

omitting the sextet following the Don's descent to hell. Nineteenth-century productions frequently made the same excision in the misguided belief that the ensemble was too frivolous, but a modern staging should not follow their example. Presented in DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include an audio commentary by Holten and set designer Es Devlin, an introduction to the opera, a behind-the-scenes featurette, and a cast gallery. With so many excellent complete versions of *Don Giovanni* to choose from—including Pizzi's 2011 mounting (reviewed on pg. 93)—this truncated release can only be considered an optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Elena ★★★1/2

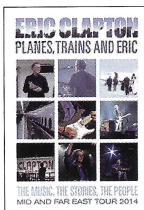
(2013) 2 discs. 177 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$44.99. Ricercar (dist. by Naxos of America).



The resurrection of the operas of Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676) continues with *Elena*—centering on Helen of Troy—which has not been produced in full form since its 1659 Venetian premiere. As is evident in this staging by Jean-Yves Ruf at the 2013 Aix-en-Provence Festival, the libretto is hardly Homeric: here, the courtship of Helen by Menelaus finds the latter disguising himself as an Amazon called Elisa in order to get closer to the object of his desire. The imposture is apparently convincing, since Elisa attracts Helen's father, King Tyndareus, who becomes infatuated with "her." Meanwhile, Theseus (not Paris) plans to abduct Helen—which requires him to dump his lover, Hippolyta. As if that weren't enough, others also have designs on Elisa and Helen, and the entire crazy business is portrayed as the work of goddesses Juno, Athena, and Venus, who are quarreling about which of them should receive the golden apple denoting supreme beauty. *Elena* mixes comedy with passionate drama, a combination that comes off splendidly in this simply mounted production. The young singers are uniformly excellent, with countertenor Valer Barna-Sabadus the standout as Menelaus, accompanied with spirit and feeling by the original-instrument group Cappella Mediteranea under the baton of Leonardo García Alarcón. Presented in stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Eric Clapton: Planes, Trains and Eric ★★★1/2

(2014) 156 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Planes, Trains and Eric won't hold as much appeal for casual fans as for Clapton diehards, since

instead of a career overview, this scrapbook-style diary focuses on the 69-year-old's tour through Japan, Singapore, Bahrain, and Dubai. Clapton has told his band mates that he plans to stop touring when he turns 70. They include Steve Gadd (drums), Chris Stainton (keyboards), Paul Carrack (Hammond organ), Nathan East (bass), and Michelle John and Shar White (backing vocals), who in separate interviews say that he should reconsider (it seems likely that Clapton will continue to play a few dates on occasion, while avoiding the marathons of his past). While visiting Japan, his favorite tour stop, Clapton receives an award in recognition of his 200th performance at Budokan, a venue he has played more than any other non-Japanese artist. Since he gets to travel with his family and a personal chef who accompanies him from Tokyo to Bahrain—carrying suitcases filled with sirloin and rice—one can imagine that he might want to continue. The musical portion of the program incorporates rehearsal and sound check footage, along with 13 full-length live songs, with Clapton updating the arrangements for a few tracks, like "Tears in Heaven," which takes on a reggae rhythm, and "Cocaine," faster and funkier here than in the recorded version. Other fan favorites include "Layla," "I Shot the Sheriff," "Crossroads," "Wonderful Tonight," and "High Time We Went." Presented in DTS 5.0, Dolby Digital 5.0 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.0 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a pair of bonus music tracks. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Freak Jazz, Movie Madness and Another Mothers: Frank Zappa—1969-1973 ★★★

(2014) 157 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



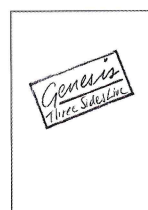
This documentary focuses on the second incarnation of Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention. Zappa assembled the players as much for their flexibility as their talent, since his work embraced blues, jazz, rock, classical, doo-wop, and comedy. The players included Mark Vollman and Howard Kaylan from the Turtles (vocals), Aynsley Dunbar (drums), Ian Underwood (saxophone, keyboards), and George Duke (keyboards). According to Zappa biographer Billy James, the original band made significant progress in 1968, but Zappa's interest in improvised jazz had a significant bearing on his decision to start fresh. Underwood, who played on *Hot Rats*, describes the new music as "difficult," while Underwood, Dunbar, and Vollman each recall the steps that led to their joining the group. In the case of Dunbar, a session musician, Zappa made a few trips to London in order to recruit him. Initially, Zappa called the new ensemble Hot Rats before reverting to the Mothers name. According to Duke, who

passed away in 2013, Zappa "liked things that didn't fit." Dunbar, Underwood, and Duke all had their doubts about Vollman and Kaylan, but the pair won them over with their humor and skill. Although critics gave records such as *Chunga's Revenge* and *Fillmore East—June 1971* mixed reviews, the Mothers did well on the touring circuit, although Zappa's habit of recording their conversations for material irked his band mates. Director Tom O'Dell also looks here at related projects released during the same period, including Zappa's *Burnt Weeny Sandwich*, violinist Jean-Luc Ponty's collection of Zappa covers, and Zappa's 1971 feature film *200 Motels*. Presented in stereo, this interesting documentary about an iconoclastic American musician and his band is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Genesis: Three Sides Live

★★

(1981) 84 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Filmed live in 1981 on the band's North American tour in support of *Abacab*, this concert interwoven with behind-the-scenes clips and interviews captures the three-man prog-rock-evolving-into-pop band several years before they hit mainstream megasuccess with 1986's landmark *Invisible Touch*. Shot a mere three months after the birth of MTV, *Genesis: Three Sides Live* finds singer/drummer Phil Collins quickly abandoning his drum kit to work the stage, mugging his way through a number of unnecessary interpretative slapstick gestures that actually ruin otherwise poignant songs such as "Misunderstanding" and "Turn It On Again" (and when the pasty Brit doffs his shirt and performs bare-chested clad in track pants and oh-so-'80s wristbands, no one is likely to mistake him for Mick Jagger). The other two official Genesis members—Tony Banks on keyboards and Mike Rutherford on guitar and bass—are joined by Daryl Stuermer (guitar/bass) and Chester Thompson (drums). Fully 10 of the 12 songs featured here hail from 1980's *Duke* and 1981's *Abacab* (early prog-rock-Peter-Gabriel-era fans go home), and several are fine tunes, including "Behind the Lines," "Duchess," "No Reply at All," "Me & Sarah Jane," and "Man on the Corner." Unfortunately, some of the songs are also truncated—interrupted by superficial radio station interviews and a long-running chat with interviewer Hugh Fielder that all comes across like basic promo fluff. Visually, the program appears in old-style 4:3 full-screen, although the audio is reasonably sharp. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include audio-only tracks of seven songs. Optional, at best. (R. Pitman)