

Ordering information for the "Recommended" listings in this section can be found in the "Where to Buy" and "Library Addresses" listings at the back of this issue.

★★★★ = Excellent

★★★ = Good

★★ = Fair

★ = Poor

PPR = Public Performance Rating

Aud = Audience

K = Preschool-Kindergarten

E = Elementary (grades 1-3)

I = Intermediate (grades 4-6)

J = Jr. High (grades 7-8)

H = High School (grades 9-12)

C = Colleges & Universities

P = Public Libraries



version of each song and a simple "making-of" featurette geared toward young children. Given the preschool crowd's perennial interest in trains, this fun and educational program is highly recommended. Aud: K, P. (R. Reagan)

Hans Christian Andersen—The Fairy Tales: The Emperor's New Clothes & Other Stories ★★1/2

(2005) 78 min. DVD: \$14.99. Starlight Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.

This compilation of Hans Christian Andersen tales kicks off with the classic titular tale of a fashion-plate-wannabe ruler who goes over making a splash with style. In a bid to place the plump chump on Mr. Andersen's eternal "Worst Dressed" list, the emperor fires his trusted tailor and his clothes makers Flim and Flam, who toil to create garments that are so exceptional only a "wise" man can see them. Plain fools, of course, see nothing but the monarch's nekid booty during his victory parade, but by the time his manservant breaks the truth to his leader, the crooks are long gone with the real booty, including money, fine fabrics, and other goodies. Three other tales are also featured on this disc: "The Lovers" (about talking toys and their romantic misfires), "The Old Street Lamp" (chronicling an enchanted last night of work for an outdated talking oil lamp), and "The Bottleneck" (following the "life" of a talking champagne bottle that eventually winds up as a bird's drinking cup). The highlight of the program is actually the opening credits, which feature a live-action storyteller/babysitter and his captivated charges as they morph into cartoons and follow along with the tales. Unfortunately, the cartoons themselves are

not our Recommended. (Editor's Choice: Williams-Wood)

The Busy Little Engine ★★★★★1/2

(2005) 34 min. DVD: \$15.95. Squirrel Tracks Wooden Trains. PPR. Color cover.

Combining live action and computer animation, *The Busy Little Engine* tells the story of a toy wooden train that pretends to be real (his CGI alter-ego is superimposed onto actual train tracks), embarking on an imaginative journey to gather the necessary materials for a factory to make cookies, and accompanied by his question-asking puppet friend Pig. Along the way, young viewers will visit a farm and meet animals, learn about different train cars, and hear three infectiously fun original songs by Jimmy Magoo. DVD extras include a sing-along

CHILDREN'S

Avatar: The Last Airbender—Book 1: Water, Volume 1 ★★★★★1/2

(2006) 95 min. DVD: \$16.99. Paramount Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. Closed captioned. ISBN: 1-4157-1896-2.

The Avatar of the title is Aang, a 12-year-old reincarnation of an ancient being whose purpose, in the imagined world of this often beautiful anime-style Nickelodeon-aired series, is to restore harmony between the four elements: fire, earth, air, and water. At various times in history, the Avatar has been embodied in different masters of each of those elements, and Aang, freed from a century-long sleep within an iceberg, is an "airbender," capable of using air and wind as forces for moving objects and defeating armies of firebending bad guys. While there's plenty of action here, the greater dramatic interest lies in Aang's reintroduction to the world he left behind 100 years before. Featuring the first four episodes, this unrated—though suitable for 7-up—opening volume in the series also includes a behind-the-scenes "kung fu" featurette. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Blue's Room: Fred's Birthday ★★★

(2006) 100 min. VHS: \$9.99, DVD: \$14.99. Paramount Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Color cover. Closed captioned. ISBN: 1-4157-1651-X (dvd).

Blue's Room, the companion series to the



40 Greatest Kid Concoctions ★★★★★

(2005) 70 min. DVD: \$14.95. Time Life (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.

40 Greatest Kid Concoctions features an excellent array of activities designed for children of all ages (including this twentysomething reviewer and her husband). Backed by a bright and colorful set, John and Danita Thomas—Parents Choice award-winning parents of four, and co-authors of the *Kid Concoctions* book series—walk viewers through 40 mostly-awesome projects (all prefaced with a text list of ingredients/materials and instructions; also included in an accompanying booklet).

The projects involve recycling (such as using coffee grounds in a recipe to make a "Treasure Stone" to hide party goodies in), snacks (super easy "Shake & Make" ice cream and slushies), music (the "Tropical Rain Stick"), paleontology ("Fantasy Fossils"), party favors ("Fruity Lip Gloss"—or balm for boys—made with powdered drink mix), variations on classics (such as "Funny Putty" that still picks up newsprint), and just flat-out weird stuff (including "Dryer Lint Clay" and preservative-free "Dog & Cat Treats"). An ideal answer to rainy day tedium (and most definitely preferable to the "go clean out your closet" option), this is highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)