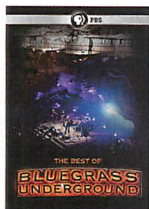


and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an interview with the band. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

The Best of Bluegrass Underground ★★★

(2011) 90 min. DVD: \$24.99. PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-60883-601-7.

The titular PBS-aired series featuring roots-oriented performances is filmed in Tennessee's Cumberland Caverns, located 333 feet underground. In this "best of" set, Cherryholmes leads off with a slick variant of bluegrass, incorporating traditional instruments such as banjo and standup bass, although the vocals have a Nashville sheen. Will Hoge prefaces his selections by saying he doesn't really play bluegrass, an accurate assessment, since the mid-tempo rockers he performs recall Bruce Springsteen more than Earl Scruggs. Between songs, he quips, "It's a pleasure to be trapped in a cave with y'all this afternoon." Mike Farris, who sings along with the McCrary Sisters, infuses his country-blues with gospel soul, which doesn't quite qualify as bluegrass either, but the enthusiastic audience doesn't seem to mind (with his straight, jet-black hair, Farris looks a little like Jack White). Unlike the other musicians, singer/guitarist Monte Montgomery plays a solo set with his weathered hollow-body guitar (his singing is merely adequate, but his bottleneck skills are impressive). Other performers include Mountain Heart, a string-based sextet with Celtic spirit running through their picking and bowing; 18 South, who take a Bonnie Raitt-meets-Little Feat approach to blues-rock; Darrell Scott, a soulful troubadour; Justin Townes Earle (son of actor/musician Steve Earle), a bow-tied crooner with a relaxed style; John Cowan, a yearning balladeer; mandolin player Ricky Skaggs, elder statesman of the genre; and Farewell Drifters, a harmony group who look like they dropped in from 1962 with their striped sweaters and cardigans. Presented in 5.1 surround sound, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

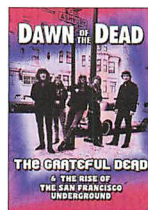


consists of flamenco pieces by Gades and a half-dozen other composers, presented by a small onstage ensemble. Enjoyment of this piece will largely depend on one's appreciation for the clicking heels and clapping hands that dominate the dance form. Vanesa Vento (Carmen), Ángel Gil (Don José), and Jairo Rodríguez (the bullfighter) are outstanding, expressing in gesture and sinewy motion the characters' many emotional moods, as the shamelessly flirtatious and fickle Carmen seduces and then discards Don José in favor of the bullfighter, thereby inciting the rage of her rejected lover. Although subtitles are regrettably absent for the occasional lyrics, the sound is beautifully clear in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and LPCM stereo. Extras include a subtitled behind-the-scenes documentary. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Dawn of the Dead: The Grateful Dead & the Rise of the San Francisco Underground ★★★

(2012) 138 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

This profile of the early Grateful Dead chronicles the '60s rise of the famed Bay Area band. Although hailing from different backgrounds, the members aimed to combine their interests in folk, blues, jazz, and modern classical music. Peter Albin of Big Brother and the Holding Company remembers meeting frontman Jerry Garcia—a jug band and bluegrass enthusiast—in Palo Alto, where he was developing a reputation for his guitar and banjo expertise. Along the way, Garcia met Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, and Ron "Pigpen" McKernan with whom he formed the Warlocks, who took further inspiration from the amped-up R&B of the British Invasion (songwriter Robert Hunter was also part of their extended circle). The group graduated to gigs in San Francisco, including Ken Kesey's famed Acid Test gatherings, at which point they became the Grateful Dead. Says biographer Dennis McNally, "They always thought the audience was the show; they were simply the soundtrack." Their popularity grew at venues such as Fillmore West and the Avalon Ballroom, after which they set up shop on Haight Street, signed to Warner Bros., and played the Monterey Pop Festival. Drummer Mickey Hart came on board in time for their second record. The documentary proceeds through Altamont and the group's later '60s recordings, ending in the 1970s as they started to shift away from psychedelia. In addition to contemporary interviews with critics, peers, and auxiliary players, the documentary features archival comments from Garcia, Lesh, and promoter Bill Graham. DVD extras include a sampling of bebop poetry from Kesey's fellow Merry Prankster Ken Babbs. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)



Die Entführung aus dem Serail ★★★1/2

(2011) 188 min. In German w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Unitel Classica (dist. by Naxos of America).

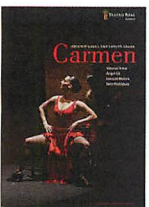
Regarded as Mozart's first operatic masterpiece, this 1782 *singspiel*—combining music and spoken dialogue—is generally treated as a light comic piece, following Belmonte as he tries to rescue his beloved Konstanze from captivity in the harem of Pasha Selim in Turkey, a place presided over by blustery steward Osmin. But Christof Loy's extraordinary 2010 production for Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu turns the work into something like a long play with gorgeous musical interludes, while also tamping down the comedy to treat the story very seriously. While that makes this *Abduction* quite different from virtually all others—and it surely won't be to all tastes—the performance makes a strong case for Loy's approach. Ivor Bolton takes slower tempi than is customary but elicits beautiful playing from the orchestra, and the cast is extremely fine. Diana Damrau has the full measure of Konstanze's difficult arias, delivering the most extreme coloratura without effort, and Christoph Strehl is a virile Belmonte, although he tires toward the close. Franz-Josef Selig's low notes sometimes become a growl, but he's a formidable Osmin, and Christoph Quest brings special fire to Selim, a spoken role that is insignificant in most productions but important here. The sets are minimalist, with no Turkish flavor, and the costuming is vaguely modern. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo, this works as an excellent supplement to a more orthodox reading (such as the Florence production reviewed in VL-11/03). Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



Carmen ★★★

(2011) 112 min. In Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Teatro Real (dist. by Naxos of America).

Although it begins with the musical prologue to Georges Bizet's opera, this is not another rendition of that ever-popular warhorse, but rather a performance of what might be termed a flamenco ballet, fashioned in 1983 by Antonio Gades and Spanish filmmaker Carlos Saura (from Prosper Mérimée's famous novel) and re-created here at Madrid's Teatro Real in 2011. While other portions of Bizet's score—the "Toreador Song," the habanera—are also included, most of the music



Die Zauberflöte ★★1/2

(2011) 160 min. In German w/English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

Mozart's famed penultimate opera—a 1791 *singspiel* with Masonic overtones composed not for Vienna's aristocracy but for ordinary folk—combines solemnity and low comedy, although this 2011 production from Milan's Teatro alla Scala clearly emphasizes the serious side. The fairy-tale story contrasts Prince Tamino (Saimir Pirgu), who's torn between good and evil in his effort to seek love and enlightenment, with naïve bird-catcher Papageno (Alex Esposito), who desires nothing more than life's simple pleasures. The tempos set by conductor Roland Böer are fleet, but the overall effect lacks warmth and geniality. Some of the singing is excellent—Genia Kühmeier as Tamino's intended, Pamina, and coloratura specialist Albina

