

Giallo procedurals

A terrific 1974 giallo procedural directed by Massimo Dallamano, **What Have They Done to Your Daughters?**, has been released on Blu-ray by Arrow Video (UPC#760137149989, \$40). A teenaged girl is found hung in the attic of an empty building, but as the police investigate, they uncover a ring of teenaged prostitution and other corruption. Running 91 minutes, the film has some very interesting plot turns, essentially starting out with one detective, but shifting over to another when the hanging is determined to be a murder rather than a suicide, and yet coming back to the first detective at the end, as he contributes some important information and energy to solving the case. Claudio Cassinelli and Giovanna Ralli (in an unusual role as an independent female prosecutor) star. Accompanied by an excellent, Morricone-ish musical score by Stelvio Cipriani, the designs are stylish, the pace is steady and involving, the characters are richly conceived, the erotic sequences are striking, the gore is hyper-charged and there are good measures of action and suspense woven into the drama. The film is essentially everything you hope it will be when you first spin it up.

Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the color transfer looks fresh and the image is in good shape, with minimal aging. The monophonic sound is passable and the film has both an Italian track and an English track, with optional English subtitles. We preferred the Italian track, which better matches the film's setting, but either one is viable. There is a trailer, a very nice collection of promotional materials, 3 minutes of the film's title sequence in English instead of the Italian that appears on the main presentation, and 5 minutes of silent hardcore sex footage that Dallamano shot for the film but never used. A 20-minute analysis of Dallamano's career includes terrific clips from many of his films and looks at the various themes that run through most of his works. Additionally, there is an outstanding 2016 interview with Cipriani, running 50 minutes, who talks extensively about how he composes for films and shares other terrific insights on the dynamics of music composition, often turning to the piano next to him to play examples of what he is talking about. He goes over his biography and how he sort of fell into the movie soundtrack business. Anyone considering a similar career path should not miss the talk. Also featured is a good 22-minute interview with editor Antonio Siciliano, who discusses his career collaborations with Dallamano and what their strategies were for constructing their movies. He is shown the hardcore footage, which he had never seen or heard of before.

Gialli expert Troy Howarth supplies a decent commentary track, providing backgrounds for not only the cast and the crew, but even for the voice actors who did the English dubbing. He discusses the film's different artistic components and makes note of their superiority to many other films in the genre. "This is one of the really kind of stand out gruesome entries in the giallo of the 1970s. I think it's the combination of the extreme gore with the very lewd and lascivious kind of sexual content that's going on in this movie. Funnily enough, I think that one of the things that makes it all the more unsettling and all the more disturbing in a way is the fact that it is also a very remarkably well made movie."

Set in Sydney, but never sounding particularly Australian, the 1977 giallo procedural, **The Pyjama Girl Case**, another Arrow Blu-ray (UPC#76-0137166382, \$40), is not as satisfying, although it does have a few enjoyable components, and more great sex scenes. The elderly Ray Milland portrays a retired detective who is antsy to be doing something and volunteers to help a younger detective investigate the death of a badly burned woman who is found on the beach in yellow pajamas. At the same time, the flashback story of how she got there is intercut with the two-pronged investigation. The 102-minute feature was directed by Flavio Mogherini. There is not much in the way of suspense, the dramatic scenes are somewhat flaccid, and while some individual sequences are striking, there is no consistency to the film's style, but the picture is especially crisp, the views and location shots of Sydney are terrific—they're all over the town—and Milland is very enjoyable, putting a lot more effort into his crotchety old man performance than he really had to. He gives it his all.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The monophonic sound is reasonable strong, but the English track, appropriate for the setting, is awkward at times, feeling a bit delayed behind the lip movements. There is also an Italian track that isn't much better. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, and a small collection of promotional and marketing stills. In a good 15-minute interview, assistant director Ferruccio Castronuovo admits that most of the movie was shot in Spain, although Mogherini did a decent job at integrating it with the footage he shot in Sydney using a couple of the actors (Milland did not go). Castronuovo talks about working with Mogherini, the relationships he had with the cast members on the film, and a few other details about the production. Also featured is a very good 23-minute interview with editor Alberto Tagliavia, who explains that they reworked the movie twice (the first cut was much more 'giallo-like') before breaking it up and integrating the story of the victim with the investigation of her murder (that plot point seems obvious, but a number of people tend to treat it as a surprise). Additionally, there is a nice 32-minute interview with co-star Howard Ross, who talks about the movie and his career, and also shares a wonderful little bit about movie kissing ("If you give a normal kiss, it will look good. A real kiss, when you use your tongue, looks bad on the screen. You see all the movement inside the mouths. It's fine in real life, but not on the screen. It doesn't look good. So you always have to pretend." Finally, there is a nice 21-minute interview with composer Riz

Ortolani, who talks about his career and compositional dynamics, and a 29-minute overview of how locations have been utilized in Italian giallo features.

There is also a passable commentary track by Howarth, who explains that the film was based upon a true event that happened in Australia in the Thirties, where, as in the temporarily set film, the body of the victim, whose face had been burned off, was put on display in a sealed but transparent casket for the public, in hopes of identifying her. He goes over the film's design strategies and also shares what he knows about the backgrounds of the cast and crew, and he discusses how the movie, which came near the end of the giallo craze, veered away from the norms of the genre. "I don't know that **The Pyjama Girl Case** is especially well known or indeed beloved among giallo fans. It goes back to the movie's lack of the tropes. There is not a pair of black leather gloves to be seen in this film. There are no scenes of beautiful Italian actresses being stalked through moodily lit sets and slashed to death with a razor. It's not that type of movie and there's a lot of scenes focusing on relationships and emotions and characters who are interacting with each other like real human beings."

Pre-code classic

Why have we never heard of this movie before? Made just before the implementation of the Production Code in 1934, Lloyd Bacon's **He Was Her Man**, a Warner Home Video *Archive Collection* release (UPC#888574-707453, \$22), is a remarkably modern and near-perfect romantic melodrama. James Cagney is a snitch who hightails it to San Francisco after setting up his confederates for a fall, because he doesn't want to get pulled back into the criminal life. Joan Blondell is pretty clearly a prostitute, who wants to put her life behind her, as well, and is heading down the coast to John Steinbeck country, to marry a Portuguese fisherman. Cagney and Blondell's characters speak the same language, however, and are instantly attracted to one another, so he tags along with her, while a pair of hitmen follows him. The performances of the actors playing the townspeople in the fishing villager have typical Central Casting yokel affectations, but that contrasts brilliantly with the gangsters, who are as modern and edgy as they come. Cagney and Blondell have always had great chemistry, but it is hyper-charged here, particularly since the script lets you know in no uncertain terms what they've been up to with each other. It is perhaps for these reasons that the film had to make a total disappearance once the Production Code came along, but it is a true classic in its design and execution, and a most welcome entertainment for our enlightened age.

The full screen black-and-white picture is generally in passable shape, with minimal wear, and the monophonic sound is workable. There is no captioning.

Early musical

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart wrote the songs for the surprisingly fresh and vibrant early musical, First National's 1931 **The Hot Heiress**, a Warner Home Video *Archive Collection* title (UPC#88857464-4048, \$22). Directed by Clarence Badger, Ben Lyon is a riveter working on a Manhattan high-rise and Ona Munson is a spoiled rich girl whose upper story apartment bedroom is parallel with the floor Lyon's character is hammering together. When an accident occurs and a fire is started in her bedroom, he swings a board across to put the fire out and it is the beginning of an unlikely but magnetic relationship. Tom Dugan plays the buddy of Lyon's character and Walter Pidgeon is the girl's haughty suitor. Running 79 minutes, the romance has its expected ups and downs, but the players are lively and their interactions are charming. The setting is quite inventive, and for its day, the filmmakers pull off the impression of staging much of the film high above the busy streets quite effectively. But what is also a revelation is the music. Contrary to the concept that the modern musical started with **Oklahoma!**, there has always been an effort to integrate songs with the narrative in musicals, and in **The Hot Heiress**, every song has a direct bearing on the story, either illuminating a situation or advancing the plot. The songs are catchy, too, and although there aren't enough of them to give the film an atmosphere of wall-to-wall music, there are enough to qualify the film as unmistakably a musical, and probably the first one in history to feature singing construction workers.

The full screen black-and-white picture has quite a few speckles and larger dots, although the wear never interferes too greatly with the film's pleasures. The monophonic sound is reasonably stable for its age, and there is no captioning.

Lombard vehicle

Carole Lombard plays a flighty chorus girl and gold digger who falls for one of the underlings in spite of herself after marrying a mob boss in the enjoyable 1934 MGM romance, **The Gay Bride**, a Warner Home Video *Archive Collection* release (UPC#888574644024, \$22). Chester Morris is the hero, and Nat Pendleton is also featured, along with Zasu Pitts, Leo Carrillo and Sam Hardy. Running 80 minutes, the film thrives upon Lombard's dizzy performance. She is incredibly loose and untethered from beginning to end, and part of the film's appeal is that you never know what she is going to be thinking of feeling from one moment to the next. The narrative is not entirely logical, but that really doesn't matter, because the characters are fun and the showcase the story provides for Lombard's talents is more than enough to satisfy a viewer's desires.

The full screen black-and-white picture has some wear, with a number of scratches and speckles, but is in tolerable condition, and the monophonic sound is workable. There is no captioning.