

Ambidextrous

Stanley Jordan plays the piano with his right hand and his guitar with his left hand, simultaneously, on **Stanley Jordan Trio New Morning The Paris Concert**, an Inakustik release (UPC#707787646673, \$20). One clever camera angle, in fact, captures the reflection of one hand working the guitar in the shiny fallboard on the piano as the other hand swings across the keys underneath. Jordan also spends time with each instrument individually, and defers as well to accompanists Charnett Moffett on bass guitar and David Haynes on drums. The set, shot in 2007, runs a full 105 minutes and features Jordan's takes on everything from Mozart and Bartok to Paul McCartney. It is generally a relaxing yet stimulating program, and worth viewing for Jordan's innovative fingering techniques as well as for the music they produce.

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 colors are sharp and the image is vivid. There is a strong 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track and an even crisper DTS track. Also featured is a great 12-minute interview with Jordan, in which he talks about his unique fingering methods and demonstrates how he warms up like an athlete for his performances.

Erotic vignettes

Two Australian softcore anthology features from the Seventies have been released by Synapse Films as *Widescreen Edition* titles, **Fantasm** (UPC#654930303795, \$25) and **Fantasm Comes Again** (UPC#654930303894, \$25). Each film contains ten erotic vignettes, similar to those that would later appear on the Playboy video programs and such, connected by makeshift linking devices. The linking device on **Fantasm**, from 1976, is a vaudevillian 'professor' introducing the pieces as case studies. The linking device on **Fantasm Comes Again**, from 1977, is a little stronger, as two magazine writers, a male and a female, read erotic letters and then compose brief, supposedly witty responses. It works better because the dynamic between the two of them is clearly leading in a certain direction. Producer Antony I. Ginnane, who provides commentaries on both programs, however, feels that the first film was a bigger success because the linking device was more directly comedic (he also shares an amusing story about a colleague hearing the trailer, which features Ginnane, in a nearby hotel room after just getting off the phone with him and wondering how he had crossed the globe so quickly). In general, the commentaries are reasonably informative, giving the listener a sense of how the softcore film market operated in the Seventies and the challenges that came up as the films were being made.

The segments in the 87-minute **Fantasm** are nominally geared to present 'female fantasies' and include a woman having an interlude at a beauty parlor with three male beauticians (yeah, right), a 'strip poker' game that turns into a partner-sharing orgy, a housewife who catches a neighbor stealing underwear off her clothesline and punishes him Myra Breckinridge-style, a student raped by a black boxer in the boxing ring, two women playing around in a steam bath, porn star John C Holmes fooling around with a woman underwater, a bizarre segment where an older woman bathes what is suggested to be her soldier son who has just returned (to the music of *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*), a black woman who performs a striptease for three men, a student who seduces her teacher in an empty classroom, and a woman participating in a black magic ritual in a church setting.

The segments in the 98-minute **Fantasm Comes Again** have a little more dialog, and include an assignation at a library, a coach fooling around with a young gymnast, a split narrative set at a drive-in movie theater in which a woman picking up snacks is accosted while her date joins in with his friends in the back of the car, the strongest sequence in which a man and two women are trapped in an elevator, a pair of young women who apparently do not find the straw in a barn all that scratchy, a suburban orgy that includes some cross-dressing, another swimming pool liaison, a young woman getting friendly with her well-endowed step-mother as her father watches, a tryst in a convertible that includes some unsafe driving practices, and a well-plotted piece about a maintenance man hiding in a church confessional.

Both programs are presented in windowboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. On both, the source material has some very minor wear and is a little soft at times (the films were shot on 16mm), but generally looks good, with bright hues and accurate fleshtones. The monophonic sound features funky pre-disco cocktail music (*When Johnny Comes Marching Home* excepted), and is in passable condition. There is no captioning. Both programs come with trailers, and the first film is accompanied by a passable 23-minute retrospective documentary.

If it's in French, it must be art

A wacky French softcore feature from 1973, **Bacchanales Sexuelles**, is available from Synapse Films (UPC#654930302293, \$25). Directed by Jean Rollin, the program runs 102 minutes and is said to be substantially longer than the American theatrical release, although it does not contain hardcore inserts that were made without Rollin's blessing. The erotic sequences are fairly racy anyway, but the film's real appeal comes from its psychedelic atmosphere and funky, nonsensical narrative, which contains, among other things, allusions to **Les Vampires**. Two extra-friendly females are house-sitting a mansion when one is kidnapped by a sex cult, run by a hookah-puffing blonde who likes to have her toes sucked, so the other girl,

and a guy who also snuck into the mansion and got friendly with her, go to rescue the abducted one and find themselves in the middle of some bizarre cult ceremonies. For all the wrong reasons, it will probably also remind you of **Eyes Wide Shut**.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is reasonably fresh, although there are stray scratches and darker sequences are a little murky. The film is in French with optional English subtitles.

DVD Letter

To the Editor:

I missed **American Gangster** when it was in theaters and I am so glad that I read your review before I watched the DVD. Normally, I would automatically choose an "extended version" as my first choice but, thanks to you, I watched the theatrical version. I then watched the ending on the extended version and you were so right. It completely ruins the wonderful symmetry of the story by imposing a somewhat conclusive 'happy' ending. It's hard to believe that a director of Ridley Scott's status would allow this, but perhaps it is he that really likes that version.

—Roger Grodsky
Cincinnati OH

DVD News

SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT: Warner Home Video will be releasing a remastered version of **How the West Was Won** that completely eliminates the panel borders between the three thirds of the image, and will have an aspect ratio of about 2.89:1. The program will also have a commentary and be accompanied by a documentary about the Cinerama process. The Blu-Ray release will have a second version of the film presented in 'Smilebox' format that replicates the curved Cinerama image. Now if only an enterprising company could start selling a curved screen... Warner's releases of **Rocky Mountain** and **Virginia City** will also have commentaries.

MEET MORE SPARTANS: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment's **Meet the Spartans** will have a commentary and some featurettes. The 'Unrated' version will be 3-minutes longer than the theatrical release. **Jumper** will have a commentary, featurettes and deleted scenes. **Charlie Bartlett** will have three commentaries.

SONY GETS HAMMERED: Each of the four Hammer films in Sony Pictures Home Entertainment's **Icons of Adventure**, *The Pirates of Blood River*, *The Devil-Ship Pirates*, *The Stranglers of Bombay*, and *The Terror of the Tongs*, will have commentary tracks.

BLU-RAY TODAY: The following titles have been released in Blu-Ray format—Coyote Ugly, Dan in Real Life, Enchanted, Hidalgo, No Country for Old Men, The Rookie, Unbreakable (Buena Vista); Space Ace (Digital Leisure); Digital Video Essentials HD Basics (DVD International); Arte Lange's Beer League, Blackbeard, Category 7 The End of the World, The Curse of King Tut's Tomb, The Last Sentinel, 10.5 Apocalypse (Echo Bridge); Alien vs. Predator, Alvin and the Chipmunks, Commando, Hitman, I Robot, Ice Age, Independence Day, Juno, Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium, Predator (Fox); Yukikaze (Geneon); Before the Devil Knows You're Dead, Mariah Carey The Adventures of Mimi (Image); The Orphanage (New Line); A Midsummer Night's Dream (Opus Arte); The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, Dogma, Gattaca, A Passage to India, The Sixth Day, Sleuth, Steep, Walk Hard The Dewey Cox Story, The Water Horse Legend of the Deep (Sony); Appleseed Ex Machina, August Rush, Bonnie and Clyde, I Am Legend, One Missed Call, Sublime Uncut, Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines (Warner).

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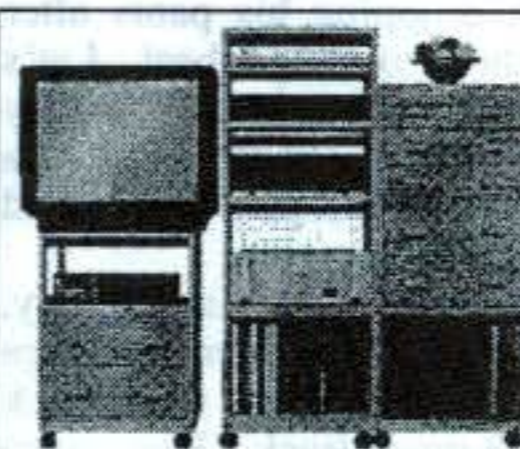
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