

Los Angeles Times

KIDS' CORNER

More joy than in Mudville



Casey at the Bat
Magic Maestro Music/Kids
CD: \$16.98
(866) 432-7624
www.magicmaestromusic.com

"Educated ears" is the goal of this "Stories in Music" series of symphonic music and narrative (in the tradition of "Tubby the Tuba" and "Peter and the Wolf") that launched with "Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel." Ernest Lawrence Thayer's classic American poem about a swaggering baseball hero whose turn at bat left "no joy in Mudville" is given the same deft treatment by composer-conductor Stephen Simon and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Includes narrative tracks about the poem, the "how" of the music composition, tips for listening, concert band and tango versions, and a play-along track performed by young violinists.

Don't Blink
Parachute Express
Trio Lane Records
CD: \$14.98
www.parachuteexpress.com

When they got together 20 years ago, Donny Becker, Janice Hubbard and Stephen Michael Schwartz, collectively known as Parachute Express, were in the vanguard of artists crafting children's music with jaw-dropping sophistication. They're still first-rate. With their amazing, Manhattan Transfer-quality signature harmonies, slick pop, rock and jazz instrumentals and some of the smoothest heart-filled and playful lyrics around, this all-new album ranks them among the best of the best.

The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear
Central Park Media
DVD: \$19.95
Collector's Series Edition
DVD (with extras): \$29.95
75 minutes; ages 3 and up
(800) 626-4277
www.boybearmovie.com/store.html

This animated tale, based on an Inuit legend, is about a boy who's raised by a polar bear and must choose between living as a

bear or returning to his human existence. Too intense for young children, it doesn't sugarcoat death, loss or grief, and many images are sad and somber. Yet an unsuited vocal cast notwithstanding, it is often playful and moving — and always beautiful to look at, with an arctic setting rendered in Asian ink drawing and gorgeous watercolor art. It was created by Jannik Hastrup, head of the production house behind "The Triplets of Belleville"; the delicate, evocative score was written by Bruno Coulais, who composed the music for "Winged Migration."



Goodnight Moon and Other Sleepytime Tales
HBO Video
DVD: \$12.97

Exquisite animation and touching and funny observations from

real kids about bedtime concerns combine in this welcome DVD release of HBO's exceptional family special from 1999, wrapped around Margaret Wise Brown's iconic 1947 classic, "Goodnight Moon," and narrated by Susan Sarandon. Other animated segments: "Hit the Road to Dreamland," sung by Tony Bennett; Mercer Mayer's "There's a Nightmare in My Closet," narrated by Billy Crystal; and Faith Ringgold's "Tar Beach," read by Natalie Cole.

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble ... and More Magical Tales
Scholastic Video Collection
DVD: \$14.95, VHS: \$9.95
www.newvideo.com/scholastic.html

William Steig's Caldecott-winning story about a little donkey who rues a magic wish, narrated by John Lithgow, is only one of the treats in this new release of book-to-screen children's literature from Weston Woods Studios. Enhanced by vivid and varied styles of illustration, narrative and original music, it includes Charlotte Huck's Cinderella-ish "Princess Purbull," Mem Fox's Aussie-style "Possum Magic"

and, on the DVD version, Jack Kent's charmer "The Wizard."



Virginia's Run
MGM Home Entertainment
DVD: \$19.98, VHS: \$14.95
www.mgmhomevideo.com

A horse-loving 13-year-old who's lost her mother to a riding accident secretly defies her father's orders to stay away from horses. As a result, both grow beyond their grief, as does the girl's older sister, whose challenge is her attraction to the local bad boy. It doesn't dig deep, but the land- and seascape of Nova Scotia, a wealth of horsey film footage and performances by the solid cast, led by Gabriel Byrne as the father and Lindze Letherman as Virginia, make for warmhearted family viewing.

— LYNNE HEPPLEY



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