

Alice in Wonderland

★★★★
(2007) 123 min. DVD: \$23.98.
EuroArts (dist. by Naxos of America).



Korean composer Unsuk Chin's 2007 English-language opera debut offers a one-act retelling of the Lewis Carroll children's classic. Collaborating with playwright David Henry Hwang on the libretto, Chin remains faithful to most of the Carroll text, but the production's use of elaborate masks, bizarre puppets, disembodied arms, and other strange tropes, makes this a Wonderland more akin to David Lynch than the Walrus and the Carpenter. As staged by Achim Freyer for the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, this avant-garde production is actually close in spirit (if not style) to Jan Svankmajer's creepy 1988 film *Alice*. As imagined here, Wonderland is the ultimate misnomer, with the frenetic, contradictory, and often futile machinations of its various denizens providing an exhausting yet hypnotic inventory of personalities at war with themselves. Sally Matthews' Alice anchors the production, which is no mean feat since she performs from within a giant mesh mask that thoroughly obscures her head. Yet her remarkable body language and vocal prowess provide full dimension to her character's moods and confusion. The production also benefits from many wonderfully off-kilter visual tricks, such as flowing blue fabric from the eyes of a giant crying puppet version of Alice after she has unwisely followed the "Eat Me" instructions on a cake. Featuring the Bavarian State Opera under the baton of Kent Nagano, this is presented with DTS, Dolby Digital 5.1, and PCM stereo options. Recommended. Aud: P. (P. Hall)

All You Need is Love

★★★★1/2
(2008) 5 discs. 885 min.
DVD: \$99.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Subtitled "The Story of Popular Music," this massive boxed set, compiling all 17 episodes of musicologist and award-winning director Tony Palmer's series (made at the prompting of John Lennon, and aired worldwide between 1975-1980) on popular music is ambitious, educational, entertaining, and a bit idiosyncratic. Although the first disc consists of a retrospective introduction featuring archival footage of musical artists ranging from Billie Holiday to Jerry Lee Lewis, the true story begins at a Nigerian university, where a discussion of the use of primitive drums, horns, and stringed instruments launches viewers on a long journey through the history of popular music, incorporating ragtime, jazz, blues, Tin Pan Alley, protest

songs, country, and rock—with interesting subcategories throughout, such as "Rude Songs" (Vaudeville) and "Sour Rock" (Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, etc.). The series offers privileged glimpses of luminaries performing in their primes (such as Stevie Wonder) or past it (such as Phil Spector), and features inspired choices for most episodes (ranging from jazzman Leonard Feather to vaudevillian star Jack Benny). As for the idiosyncrasy: you won't find Hank Williams or Johnny Cash in the country episode, or Count Basie or Glenn Miller in the one on swing. And Palmer wears his strengths on his sleeve—the aforementioned country and swing, for instance, tend to get short shrift compared to, say, folk music. Still, *All You Need is Love* is filled with such dazzling insights, amazing music, and rare footage that one can easily overlook minor faults and peculiar omissions. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (A. Jacobson)

Autour Du Blues Meets Larry Carlton & Guest Robben Ford: New Morning—The Paris Concert ★★★★★

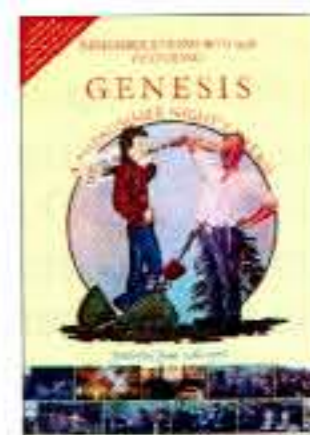
(2006) 101 min. DVD: \$19.95.
Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Here's an item that dares to confront one of the burning issues of our time: namely, can Frenchmen play the blues? Recorded in 2006, this concert finds a whole passel of French *hommes du blues*—including no less than five guitar players, and that's before Americans Larry Carlton and Robben Ford even show up—cramming the stage at Paris' New Morning nightclub to play this quintessentially American music. These Gauls have the gall to take on some of the genre's real chestnuts—"Got My Mojo Working," "Stormy Monday," "Rock Me Baby," "Reconsider Baby"—and while the results are occasionally a bit weird (as in "Down in Meessisseppi"), by and large the music is performed with considerable skill, authenticity, and aplomb by talented guitar players and singers (the best of the latter is an organist who goes by the delightful moniker of Slim Batteux). Still, the whole vibe is ratcheted up a level or two when longtime veterans Carlton and Ford take the stage (not together, unfortunately). Of course, Ford has been making blues albums since his teens, while Carlton's hundreds of recordings include some immortal solos on Steely Dan songs such as "Kid Charlemagne" and "Third World Man." But there's also a certain *je ne sais quoi* that American musicians bring to this music, a combination of chops and feel that the French just can't quite match. Then again, they'd no doubt say the same thing about our cooking, *n'est-ce pas?* Recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Genesis—Remember Knebworth 1978: A Midsummer Night's Dream ★1/2

(1978) 24 min. DVD: \$14.95.
Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).



Just in case you've been hankering for a concert documentary with a grand total of two songs, here you go. *Genesis—Remember Knebworth 1978* purports to be an "in-depth" look at the 1978 version of England's respected Knebworth festival, but if the paltry running time of 24 minutes isn't enough to belie that claim, then the content will. Viewers learn a bit of information about the logistics involved in staging an event attended by some 60,000 pop music fans (450 portable toilets, 180,000 cans of Coke, and a truckload of meat pies are among the supplies), and even meet a couple of rain-soaked concertgoers. But when it comes to the music, forget about it: Tom Petty, Devo, Jefferson Starship, the Atlanta Rhythm Section, and others on the bill aren't even mentioned (other than in the reproduction of the concert program that accompanies the DVD), let alone seen or heard. What we do have is Genesis, then a threesome, performing two songs: one in rehearsal ("Many Too Many"), the other before an audience ("The Lady Lies")—and both are technically dreadful, with grainy visuals and terrible sound (Dolby Digital 5.1 sound notwithstanding). DVD extras include a half-hour 2007 interview (longer than the program itself) with promoter Freddy Bannister. Not recommended. Aud: P. (S. Graham)

Khovanshchina ★★★★★1/2

(2007) 2 discs. 192 min. In Russian w/English subtitles.
DVD: \$45.98 (booklet included). Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Aside from *Boris Godunov* (which was revised by Rimsky-Korsakov), all of Modest Mussorgsky's operas were left unfinished at his death in 1881. In this 2007 production from the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Mussorgsky's epic *Khovanshchina* (which revolves around the political machinations surrounding Tsar Peter the Great's accession in 1682) is presented in the 1960 version offered by Shostakovich, with the exception of the ending, which is here replaced with Guerassim Voronkov's far more subdued close, involving the mass suicide of the Old Believers (religious zealots caught up in the struggles between rival noble factions for control of the throne). A romantic triangle of sorts is embedded in the libretto (involving the son of one of the princes, a German girl, and his former mistress), but this is really secondary to the broader background of the conflict between traditionalists and modern-