

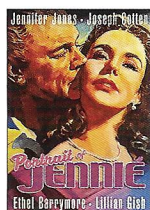
comedy with genuinely human, nuanced characters—one a cynic who can't handle life's curve balls, and the other an amiable if reckless loner who secretly harbors fears about mortality. A winning film about what can happen when you go with the flow, this 30th anniversary edition features the same set of extras as the 2012 Blu-ray release, including behind-the-scenes featurettes, a tribute to John Candy, and a deleted scene. Recommended for those who don't already own the earlier edition. (T. Keogh)

Portrait of Jennie

★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 86 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

William Dieterle's 1948 adaptation of Robert Nathan's titular 1940 novella might not have been a big hit, but it holds up as well as other supernatural love stories from the post-war era, such as *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*. According to film historian Troy Howarth's detailed audio commentary, the David O. Selznick production was so expensive that it was always going to be a challenge to break even. Selznick's wife, Jennifer Jones, plays the mysterious Jennie opposite Selznick favorite Joseph Cotten as struggling New York artist Eben Adams. Eben's fortunes start to change after an appointment with self-proclaimed old maid Miss Spinney (a touching Ethel Barrymore), a gallery owner who sees something in his talent and buys one of his paintings, although she acknowledges that "there isn't a drop of love in any of these." Love enters Eben's life when he meets the effervescent Jennie in Central Park. It's a platonic relationship at first, which keeps impropriety at bay since she's underage, but every time they subsequently meet, she's a few years older. Jennie also refers to events from the past as if they were in the present. Dieterle never suggests that any of these characters are crazy. Miss Spinney, for instance, has doubts about Jennie's existence, but also feels that Eben's eventual portrait justifies her faith in his abilities. Dieterle aimed to make a swoon-worthy film and he succeeds thanks to nuanced acting, Dimitri Tiomkin's Debussy-inspired score, beautiful high-contrast cinematography, and Oscar-winning effects. Highly recommended. (K. Fennesy)



The Sissi Collection

★★★★

Film Movement, 5 discs, 600 min., in German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$49.99, Blu-ray: \$59.99

German writer-director Ernst Marischka made three films about Princess Elizabeth of Bavaria (1837-1898) and her husband, Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph (1830-1916). The first,

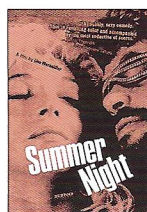


1955's *Sissi* (which was Elizabeth's nickname), recounts the couple's meeting and marrying over the objections of Franz Joseph's widowed mother Sophie; the second, 1956's *Sissi: The Young Empress*, focuses on Sissi's insistence on raising her first child herself, which again leads to conflict with Sophie; and the third, 1957's *Sissi: The Fateful Years of an Empress*, records how despite illness, Sissi was instrumental in gaining the support of the Hungarian and Italian provinces for her husband. All three films star Romy Schneider as Sissi (her signature role), Karlheinz Böhm as an incredibly upright Franz Joseph, and Vilma Degischer as the redoubtable Sophie, and all are lavishly filmed on gorgeous locations. Treating history very loosely, the trilogy feels like a sentimental operetta, although without music, save for Anton Profes's syrupy score. The *Sissi* films are bland costume soap operas with a royal background, but remain very popular in Europe, and while they are unlikely to achieve similar status in America, they still retain a certain value as curiosities. The most substantial extra here is the bonus DVD featuring *Mädchenjahre einer Königin* or *Victoria in Dover* (which, believe it or not, was originally released in the U.S. as *The Story of Vickie*), a film that Marischka and Schneider made in 1954 about the serendipitous courtship of Queen Victoria of England and her beloved husband Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg. Also included are 1962's *Forever My Love*, a condensation of the *Sissi* trilogy dubbed into English for American release (with a title song by Burt Bacharach and Hal David added), the vintage behind-the-scenes 1956 featurette "From Romy to Sissi", an excerpt from the 2006 documentary *Sissi: Enigma of an Empress*, and a booklet with essays. While none of these movies are great, together they represent a cinematic phenomenon in post-war Germany worth seeing. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Summer Night

Kino Lorber, 103 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

A bubbly romantic comedy shot through with softcore commingling and a soupçon of gender politics, the full title of Italian director Lina Wertmüller's 1986 film is *Summer Night with Greek Profile, Almond Eyes and Scent of Basil*. Trying to strike back at the backwater Sicilian terrorists who have made a mockery of the Milanese elite by blackmailing them for millions of dollars in ransom money, ice queen eco-industrialist Fulvia (Mariangela Melato) does the criminals one better when she arranges the kidnapping of their leader Giuseppe "Beppe" Catania (Michele Placido) with the help of the shady, vulture-like ex-Special Forces agent Cantalamessa (Robert Herlitzka). Keeping Catania holed up in her

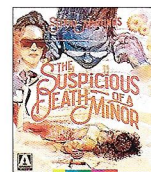


opulent, secluded villa, Fulvia finds the tables being turned on her when she begins harboring sexual feelings for her repugnant captive. The culmination of her longing arrives when, after having Catania bound in chains and donned in a zippered domino mask, she fulfills his request to supply him with a trio of sexual partners...and then quietly joins in on the fray. While Wertmüller's script doesn't add any fresh insights into the push-and-pull mechanics of romantic magnetism, the film does feature numerous comedic exchanges and situations, ending on a pleasingly wry, screwball note. Extras include a booklet with an essay by film critic Simon Abrams. Recommended. (J. Cruz)

The Suspicious Death of a Minor

Arrow, 100 min., in Italian & English w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.95

A hybrid of crime thriller, slasher film (*giallo*), and sexploitation drama, Sergio Martino's *The Suspicious Death of a Minor* (1975) is an Italian genre curio about a prostitution ring trafficking in minors. Claudio Cassinelli stars as Paolo Germi, who goes in search of a teenage hooker he met at an outdoor café. A cop with the Special Investigations Division on a deep cover case, Germi hires a genial, Vespa-driving purse snatcher (Adolfo Caruso) as his guide through the criminal underworld as he tries to find the hidden power behind the trafficking ring. Along the way, there's a mysterious assassin in mirrored glasses murdering witnesses, a bang-up car chase through the streets of Milan, and an inventive finale aboard a railroad flatbed transporting the assassin's car out of the country. Never before released in the U.S., the film is ultimately unsatisfying as either crime thriller or murder mystery. Cassinelli is an engaging hero, however, and the centerpiece car chase is beautifully choreographed and executed. Token American star Mel Ferrer has a couple of scenes as Paolo's boss but is dubbed in both the Italian and English language soundtracks. Extras include audio commentary by Italian genre movie expert Troy Howarth and a new interview with director Martino. Optional. (S. Axmaker)



Take the Money and Run

★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 85 min., PG, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Woody Allen stars as Virgil Starkwell, the most incompetent criminal to ever make the most wanted list, in Allen's official 1969 feature debut as a director. Narrated in the authoritative tones of the omniscient narrator (Jackson Beck, a veteran radio commentator) who reads comic lines with deadly serious gravity, it spoofs

