

the way (as when they fall in with helpful beggars) and prejudice as well (fellow passengers on a train try to eject them out of fear). There are moments of joy as the two get to know one another, but also painful episodes, such as when Obama suddenly falls ill or their donkey collapses. And there is frequent criticism of a governmental bureaucracy that does little to help the country's forgotten poor. A touching portrayal of an unlikely friendship, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

## Classic Films

### The Bedroom Window

★★★1/2

Kino, 112 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

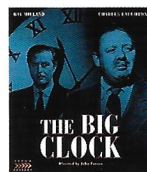
Future Oscar-winning filmmaker Curtis Hanson (*L.A. Confidential*) first made his reputation with this 1987 thriller, which draws deep from the Alfred Hitchcock well. Steve Guttenberg plays everyman hero Terry, a "romantic fool" who is having an affair with the boss's wife (Isabelle Huppert). She sees an assault while looking out through Terry's bedroom window but is unwilling to come forward, so when the same man murders another young woman, Terry steps forward to give his mistress's testimony as the witness. After becoming the new prime suspect when his story falls apart at trial, Terry teams up with Denise (Elizabeth McGovern)—survivor of the first attack—to trap the real killer. In addition to the film's debt to *Rear Window*, it features a well-executed set-piece in which Terry rushes to stop a murder at a ballet recital but ends up neatly framed for the killing in a theater that is filled with witnesses (a scene that recalls *North by Northwest*). Guttenberg makes for a likable hero but he has little dimension or depth and the script relies on leaps of logic and contrivances (how does Terry burst into a sold-out ballet hall—twice!—without a ticket?). But Hanson is a skilled director of suspense and he draws the audience into the self-made trap created by the well-meaning hero. And Wallace Shawn has a great scene as the attorney who takes Terry's story apart in court. Extras include audio commentary by film historian and critic Peter Tonguette. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



### The Big Clock

★★★★ Arrow, 96 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99

Ray Milland stars as the editor of a crime magazine whose latest assignment from his publisher (Charles Laughton) is to track down a mystery man in this clever 1948 film noir thriller. Laughton delivers a suitably hammy performance as Earl Janoth, an imperious, micromanaging



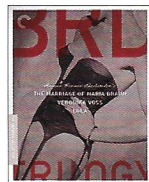
media mogul obsessed with time and punctuality—every clock in his office building is synchronized with the giant clock in the lobby—and Milland is George Stroud, a family man who goes on a drinking binge with Janoth's vindictive mistress (Rita Johnson) when he is fired. After Janoth murders his mistress in a rage, he hires Stroud back to lead the search for the man she was seen with. Director John Farrow avoids the more lurid aspects of the story—Stroud never makes a pass at his beautiful drinking buddy—focusing instead on the ordeal of an innocent man trying to save himself as the investigation closes in. The visual style lacks the evocative heavy shadows and claustrophobic atmosphere of more traditional film noirs—only one scene in the basement clockworks presents the characters slipping in and out of darkness in a visual labyrinth—but the direction of the actors is excellent and the pacing builds the tension beautifully as Stroud races to find the real killer before he himself is identified in this solid thriller. Extras include audio commentary by film scholar Adrian Martin, new featurettes on the film and Laughton, a 1948 radio play version featuring Milland, and a gallery of stills and artwork. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

### The BRD Trilogy

★★★★1/2

Criterion, 3 discs, 339 min., in German w/English subtitles, R, Blu-ray: \$99.95

Rainer Werner Fassbinder was already an internationally respected filmmaker when he embarked on a trilogy of films that explored the history of post-war Germany and the Federal Republic of Germany (i.e., the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or BRD) as seen through the eyes of three women—movies that became his first big commercial hits in Germany. Hanna Schygulla stars in *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979) as a woman struggling to survive while awaiting the return of her husband, a soldier reported missing in battle. Maria's rise to success parallels Germany's development in the years between 1945 and 1954, but the personal costs to Maria belong to the operatic emotional world of melodrama. The gauzy beauty of the look in *Maria* becomes brighter, harder, and more decadently garish in *Lola* (1981), a spin on Heinrich Mann's 1905 novel *Professor Unrat* and Josef von Sternberg's 1930 film *The Blue Angel*. Fassbinder's reworking casts Barbara Sukowa as the star attraction in a Bavarian brothel, with Armin Muller-Stahl as a self-righteous city bureaucrat whose fight against corruption is sidetracked when he falls for the calculating Lola. Shot in stark and striking black-and-white, *Veronika Voss* (1982) is kind of a *Sunset Boulevard* story set in the shadowy twilight of Munich some 10 years after the war. Rosel Zech stars an aging former movie star who is



now a lonely, forgotten, drug-addicted victim of a predatory doctor who feeds her habit while systematically robbing her estate. *The BRD Trilogy* films rank among Fassbinder's greatest and most accessible. Newly remastered from 4K restorations, extras include audio commentary on each film, cast and crew interviews, archival featurettes, and the feature-length 1992 documentary on Fassbinder *I Don't Just Want You to Love Me*. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

### The Extraordinary World of Charley Bowers

★★★★1/2

Flicker Alley, 2 discs, 288 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$49.99

Charley Bowers was one of the most ingenious talents of the silent film and early sound film eras, but is one of the least remembered by modern audiences. This collection of 17 restored short films spanning 1917-40 provides a long-overdue appreciation of this creative artist's distinctive approach to filmmaking. Originally a cartoonist and animator, Bowers moved into live-action productions that mixed stop-motion animation with complex mechanically-inspired humor. In shorts including *Egged On* (1926) and *Many a Slip* (1927), Bowers tries to improve on the food chain by creating an unbreakable egg and a no-slip banana peel, respectively. As a performer, Bowers's diminutive stature and mostly deadpan approach to outlandish physical situations recalls Buster Keaton's screen persona, but also predated Ernie Kovacs in creating surreal sight gags that boggled the imagination: a basket of eggs in *Egged On* hatch to reveal a swarm of miniature automobiles, while a pussy willow in *Now You Tell One* (1926) grows full-sized cats. Bowers's sound work—including *It's a Bird* (1930), featuring a metal-eating avian—shows his ability to incorporate clever audio elements into his cinematic trickery. Extras include the documentary short *Looking for Charley Bowers* (which details how French film archivist Raymond Borde rediscovered Bowers's long-lost films in the 1960s and championed his cause), an image gallery, and a booklet with an essay by *Video Librarian* contributor Sean Axmaker. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)



### Fantomas: Three Film Collection

★★★ Kino, 2 discs, 304 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$49.99

Jean Marais, who was most famous for his leading roles in Jean Cocteau's films *Beauty and the Beast* and *Orpheus*, plays dual roles in this trilogy of supervillain crime films based on the pulp serials written by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain in the 1910s. In *Fantomas*

