

her, only to discover that her clothing has been caught on the anchor hanging from the side of the boat and she is perfectly safe. They live happily ever after. We don't mind spoiling the ending of the 88-minute feature, another Paramount Kino *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329229641, \$30), but we would not dare tell you what happens at the beginning—that is the film's truest and most delightful surprise. Anyway, Swanson again plays a down-to-earth and spunky American girl, coping with the stresses of her job and doing whatever she can to please her clueless guy. Again, there is a satirical sequence where she puts on airs, but again, it is a joke that invites the viewer to laugh with Swanson at what she is doing. Even though it was made just a year later, **Stage Struck** is a more complex work than **Manhandled**, taking its heroine on a more elaborate and emotionally taxing journey. Swanson, as she did in **Manhandled**, displays a Chaplinesque skill at physical comedy, and indeed seems to be imitating him directly at times. It is her perky energy that brings life to the film and makes the fairly common story—the pancake guy becomes infatuated with one of the riverboat actresses and doesn't notice the depth of the heroine's feelings for him—succeed. Swanson's presence and dexterity make the movie seem unique in its approach and execution. Dwan also becomes more adventuresome with his camera setups and staging, although in both movies, his handling of crowd sequences is quite impressive, giving the segments a kinetic energy that has you flicking your eyes rapidly over every portion of the screen to catch everything that is going on.

The full screen picture is in much better condition than **Manhandled**. There are still scratches, of course, but they are not as rampant, and the basic quality of the image is decent. In addition, along with some tinting, there are a couple of segments in the movie that are in two-tone color and look quite fabulous. There is another unobtrusive piano score that supports the film effectively.

Dwan biographer Frederic Lombardi supplies a commentary track on **Stage Struck** that feels a little more comprehensive than the one Studlar delivers on **Manhandled**. He actually goes into detail about each one of the films that Swanson and Dwan made together, including **Manhandled**, but he also goes over the other contributors to **Stage Struck**, explains what was happening in Swanson's and Dwan's lives when they made the films, and how the office politics in Paramount's headquarters affected the artistic content of its product. He also goes over the movie's production history (some of it was shot in a small West Virginia town, which tripled in population when the movie crew arrived because people from miles around wanted to see them) and deconstructs the film's design and conceptualization. On a scene where the heroine wants to become an actress to please her beloved: "Dwan was fond of exploiting glass surfaces, including both windows and mirrors, for expressive effects. Here we have a distorted mirror, in [Swanson's character's] room, which makes her attempt to use it as an aid for her acting exercise useless. Of course, this begs the question of why she would have a distorted mirror in her room, which may be too logical of a question for a comedy of this sort. It raises the possibility that this is not a distorted mirror, but [the character's] imagination that causes the effect, that she cannot really see herself as an actress, but as some kind of grotesque figure separate from herself."

### On the road in India

The lovely, bittersweet romance and portrait of a British theatrical troupe specializing in Shakespeare and traveling the backroads of India after Independence, **Shakespeare Wallah**, has been released on Blu-ray by Cohen Media Group and eOne Entertainment as a *Cohen Film Collection* title (UPC#741952842699, \$31). One of the first big art house hits by the wonderful production team of Ismail Merchant, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and James Ivory, the 1965 film gives you little morsels of Shakespeare as it shows the troupe struggling to get bookings and make ends meet with dwindling audiences. At the same time, the daughter of the troupe's leader attracts the attention of a wealthy Indian playboy, played by Shashi Kapoor, who starts following the troupe around and bouncing between her and his Bollywood star girlfriend, played by Madhur Jaffrey. The performances are endearing, and the 122-minute film is both exotic and literate as it delivers a loving and realistic portrait of entertainers too self-defined by their vocations to imagine changing their ways. Felicity Kendal made her screen debut as the daughter (with her father, Geoffrey Kendal, playing her father—the film is based upon their troupe), and becomes the magnetic center of the film, although the primary appeal of the movie is how effortlessly it shifts from one concept (the Shakespeare scenes, Bollywood, the scenic roads and vistas, the waning British presence in the small towns, the backstage scraping to make ends meet, the romance) to the next and back again. With a musical score by Satyajit Ray, the film is an adventure and a delight, and despite its age, it remains both memorable and timeless.

The black-and-white picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The mildly grainy source material has an occasional scratch and other markings, but is generally in nice condition, and is sometimes intentionally soft and foggy during the outdoor sequences. The monophonic sound is crisp, and there are optional English subtitles. Along with two trailers, there is a terrific 47-minute interview with Ivory and Jaffrey, and an excellent 24-minute retrospective interview featuring Ivory, Merchant, Felicity Kendal, and Kapoor, the latter appearing previously on the DVD we reviewed in Feb 05. The quality of the DVD transfer of the feature film was similar to the BD transfer, although the BD delivery is crisper in both image and sound.

### Vacations are dangerous

It is a dark and stormy night. Two couples are staying in a nice but oldish beach house on an otherwise people-less island. Decapitations ensue. Arrow Video has released the 1982 slasher thriller, **The Slayer**, on DVD & Blu-ray (UPC#760137035886, \$40), which has a fairly cute punchline but is otherwise generally unremarkable. Running 89 minutes, there is a teaser, one death after the first half hour, one death after the second half hour and then things rev up for the final half hour. Although the editing seems limited by the available footage, the gore is reasonably well executed, the performances are tolerable, and the film, although being one of many, delivers what viewers are expecting from it, even if it takes its time a little bit more than most of its ilk.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The source material is grainy at times, especially during the darkest and stormiest portions of the night, and the cinematography is not the slick, but colors are fresh and it is fairly clear that the transfer has been executed with care. The monophonic sound is strong and clear, and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer, a 10-minute montage of promotional and production photos, an excellent 52-minute retrospective documentary and a 13-minute look at the locations in Tybee Island, Georgia and what they look like several decades later. One of the locations was an abandoned, derelict theater that had been built for G.I.s stationed nearby during WWII, which has since been fully restored and was the site of a special 2017 screening of the film in front of an enthusiastic audience. You can watch the film with the audio recorded in the theater during the screening, which might not be a bad idea even if you've never seen the movie before, since the screams and hoots are a lot of fun, and the echoey film soundtrack remains fully coherent. There are 4 minutes of introductions before the audience version begins, and an 18-minute Q&A after the screening is finished, which includes a couple of insights about the production that somehow managed to escape the other special features.

There are also three additional alternate audio tracks. One has a very good 50-minute interview with the film's composer, Robert Folk, who recorded his score in London with a symphony orchestra near the beginning of his successful career. He talks about many of the films he worked on (his ka-ching moment was scoring the **Police Academy** movies), but also speaks about designing the score for **The Slayer**, and getting to record it at Abbey Road Studios ("It was kind of thrilling to work in that studio that [The Beatles] had done so many of their albums in. You do feel this magic."). After the talk is finished, there is a very satisfying 17-minute selection of music from the film (in mono, unfortunately), after which the movie's actual soundtrack kicks in, except that since it is during the movie's climax, there is very little dialog and plenty more music.

Another talk is lifted from a pod cast series entitled *The Hysteria Continues*, in which three horror film fans share what they know or have gleaned from Internet research about the film, and compare it in fan-like fashion to other horror thrillers. They do point out a few of the movie's contradictions (although the movie's ending readily excuses all of them)—"You see the 'Slayer' and he's got basically like these long kind of claws protruding from his hands, so you wonder why he would use something like a pitchfork or an oar to kill someone?"—and on the whole, it is enjoyable the same way that the audience reaction track is enjoyable, as if you're watching the movie with a gang of friends.

The primary commentary track, however, is a standard and informative reminiscence by the director, J.S. Cardone, producer Eric Weston and one of the stars, Carol Kottenbrook, prompted by Arrow's Ewan Cant. By going off and shooting most of the movie in a remote location, it was an adventure for all of them, and so their memories are copious and vivid, as they share lots of stories about the shoot, explain what they were trying to accomplish, and provide their share of good filmmaking tips. "An actor has to sell this. You can bring out all the pitchforks and whatever you have in your toolkit, but if an actor doesn't sell it, it doesn't work."

They are justifiably proud of what they did. "This house was a practical house. We didn't have the advantages of 'flying walls.' We were very confined in our areas to shoot in. We were only relying on four lead actors to fill the gap in the suspense and stuff, and just the visual imagery of the atmosphere."

### Test pilots push the envelope

William Holden is an Edwards AFB test pilot and the improbably cast Lloyd Nolan is his hands-on commander in the 1956 **Toward the Unknown**, a Warner Home Video *Archive Collection Remastered Edition* title (UPC#883316341308, \$22). Having had the full cooperation of the U.S. military, the drama cannot be too daring (Holden's character was subjected to brainwashing in Korea and has few problems getting back in the groove), but there are a few similarities to parts of **The Right Stuff**, the jets are terrific, and the 1.85:1 letterboxed image is particularly engaging in showing them off. The monophonic sound is also fairly impressive for its day in allowing the planes to roar through your sound system. The picture is somewhat dark at times, and the mix of stock footage and new footage makes everything a little grainy now and then, but the colors are fresh and the important flying footage remains thrilling no matter how old fashioned the planes become. There is no captioning.