneous material that was salted into the film, and bicker about a few of their choices. They also supply an interesting portrait of Smith. "Anna was always in her character when she walked out of her trailer. Nobody really knew if she was just crazy or whatever, and I finally realized by the last week that she was a method actress. She didn't know it. That was just the only way she could hold it together, and I said, 'You know, Anna, you're a method actress.' She said, 'What's that?' I said, 'You just stay in character. That's your process as an actress. Lots of very famous actors use this method. I think De Niro uses it, I may be wrong, but there are a lot of famous actors that use this.' I explained this to her and she was very impressed. She said, 'Oh, that's great.' But once I knew that, it was the last week of the shoot. I really could use it more." "Stanislavski would be proud."

### Beyond good and evil

From *The Wire* to *Six Feet Under*, HBO has produced better written, more artistically accomplished and more entertaining television shows than *The Sopranos*, but no other series has achieved the same level of greatness in terms of social impact or sheer dramatic authority. The series reaches what is apparently its conclusion with what the creators chose to codify as a single season, even though its production and broadcast was split across two years with a long gap, now issued on DVD by HBO Video as *The Sopranos Season Six, Part I* (UPC#026359330124, \$100), which was broadcast in 2006, and *The Sopranos Season Six Part II* (UPC#026359-424120, \$100), which was broadcast in 2007. The story of a mobster who lives with his wife and kids in an upper-middle class New Jersey suburb, the series zigged and zagged throughout its run, altering the personalities of characters to suit its story needs and forever veering away from the classic gangster film suspense mechanics even as its own characters celebrated the heritage those films brought to their lifestyle. Ironically, *Season Six*, both parts, is far and away the best season the show's creators achieved, although fans who were turned on by the concept of gun-blazing godfathers living next door to them were as frustrated as ever by the program's elliptical narrative and too quick, often unexpected, moments of violence. The season begins with one such moment, as the hero, played with a remarkable sense of human imperfection by James Gandolfini, is accidentally shot and then drifts through a fascinating two-episode dream sequence as doctors work to save him. That opening sets the tone for the well-publicized and quite compelling conclusion of the series, which cuts out abruptly, without definitive resolution. Between those two bookends is a wonderful array of financial maneuverings, law enforcement traps, bullying, backdoor deals, emotional outbursts, substance abuse imbroglios, character growth, family nitpicking, cultural reflections, sex, violence, and alpha male gone wild antics. The story arcs of most of the supporting characters are brought to viable conclusions, and are richly embellished along the way. Gandolfini's character is presented throughout the series as traveling on a spiritual quest that is beyond good and evil, and the reconciliation of that journey to the inhuman acts he commits to sustain his being goes to the heart of the program's appeal. Perhaps as viewers waited from week to week and month to month to see the show to its end they became flustered by its leisurely pace and many digressions, but when the viewing is compacted to a more sensible fortnight—or less—the elegance of the show's thematic harmonies are far more accessible, the plot delays and side trips are much less frustrating, and the emotional impact of the program is not only solidified, but intensified by a consistency of detail and vision that had never been as effectively achieved in the previous seasons. It may look like *The Sopranos* ends in a whimper, but if you step back a bit you realize that it has actually gone out with a bang.

**Part I** contains twelve episodes spread across four platters and runs a total of 661 minutes. **Part II** contains nine episodes spread across four platters and runs a total of 489 minutes. There is no 'Play All' option and HBO's annoying, spoiler-laden menu design is present, as usual, although in a more subdued form. The picture is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is fine and the image is solid. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has plenty of power, a satisfying dimensionality and occasional directional effects. There is an alternate Spanish track in standard stereo and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Four of the episodes on **Part I** have commentary tracks featuring members of the cast and crew, but they are all very lightweight, superficial talks and are generally a waste of time. Along with a semi-spoof featurette on the making of a movie one of the characters produces, and a much better 16-minute segment on the show's music, **Part II** has another four commentaries—again, one per platter—and again, most of them are lightweight affairs, featuring cast members who ramble on as best they can, trying to fill the hour with what they can remember and how they feel about working on the show. The final commentary, however, which appears on the next to the last episode, is a bit stronger, as cast members Stevie Van Zandt and Arthur Nascarella play off one another quite well and share a number of amusing anecdotes and insights. They also offer the only analysis of the finale present on the DVD.

Van Zandt: "We did not shoot three or four different endings. Everybody thought we shot three or four different endings. It was one ending. [Series creator David Chase] wrote it like two years ago, or more, because there was only supposed to be one season, remember? This was an extra season. So this was already written for last season, at least."

Nascarella: "No, you're right. The last read-through of the last episode, which we did before every episode, we did a table read. That was exactly how it was written. Exactly. There's nothing changed. You know, let me tell you something, most people never heard this before, because I was at that table read. At the end of the table read, there was about ten seconds of silence and Jimmy Gandolfini looked at David Chase and said, 'Why did you end it that way?' And David Chase said to him, 'I didn't want to show that crime paid, and I didn't want to show that crime didn't pay.'"

### The richness of Lean times

A 1992 concert staged shortly after David Lean passed away, *Maurice Jarre A Tribute to David Lean*, has been released by Ryko Distribution as a 2-Disc Special Edition Milan Concerts title (UPC#7313836-31726, \$20). Running 57 minutes, Jarre conducts an orchestra in London, playing passages and suites from the four Lean films Jarre scored, as film clips appear on a screen in the rear of the stage, containing both footage from the films and behind-the-scenes shots. For one sequence from a *Passage to India*, Jarre conducts as if he were in a genuine scoring session, matching the music to the images, to the exact frame. He also plays a specially composed suite he put together for Lean's wedding, although, as we pointed out in our LD review, including the love themes from two of the greatest cinematic tributes to infidelity ever conceived, *Dr. Zhivago* and *Ryan's Daughter*, makes a somewhat questionable wedding present. In any case, the music instills within the viewer memories of the grandeur of each movie, and it is a transporting performance.

The picture is presented in full screen format only. The colors are mildly aged and the picture is a touch grainy in spots, but not to the point of distraction. The standard stereo sound has a terrific dimensionality and plenty of smoothly detailed power. Jarre also supplies a commentary, talking about what Lean was looking for with each score, going over some of the more exotic instruments employed, and reminiscing about the concert event and his original recording sessions. There is also a 36-minute interview with Jarre, in which he talks about his career and more about his work with Lean.

The second platter is an audio CD, running 48 minutes and delivering the live performance with even more clarity and vigor than the DVD.

### Django Reinhardt

A 110-minute profile of European jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt is presented on *Django Reinhardt King of Jazz Guitar*, a Quantum Leap MVD Visual release (UPC#022891694991, \$20). Since footage of Reinhardt is rather scarce, the visual program combines still photos and archival materials with impressionistic videos of Paris, guitar playing and that sort of thing, all blended in a busy collage format, as a voiceover narrator delivers Reinhardt's complete biography, intercut with a very healthy selection of his recordings. It is the extensiveness of the recordings that makes the 2005 program worthwhile, particularly as they are placed in context by the narration, which otherwise steps back to let them play without interruption. The full screen picture is in adequate condition and the monophonic sound is solid and clear. There is no captioning and no chapter encoding. Also featured is a worthwhile discography and a text essay about Reinhardt's guitar.

### Have some Heart

A 2007 revival concert, *Heart Dreamboat Annie Live*, has been released as a *Legendary Albums Live* title by Shout (UPC#826663106053, \$15). The show runs 83 minutes, and while the renditions of their original music are rather bland, the Led Zeppelin covers they do in their encore are great fun and create an effective climax. The program opens with a short interview in which the two central band members, Ann and Nancy Wilson, look back on their career.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is crisp and bright. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is spread out effectively and delivered with a reasonable amount of energy. There is a 4-minute piece about the concert and a small collection of photos in still frame. There is no captioning.