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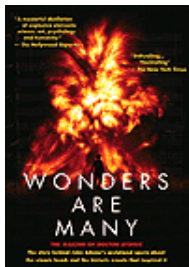
Rating system: ★ = poor, ★★ = fair, ★★★ = good, ★★★★ = excellent

K = Preschool-Kindergarten	E = Elementary (grades 1-3)
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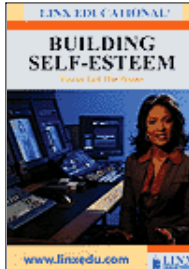
Updated June 9, 2009

Wonders Are Many: The Making of Doctor Atomic ★★★½

(2007) 92 min. DVD: \$26.95. Docurama (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 1-4229-2908-6.



John Adams' 2005 opera revolving around J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project has already bowed on DVD in a superb 2007 production from Der Nederlandse Opera (VL-1/09). Jon Else's documentary takes viewers behind the scenes, deftly juxtaposing the story of *Doctor Atomic's* development (from initial conception through premiere, featuring interviews with Adams and librettist-director Peter Sellars) together with an historical account of the bomb's creation and Oppenheimer's career. Regarding the opera, Else not only effectively chronicles the evolution of the work, but also captures the excitement of pulling it all together for performance—a process exacerbated by a last minute decision to replace a major cast member with his understudy. Meanwhile, the historical side examines the daunting subject of nuclear physics, while also exploring the Manhattan Project's moral ramifications, which would lead Oppenheimer to exclaim in anguish, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." Melding the stories of two very different creative processes—one that resulted in the most destructive weapon yet devised by man and another that brought to fruition a major work of art, *Wonders Are Many* is an intriguing meditation on the contradictory impulses inherent in human nature. DVD extras include audio commentary by Else, and a biographical sketch of the filmmaker. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Building Self-Esteem: You've Got the Power ★★★½(2009) 27 min. DVD: \$108; VHS: \$98 (instructor's guide included). LINX Educational (tel: 800-717-LINX, web: www.linxedu.com). PPR. ISBN: 978-0-9797510-8-0 (dvd), 978-0-9797510-9-7 (vhs).

More than just a pep talk, this fine program not only offers nine specific steps towards building better self-esteem, but also does a good job of communicating the critical importance of self-confidence. Josh was a geeky loner who hid his bad self-esteem behind an apathetic, sullen attitude, while Sadie was a popular pretty girl whose low self-esteem arose from fear of rejection and a belief that she was dumb. Both Josh and Sadie—hailing from opposite ends of the high school social spectrum—share their stories here in an interview setting, explaining how they broke out of the poor self-esteem cycle to become more confident and happy with themselves. The nine steps ("take action, make a change," "accept yourself for who you are," etc.) might sound somewhat vague and self-help-boilerplate-ish, but since Josh and Sadie introduce them within the context of their own personal

experiences—presented in black-and-white flashbacks—many of the suggestions come across as both practical and realistic (such as “improve your personal hygiene” and “don’t compare yourself to other people all the time”). Teaching viewers that building healthy self-esteem is a learnable skill requiring time, practice, and possibly some challenging emotional work, this is highly recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (E. Gieschen)

Fatherhood Dreams ★★★

(2007) 55 min. DVD: \$49.95: public libraries; \$249 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Interfilm Productions (dist. by FilmWest Associates, tel: 888-982-3456, web: www.filmwest.com). ISBN: 978-0-9784976-0-6.



Canadian filmmaker Julia Ivanova’s documentary *Fatherhood Dreams* looks at the fatherhood experiences of four gay men. Randy and Drew are a married couple (legally in Canada) who adopt an infant but keep the birth mother and father, as well as the maternal grandmother, in the child’s life. Scott is a single man preparing for the arrival of his twins, born of a surrogate mother. Stephen, a gay man who fathered two daughters with his wife—who is now in a committed relationship with a woman—co-parents his children with their mother and her partner. Each of these stories is uplifting and effectively intertwined, thanks to Ivanova’s deft handling of the material. DVD extras include two bonus profiles: in the first, Kelly struggles to adopt a child against his own family’s opposition, while in the second, Murray adopts two foster children with his partner Duane (this last segment contains some of the most powerful moments of all, including Murray’s recollection about how his sister broke with him over the adoption, sympathetic remarks by an Anglican pastor, and a moving explanation from young adoptee Justin about why he’s so attached to his stuffed animals). Additional extras include a Q&A with Ivanova and the three featured main families after a screening of the film, and a photo gallery. Offering a sensitive treatment of a controversial subject (even more so in the United States), *Fatherhood Dreams* is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

FDA: A History ★★★

(2008) 82 min. DVD: \$39.95 (\$274.95 w/PPR). Compliance Media (tel: 650-566-9000, web: www.fdahistory.com). ISBN: 978-0-615-23820-3.

The Food and Drug Administration regulates 25 cents out of every dollar spent on consumer goods in the United States, being responsible not only for food and drug safety, but a host of other products as well, including cosmetics, prosthetics, and any electronic device that emits radiation. Made in cooperation with the FDA History Office, this documentary chronicles the history of this influential agency from its inception during the wild and woolly days of patent medicines in the late 19th century up to the more recent scandals involving the drug Vioxx and E. coli-tainted spinach. *FDA: A History* takes a chronological approach, incorporating archival footage, photos, and clips from educational videos, together with interviews of authors, scholars, and former FDA officials. Viewers learn about the origins of many developments we now take for granted, while also witnessing how science, politics, and public opinion shape the work of the FDA. For example, muck-raking exposés led to the Food and Drug Act of 1906 (the law requiring companies to list the ingredients in their products), while later during the 1950s, the FDA introduced procedures for testing drugs that would set the standard for the pharmaceutical industry. As significant—and essential for public health—as the work of the FDA has been, however, this documentary