

by Gruen, Johansen, and guitarist Sylvain Sylvain (guitarist Johnny Thunders, bassist Arthur Kane, and drummer Jerry Nolan are dead). An optional purchase. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

**Otello ★★1/2**

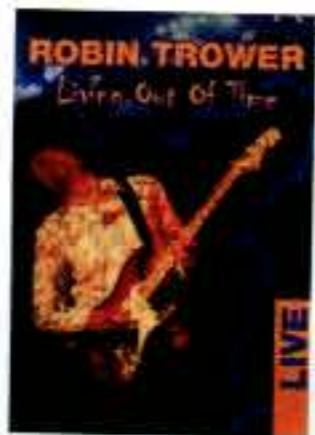
(1982) 138 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. Kultur International Films. Color cover. ISBN: 0-7697-7849-6.



Giuseppe Verdi's penultimate opera (only *Falstaff* was to follow), a magnificent adaptation of Shakespeare's tale of malicious cunning and baseless jealousy, is presented in this 1982 taping made for Italian television, which boasts lead performances of considerable distinction. Russian tenor Vladimir Atlantov produces some ringing tones as the deluded Moor, Kiri Te Kanawa shines as the doomed Desdemona, and veteran Piero Cappuccilli makes a vivid impression as Iago, the malevolent soldier who turns Otello against his wife. Unfortunately, the production was staged outdoors in the cavernous Arena di Verona, and though it obviously pleased the huge and enthusiastic crowd—whose applause and shouts are frequently obtrusive—the locale makes for a somewhat untidy reading of Verdi's masterful score. The orchestral playing under the baton of Zoltan Pesko is rather scrappy, and while the three principals are excellent, the secondary roles here disappoint and the choral contributions are mediocre (the virtual absence of sets is also a drawback—the performers simply climb up and down the auditorium stairs and stop on balconies to deliver their arias). While this rendition (presented in Dolby Digital stereo) will appeal to those interested in the lead performers, it can't be recommended over more conventional readings. Optional. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

**Robin Trower: Living Out of Time—Live ★★1/2**

(2005) 83 min. DVD: \$19.95. Inakustik (dist. by Music Video Distributors). Color cover.

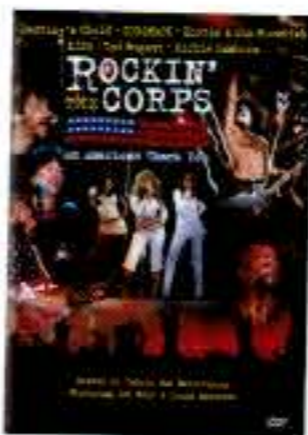


Former Procul Harum guitarist and 1970s solo FM radio favorite Robin Trower has never stopped releasing new music or performing in concert, and *Robin Trower: Living Out of Time* ably demonstrates just how comfortable Trower's roadshow has become both for the artist and his loyal fans. Still, the sameness of Trower's Jimi Hendrix-influenced sound from song to song grows wearisome after awhile, and making the effort to hear his band's workmanlike blues beneath all the psychedelic mannerisms simply becomes too much work. That said, this 13-song concert features songs plucked from material spanning more than 30 years,

with selections including "Daydream" (off Trower's debut album *Twice Removed From Yesterday*, and still sounding like something from Hendrix's *Axis: Bold as Love*), the old workhorse "Day of the Eagle," Trower's signature epic "Bridge of Sighs," and the blues workout "Too Rolling Stoned." Oddly, it's the recent songs that prove more rewarding, including 2004's "Living Out of Time" and 2005's jazzy "Sweet Angel," with its sizzling instrumental break. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo, DVD extras here include an interview with Trower and a photo gallery. Optional. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

**Rockin' the Corps ★1/2**

(2005) 120 min. DVD: \$19.99. Image Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.



Any concert/performance with comedian Louie Anderson, right-wing rocker Ted Nugent, the Hooters Calendar Girls and the San Diego Chargers' cheerleaders on the same bill has got to be, well, strange. An outdoor performance for U.S. marines and their families stationed at Camp Pendleton, *Rockin' the Corps* kicks off with Nugent's sanitized cover of Jimi Hendrix's electric "Star-Spangled Banner," followed by head-banging metal music from Godsmack, who also accompany Nugent for a frenzied "Cat Scratch Fever" (originally recorded long before anyone in the audience was born). Bon Jovi lead guitarist Richie Sambora adds to the noise but sings a passionate "Livin' On a Prayer," Hootie and the Blowfish's lite soul on "Time" sounds exactly the way it always does, Destiny's Child heats things up with "Soldier" and "Crazy in Love," and the perennially silly Kiss brings things to a close with "Rock and Roll All Nite." Although one has to appreciate the "support the troops" inspiration behind this Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo-backed 18-song concert—which turns Camp Pendleton into one big mosh pit—this is truly a mixed bag, musically speaking. DVD extras include a handful of featurettes, including one on marines in training. Not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

**Teseo ★★1/2**

(2004) 170 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. Arthaus Musik (dist. by Naxos of America). Color cover.



One of Georg Friedrich Handel's early operas, *Teseo* (1713) is structurally unusual: adapted into Italian from a French libretto set nearly four decades earlier by Jean-Baptiste Lully, it retains the five-act format common to Parisian *tragédie lyrique*. The narrative is a fairly typical, and rather silly, romantic quartet involving the Athenian hero Theseus (i.e., Teseo), the maiden Agilea whom he loves, King Egeo,

who plans to marry Agilea, and the sorceress Medea, who desires Teseo (and the throne of Athens) for herself. Presented here in a 2004 staging at the Schlosstheater Neues Palais in Potsdam, the score by the original-instrument orchestra Lautten Compagny Berlin under Wolfgang Katschner is rendered in a lively if somewhat stiff reading. But there are serious deficiencies in singing and direction: of the principals only Maria Riccarda Wesseling, as the fiery Medea, stands out (although Sharon Rostorf-Zamir manages some lovely moments as Agilea). The three countertenors (Jacek Laszczkowski and Martin Wolfel as Teseo and Egeo, and Thomas Diestler in the secondary role of Arcane) are variable, with Diestler's delivery of one aria—while his beloved Clizia is supposedly servicing him under bedcovers—emerging as the worst instance of crass comic staging on display. Presented with Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo sound, DVD extras include a synopsis and the option of superimposing the printed score over the images. Overall, this performance doesn't give this neglected opera its full due. Optional. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

**Tosca ★★★**

(2001) 120 min. DVD: \$29.99. Kultur International Films. Color cover. ISBN: 0-7697-7953-0.



Your reaction to Benoit Jacquot's version of Puccini's classic musical melodrama will largely depend on your feelings about cinematic remakes of traditional live opera performances. Opening with an extended sequence—in artily enhanced black-and-white—of the recording sessions in which the singers later lip-synched their screen performances, employing large sets and sweeping camera movements, and even occasionally superimposing spoken dialogue over the singing, the director defiantly proclaims his intention to liberate the piece from its stage origins in order to drive home the visceral passions on display. Musically, this is a very strong *Tosca*, with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden offering a muscular reading of the score under the propulsive baton of Antonio Pappano, and Angela Gheorghiu not only sounding but also looking the part of the tempestuous titular diva, who pretends to submit to the advances of the lustful police chief Scarpia (Ruggero Raimondi) in order to save her lover, the painter Cavaradossi, from torture and execution. Raimondi, exuding silken malevolence, is equally impressive, although the weak link here is tenor Roberto Alagna, whose voice sounds a bit thin for Cavaradossi. But it's really Jacquot's extravagant cinematic flourishes that you'll either love or merely tolerate. Presented on an extra-less disc with a good Dolby Digital stereo soundtrack, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)