

Above: Robert Carlyle arrives for the gala screening of *28 Weeks Later* in London on April 26, 2007.

PHOTO: EPA

Below: Robert Carlyle with actors Gil Bellows, far left, and Kiefer Sutherland, left, from the TV drama *24*; and with his wife Anastasia Shirley, far right.

PHOTOS: AGENCIES



Is this the final countdown?

Robert Carlyle made his name with tough, violent and damaged characters. But it won't stop him appearing in '24' or playing Leonard Rossiter

KIRSTY SCOTT
THE GUARDIAN, GLASGOW

On screen, we expect Robert Carlyle to be a particular type of man: damaged and disenfranchised; the loser; the loner; the archetypal tortured soul. "These are the kind of characters that crop up time and time again throughout my whole career," says the 47-year-old Scot. "The question is whether they are pulled towards me or whether I am pulled towards them?"

An answer of sorts came when Carlyle was sent a script for the 2006 BBC homelessness drama *Born Equal*. He says he felt his heart sink when he looked at the role picked out for him, a troubled ex-con trying to get his life back on track. "I thought, I've played this guy before, it's too similar. Then I thought about it. I thought, is there anything wrong with that? What's wrong with re-examining that? Going back to that person again, shooting it slightly differently."

"My first love is art and I see a lot of things in an artistic way. And this is like a series of self-portraits in a sense. This is painting an image of me on a different path, a different road. That's interesting. If that has to be my fate, I'm happy with that, to play these kinds of guys. A lot of the characters I play have problems, they are marginalized, they have serious psychological problems, problems with relationships, with childhood. These are big subjects, big subjects. You can't balk at work like that. As an actor, that's as good as it gets."

And so it is with *Summer*, Carlyle's next project. Directed by Kenny Glenaan, it tells the story of two school friends facing up to loss and disillusionment in middle age. Carlyle plays Shaun, labeled a violent bully by the education system that cast him adrift, a man whose response to dyslexia was to crush his own hand in a vice. The role won Carlyle a best actor nomination in Scotland's Oscars, and the PPG award for best performance in a British film at this year's Edinburgh film festival. The jury called it a "flawless performance in a great, uncompromising film."

"I'm 47. I understand Shaun," says Carlyle. "I understand that man. I don't have any regrets in my own life, but I can sympathize and empathize

with this guy who wakes up and realizes his life is past and gone and what has it been for?"

We meet in Glasgow, Carlyle's hometown, where he lives with his wife, makeup artist Anastasia Shirley, and their three young children. We're not so very far from his birthplace in Maryhill. The hotel is just round the corner from his house, and so thickly carpeted you move without sound. He is in the lobby before you notice him, a slight figure in jeans and old leather, a scarf wound tight around his neck.

Carlyle hopes people will see past the deprivation and frustration of Shaun's existence to a man sustained by a deep, abiding friendship and harboring a hidden sense of self. He's always looking for what lies beneath, he says, even in the most unhinged of personas. "He has had a bad hand in his life, has Shaun; he has been dealt a bad fucking hand. He tries his best, he knows, shit, he shouldn't have crushed his hand. But in these films, even in Ken Loach's films, there's always a heart; there's always a human heartbeat behind it. Kenny is a bit like the spawn of Ken Loach, you can see that in his work. It is the people. They tell the stories."

Loach gave Carlyle his first break, casting him in *Riff Raff* in 1991. Roles in the TV crime drama *Cracker*, *Trainspotting* and *The Full Monty* followed quickly and made him a star. *Summer* was filmed in Bolsover, northern England, not too far from Sheffield, where *The Full Monty* was set. As Gaz, unemployed steel-worker-turned-stripper, he had been the heart of one of the biggest British films of all time.

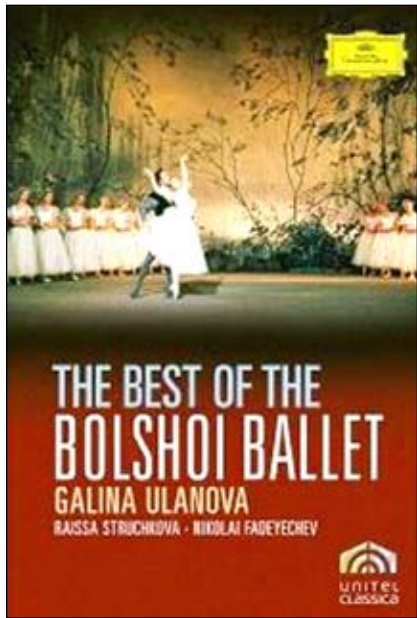
"I had forgotten Bolsover is very close to Sheffield and Sheffield is the eye of the storm for me. I was like the fucking prodigal son. It was extraordinary; I felt I am actually theirs. That film, *The Full Monty*, was their film, therefore I'm their actor and I'm back home again." Carlyle was mobbed. Every day on set he was surrounded by kids, slapped on the back, asked for autographs. "It was a fucking great experience," he says.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

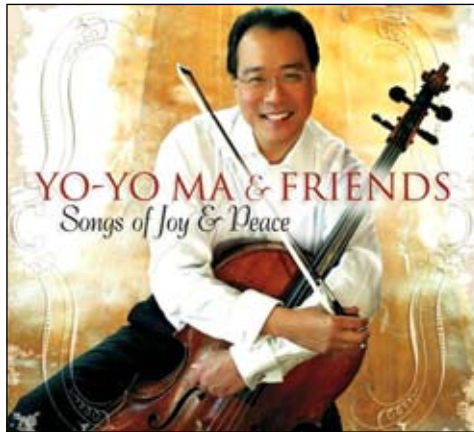
[CLASSICAL DVD AND CD REVIEWS]



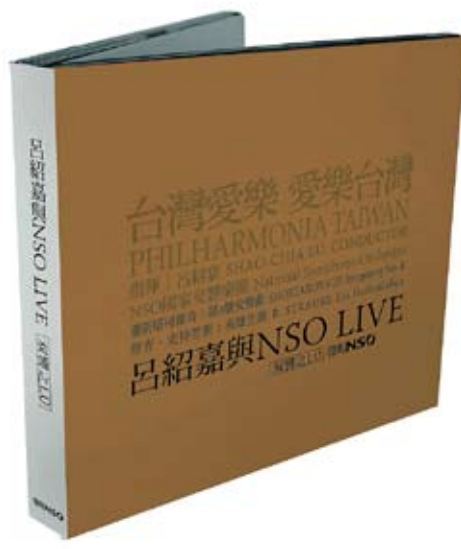
THE MAGIC FLUTE
Directed by: Kenneth Branagh
Carson, Petrova, Davis
Lien Yin DVD-9



THE BEST OF THE BOLSHOI BALLET
Galina Ulanova
Covent Garden, 1956
DGM 073 4425



YO-YO MA AND FRIENDS
Songs of Joy and Peace
Brubeck, Krauss, Taylor
Sony Classical 88697-34480-2



NSO LIVE
Strauss, Shostakovich
Lu Shao-chia
NSO 007-8

When I first heard Kenneth Branagh had directed a film version of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* set during the First World War my hopes weren't high. In fact it's by a long way the most lovable and refreshing version of the opera I've ever seen.

Playfulness is its main characteristic, and if you think this a little out of place in a battle setting you'd be right. Mozart was a product of the 18th-century Enlightenment, and his interests in Zoroastrianism and Masonry led him to a dialectic of darkness versus light. Branagh rightly concludes that these days darkness equals war, and light equals love, and even sex. So he sets the opera with troops marching around and frightened soldiers, but much of the latter part inside a French chateau. The gruesomeness of war isn't in the foreground, in other words, but this product is so delightful it hardly matters.

The overall effect is reminiscent of the

Dennis Potter TV miniseries *The Singing Detective* and *Pennies from Heaven* of the 1980s, or perhaps a Baz Luhrmann movie — a fantastic extravaganza whose serious themes don't detract from its genuine charm. This fantasy-based playfulness even extends to the Web site — access www.magicflutefilm.com for an absorbing experience!

The Internet is full of complaints that there aren't any subtitles, together with allegations that the entire product has been "banned in the US." But buy it here in Taiwan, where it's been issued by the Lien Yin company and sells at around NT\$580, and you'll have both English and Chinese subtitles. It's sung in English, but the lyrics have been re-translated by the UK comedian and polymath Stephen Fry (Oscar Wilde in the 1997 film *Wilde*) and are often funny beyond belief. Sometimes you need the English subtitles just to convince yourself that what you heard was really correct.

Some critics have suggested musical values are sacrificed to images of inflated plastic lips in the middle of fields, but this is far from the truth. Rene Pape (who sings Sarastro) is one of opera's great bass voices, for instance, and though the younger soloists have undoubtedly been chosen in part for their visual allure, this is musically an extremely satisfying rendition. The American Benjamin Jay Davis makes a superbly comic Papageno, while UK discovery Amy Carson is a lovable Pamina.

With Christmas on the way, this is undoubtedly my Number One recommendation for a high-quality peace-and-love-spreading gift.

When the Bolshoi Ballet came to London's Covent Garden in 1956 audiences were taken aback by the boisterousness of the performances, which contrasted strongly with the fey sentimentality that characterized

much of British ballet. Several items were filmed and the result released in UK cinemas, and this is the material that Deutsche Grammophon has now re-released on DVD.

The sound quality is raw at best — surprisingly, as many fine studio recordings were made in that era. Even so, the dancing makes this a spectacular as well as a historic product. Most notable is the legendary Galina Ulanova, by this time aged 46. You see her in Saint-Saens' *The Dying Swan* looking far from delicate, more like a tough animal dying only very reluctantly. She's then seen in *Giselle*, given here complete. Every ballet fan will seize this DVD, simply because Ulanova is far and away the most celebrated Russian ballerina of her era.

Among Yo-Yo Ma's many virtues, an openness to many musical traditions and a refusal to lower his standards in his many collaborations rank high. In

his new Christmas CD *Songs of Joy and Peace* there are guest appearances from Alison Krauss, James Taylor (singing George Harrison's *Here Comes the Sun*) and Dave Brubeck, now 87, plus his cellist son Matt.

Ma is also a world music enthusiast, and there are contributions from Cuban jazz clarinetist and saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera, Canadian fiddler Natalie MacMaster, and seven members of the Brazilian Assad family. Ma says he wanted this CD to be like a party, and though it feels too tasteful for that, and certainly never gets wild, it's nonetheless a welcome contribution to the Christmas spirit.

Lastly, Taiwan's National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) has released a new pair of CDs in its NSO Live series. They contain Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony and Richard Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life), recorded at concerts in 2006 and 2007

respectively. The conductor was Lu Shao-chia (呂紹嘉).

Fine though the Strauss performance is, it's the Shostakovich symphony that's the masterpiece. Completed in 1936 when the 29-year-old composer had just been officially condemned by the Community Party, it's an astonishing work. Too serious for official taste, and so liable to be suspected of containing criticism officialdom couldn't understand, but others might, Shostakovich put it away in a drawer and it wasn't performed for another 30 years.

It works on a gigantic scale and as a result the NSO, no tub-thumping orchestra, is in many ways its ideal interpreter. This performance must rank high among world recordings of the Fourth, and it's a pity it isn't being issued by an international record company. It's superb, anyway, and the easiest way to find it is at any NSO performance

— BRADLEY WINTERTON