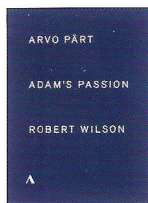


Adam's Passion ★★★
(2015) 94 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Accentus Music (avail. from most distributors).



The music of Estonian composer Arvo Pärt has a hushed, ethereal beauty, but is also static and repetitive—an unlikely choice for conventional ballet treatment. But in this 2015 world premiere performance at the Noblessner Foundry Tallinn, avant-garde American stage director (and sometime choreographer) Robert Wilson finds an appropriate visual complement to the music's contemplative quality, employing statuesque poses and movements that are sometimes barely perceptible. Their collaborative work brings together four separate pieces by Pärt. A gentle orchestral *Sequentia*, newly composed, leads into *Adam's Lament* (2009), a choral setting of a poem by a monk of Mount Athos in which the first man foresees all the pain his sin will cause humanity. Following *Tabula rasa* (1977), a double concerto for two violins and piano, the chorus returns for *Miserere* (1989/92), a plea for divine mercy. Wilson accompanies the music with a long sequence of the naked Adam, slowly turning and then walking down a ramp extended into the audience, followed by another in which adults and children, watched by a heavily costumed woman, carry ladders in patterns while a boy balances what appears to be a brick on his head. The performers' movements on the nearly bare stage are agonizingly slow, set off by Wilson's imaginative lighting design. Conductor Tõnu Kaljuste elicits refined work from the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Aida ★★★1/2
(2015) 151 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. C Major/Unilet Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



You would expect Milan's La Scala to serve up Verdi's ever-popular opera with exuberance and confidence, and that is certainly the case in Peter Stein's 2015 staging, which brilliantly blends tradition with innovation, displaying sumptuous costumes (some in period style while others sport modernist touches) set against backgrounds that emphasize geometric shapes rather than quasi-realistic structures. While the look is striking, the real glory of this *Aida* lies on the musical side. Conductor Zubin Mehta delivers powerful orchestral accompaniment to an exceptional cast. Kristin Lewis acts touchingly and sings ravishingly in the title role of the Ethiopian princess in Egyptian captivity, while Fabio

Sartori, although beefy in appearance, exhibits a huge, ringing tenor as Radamès, the general whose love for Aida leads to their joint doom. But both are very nearly overshadowed by Anita Rachvelishvili, who brings fire as well as luscious tone to the role of Amneris, the rival whose jealousy destroys the lovers. The supporting cast can't match this power trio—in the role of high priest Ramfis, Matti Salminen's once rock-steady bass shows a newfound gruffness—but overall this *Aida* brings welcome freshness to an operatic warhorse that too often suffers from pedestrian run-throughs. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Black Stone Cherry—Thank You: Livin' Live, Birmingham, UK ★★★1/2



(2014) 131 min. DVD: \$20.98 (audio CD included), Blu-ray: \$25.98 (audio CD included). Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

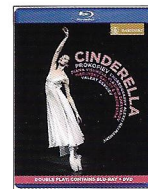
For their first Birmingham concert, Kentucky alternative-metal outfit Black Stone Cherry played at Barfly—a venue that holds 200 people. For this 2014 engagement, on tour for their album *Magic Mountain*, the band appear at the LG Arena (since renamed Genting Arena), which holds over 15,000. After releasing four full-length albums, it's not surprising they would make a few British fans. But their sound couldn't be more quintessentially American. Even when covering U.K. trio Cream's "Sunshine of Your Love," they still sound as if they grew up on Southern rock acts—such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and Molly Hatchet—an effect reinforced by their plaid shirts, jeans, and tattoos. But apparently that's a big part of their appeal, since 2011's *Between the Devil & the Deep Blue Sea* was a top five hit in Britain, but barely cracked the Top 40 in the U.S. This 21-song set consists of shouted rockers that inspire singing and fist-pumping from the crowd, particularly on "Such a Shame," which features more vocals from the audience than lead singer-guitarist Chris Robertson, who stays rooted to the spot, while guitarist Ben Wells and bassist Jon Lawhon never stop moving back and forth across the stage, and drummer John Fred Young takes a loose-limbed, John Bonham approach to his kit. Extras include a bonus audio CD, and an interview with Robertson and Wells from 2015's Download Festival along with two songs from their headlining performance. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Cinderella ★★★

(2013) 110 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$42.99. Mariinsky (dist. by Naxos of America).

Serge Prokofiev's 1944 fairy-tale ballet

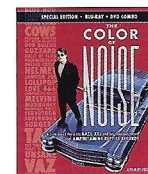
has never achieved the international renown of his earlier *Romeo and Juliet*, but this scintillating 2013 staging from St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre certainly makes a strong impression.



A revival of the 2002 production by Alexei Ratmansky, *Cinderella* is presented on an oddly spare stage—with only a couple of staircases and a few sticks of furniture—but the costumes are vibrantly colorful and the choreography displays an exuberant mixture of soulful elegance and almost frantic gestures. The company orchestra plays the alternately spiky and lush score brilliantly for musical director Valery Gergiev, while the dancing is splendid. Diana Vishneva makes for a lovely heroine, her hesitant gestures perfectly capturing the character's shyness, and she's admirably partnered with Vladimir Shklyarov, who brings both hauteur and boyishness to the prince, reaching a high level of virtuosity in his long third-act search for the girl whose foot will fit the glass slipper. The rest of the cast shine as well, with Ekaterina Kondourova—wearing a bright orange wig—threatening to steal the show as the wicked stepmother. While *Romeo and Juliet* is undoubtedly the composer's greatest ballet, Ratmansky's inventive take on *Cinderella* justifies its continuing place in the Russian repertory. Presented in PCM stereo, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Color of Noise ★★★

(2015) 120 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$19.95. MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).



Eric Robel's digressive documentary revolves around Tom Hazelmeyer, musician and founder of Amphetamine Reptile Records. As a framing device, Robel draws on a 25th anniversary concert that took place in Minneapolis in 2010. Hazelmeyer makes for a unique subject, since he's a private man with a public profile—even though he provided an interview, most of the commentary here comes from the bands he worked with, including Cows and the Melvins. *The Color of Noise* moves along chronologically, starting with Halo of Flies, the noise-rock trio in which Hazelmeyer began to make his reputation. While the band was getting off the ground, he joined the Marines, partly because he didn't have the grades for college, but Robel also hints at a conservatism that is somewhat at odds with the indie-rock scene: Hazelmeyer is a gun enthusiast with an antipathy for hippies (Robel could have explored this subject more, particularly in light of Hazelmeyer's use of stylized swastikas). While Hazelmeyer was on leave, the band played and recorded, but couldn't interest a label, so Hazelmeyer started his own. From

1986 to 1998, he signed over 70 acts, some of whom—like Helmet—would eventually move on to major labels. He also worked with artists, like Coop and Frank Kozik, who designed album covers and posters. Their influence on Hazelymyer was so profound that he segued from music to art. His new career began in earnest after a bout with spinal meningitis in 2009. Afterward, he found printmaking therapeutic, and has since opened an art gallery. Both visually and aurally stimulating, *The Color of Noise* offers an engaging mix of “color” and “noise” capturing Hazelymyer’s B-movie aesthetic. Presented in 5.1 surround sound and stereo, extras include an audio commentary, behind-the-scenes featurettes, a 1992 interview with Hazelymyer, bonus song performances, a poster gallery, and a booklet. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Der Freischütz ★★½

(2015) 149 min. In German w/English subtitles, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. C Major/Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).



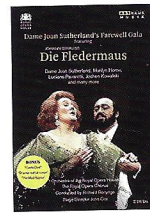
Carl Maria von Weber’s 1821 masterwork—a milestone in the development of German Romantic opera—tells a supernatural tale that focuses on Max, a huntsman who is so anxious to win the hand of Agathe in a shooting contest that he is persuaded by Kaspar, a man who has sold his soul to the devil, to do the same in return for seven magic bullets that will always find their targets. It would be difficult to imagine a more potent presentation of *Der Freischütz*—which boasts a succession of memorable arias and choruses—than this 2015 production from the Dresden Semperoper. Christian Thielemann coaxes extraordinary playing from the Staatskapelle Dresden, while the vocalism is top-notch, with Michael König (Max), Sara Jakubiak (Agathe) and Georg Zeppenfeld (Kaspar) all superb, and Christina Landshamer adding a touch of joviality as Agathe’s good-natured cousin Ännchen. Some may object to director Axel Köhler’s updating of the action from the 17th century to what appears to be post-WWII, but he certainly creates a striking tableau for the key setting of Wolf’s Glen, which features corpses hanging in the air, bathed in hellish red lighting. In all, this is a thoroughly gripping version of Weber’s opera, even though the visuals are sometimes a bit too dark (a deliberate effect of the lighting design). Presented in DTS 5.0 (DTS-HD 5.0 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Die Fledermaus ★★½

(1990) 197 min. DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$24.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America).

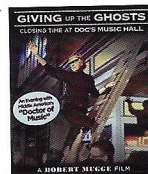
The big selling point of this December 31, 1990 performance—mounted at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden—of

Johann Strauss II’s most famous operetta (a complicated farce of infidelity and mistaken identities) is that it celebrated the career of Dame Joan Sutherland, who was retiring from the stage. Although Sutherland was not part of the regular cast, she and her colleagues Marilyn Horne and Luciano Pavarotti appeared in the traditional “gala scene” at Prince Orlofsky’s ball in Act 2, singing pieces by Cilea, Rossini, Saint-Saëns, and Verdi before Sutherland offered “Home Sweet Home” to expected cheers (also featured is a ballet interlude). Otherwise this staging, presented in an English translation that invites much mugging from the cast, is a rather broad affair, made all the more peculiar in that the Orlofsky role is taken by countertenor Jochen Kowalki rather than the traditional mezzo—although Sutherland’s husband Richard Bonyngé’s conducting does bring a solid lilt to the familiar tunes. Viewers also must suffer a prolonged comic riff at the beginning of Act 3 by John Sessions as the jailer, which recalls the music hall as much as the operatic stage, and notes the presence of John Major, the newly-installed Prime Minister, in one of the venue’s boxes. Made for British TV, this *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*) exhibits the visual and sonic limitations one would expect of a quarter-century-plus-old TV production, but even though it will appeal more to aficionados of Sutherland than Strauss, it is a fine tribute to one of the 20th century’s greatest coloratura sopranos. Presented in PCM stereo, extras include bonus segments of Sutherland singing famous arias by Verdi, Donizetti, and Bellini excerpted from filmed Opera Australia productions. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Giving Up the Ghosts: Closing Time at Doc’s Music Hall ★★½

(2014) 80 min. Blu-ray: \$19.95. MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).

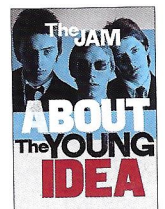


Respected music documentary filmmaker Robert Muggé’s latest captures the last night at an influential music venue: Doc’s Music Hall, which was originally a Muncie, IN, shoe store bought and reinvented in 1992 by keyboard player John Peterson, who oversaw the place for 20 years. In opening remarks, Peterson notes, “Yes, I’m a real doctor.” He keeps his board certification in Western medicine up to date, while incorporating Eastern systems such as Ayurvedic medicine into his practice. He opened Doc’s in order to revive the style of venues he played in as a musician during the 1960s. In between full-length song performances here, Peterson and his associates—including manager Mike Martin—recount the place’s history. Associate Paul Troxel mentions ghosts that some

observers claimed to have seen over the years, suggesting that they might be vaudevillians of yore looking for somewhere to hang out since the building did attract artistic types in the early-20th century. The musical portion of the program includes a 10-song set with the house band, featuring guitarist Douglas Hunt, saxophone player Phil Dunn, and drummer Kyle Ivy, who concentrate on rock and R&B covers such as the Doors’ “Light My Fire” and Lionel Richie’s “All Night Long.” Everyone except Hunt sings, but they are better musicians than singers, so the instrumental selections work best, like Peterson’s “Tribute to Monk.” While too narrowly focused to have wide appeal, this should still be considered a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

The Jam: About the Young Idea ★★½

(2014) 2 discs. 90 min. DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



In the late ‘70s, the working-class British punk trio The Jam had a somewhat different look and sound compared to contemporary acts like the Sex Pistols, drawing on R&B influences and sporting a ‘60s mod fashion style instead of safety pins and torn clothing. The band’s debut LP, 1977’s *In the City*, featured driving songs written by singer-guitarist Paul Weller, backed by bassist Bruce Foxton, and drummer Rick Buckler—including the titular youth anthem single that promised “we wanna say, we gonna tell ya/about the young idea.” Although only six years old when The Jam arrived on the music scene, Martin Freeman (*Sherlock*, *The Hobbit*) became a lifelong fan (“I know every lick of those records.”) Freeman is one of several aficionados singing the band’s praises in Bob Smeaton’s documentary profile, which presents a relatively anodyne and controversy-free chronological portrait tracing the rise and rise of the group (in Britain, that is; The Jam’s political songs never caught fire in America) up through the release of their sixth and final LP, 1982’s *The Gift*. Shortly thereafter, Weller—at the ripe old age of 23—walked away from it all (forming the Style Council two years later, and continuing to have a critically-acclaimed solo career to this day). Weller, Foxton, and Buckler are all on hand to visit key locations in the band’s history while also offering reminiscences—although never onscreen together. In fact, “The Bitterest Pill”—the title of a late single—of their breakup is essentially glossed over here (Foxton reputedly did not speak to Weller for 25 years, but he did appear on a 2010 Weller solo album). While the love and enthusiasm for the group is wonderful to hear (full disclosure: The Jam rank as one of my all-time favorite bands), the narrative here is ultimately a bit thin—no redemptive