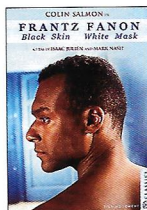


ence. Extras include an audio commentary by Haines moderated by filmmaker Heather Buckley. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask ★★

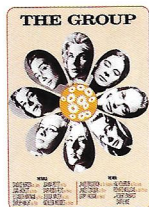
Film Movement, 72 min., in English, French & Arabic w/ English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Those who don't know much about Frantz Fanon before seeing this sort-of cinematic essay are not likely to have a handle on much more by the end. A fascinating and internationally influential figure who died at age 36 in 1961, Fanon was a mixed-race (although clearly black) youth born in Martinique, back when it was a French colony. Leaving the island in 1943 to join Free French forces during World War II, he later found that, despite his demonstrated bravery during the fight and his loyalty to France, he was subject to profound racial hostility from European whites. After becoming a psychiatrist, Fanon eventually took the reins of a psychiatric hospital in Algeria. Between his developing beliefs about the psychological underpinnings of race-based colonialism and a series of personal experiences leading to his support for Algerian revolution against France, he would create a lasting legacy for people struggling against occupation and oppression through his writing, relationships with fellow intellectuals, and pan-Africanism ideas. Unfortunately, little of that is clear or cohesive in this 1995 film by Isaac Julien, which fails to provide enough context for viewers to be able to truly grasp why Fanon is still an important figure. Featuring Colin Salmon as Fanon in dramatic re-creations, this is a visually indulgent work, with opaque lyricism and confusing refrains. Extras include the 1992 short drama "Between Two Worlds" by producer Mark Nash, and a booklet with essays by Julien and Nash. Optional. (T. Keogh)

The Group ★★

Kino Lorber, 150 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Eight women at a Vas-sar-like college during the Depression become close friends in this 1966 drama adapted from the 1954 novel by Mary McCarthy. Candice Bergen is top-billed as the maverick Lakey, who runs off to Europe and returns arm-in-arm with a German countess, but the film mainly focuses on the women who remain behind looking for love, marriage, or a meaningful career. Jessica Walter is most memorable as the high-living group gossip, Joan Hackett has an affair with a bohemian artist (Richard Mulligan) in which she feels love (but he doesn't), Shirley Knight is a hospital nurse with a mentally unstable

father, and Elizabeth Hartman is an idealist whose devotion to Roosevelt's New Deal is smothered by a controlling conservative husband who turns her pregnancy into a social experiment. Joanna Pettet, Mary-Robin Redd, and Kathleen Widdoes fill out the group, while James Broderick, Larry Hagman, and Hal Holbrook are some of the men in their lives. *The Group* tries to engage issues being raised in the 1960s through the prism of the 1930s, but it fails to successfully evoke the earlier period and too often slips into high-toned soap opera bordering on parody. Sidney Lumet, usually a strong director of actors, stumbles while trying to embrace the large ensemble and sprawling, rambling screenplay. And this film about the lives of women is directed, scripted, and produced by men, which may help explain its often awkward and arch presentation. Ultimately, this is a cinematic artifact from the dying days of the Production Code when adult issues were still being tangentially addressed, although it does feature the film debuts of Bergen and Holbrook. Optional. (S. Axmaker)

The Haunted Castle/The Finances of the Grand Duke ★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 159 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.99



German filmmaker F.W. Murnau was one of the greatest and most influential directors of the 1920s, helming such masterpieces as *Nosferatu* (1922), *The Last Laugh* (1924), and *Sunrise* (1927). This release features the Blu-ray debuts of two of his lesser-known films. Despite the title, *The Haunted Castle* (1921)—the earliest surviving Murnau film on disc—is neither horror film nor ghost story. It's a psychological drama and tepid murder mystery that plays out in a magnificent country manor like a chamber piece. Murnau's visual approach is mildly expressionistic with stately acting that evokes the theatrical tradition rather than the lively cinematic style he would perfect over the next decade. But he deftly sets up the complicated relationships and fills in backstory with limber crosscutting between various conversations, and he creates great dramatic tension and an ominous mood in the stillness of his compositions. *The Finances of the Grand Duke* (1924)—which couldn't be more different—is a lighthearted espionage thriller set in an island nation with a charming "benevolent dictator" who is about to have his entire country repossessed as an industrialist enlists a group of shaggy anarchists to overthrow the government. Scripted by Fritz Lang collaborator Thea von Harbou and photographed by expressionist master Karl Freund, the film feels more like a romantic Ernst Lubitsch lark than the dark expressionism that made Murnau's reputation. But both movies show the master filmmaker

developing the skills that would later flourish in some of the greatest masterpieces of the silent era. Featuring musical scores composed by Neil Brand and Ekkehard Wölk, extras include audio commentary on *Finances* by film historian David Kalat. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Horror Express ★★★

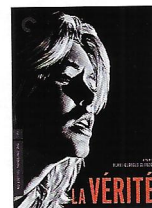
Arrow, 91 min., R, Blu-ray: \$39.99



This 1972 Spanish production featuring British horror stars Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing serves up an odd but entertaining mix of murder mystery, supernatural horror, mummy movie, zombie film, and alien attack set at the turn of the 20th century. Lee plays archeologist professor Sir Alexander Saxton, traveling from Northern China on the Siberian Express with the frozen remains of a "missing link" that comes back to life, preys upon passengers, and then jumps bodies to survive. Cushing is rival gentleman scientist Dr. Wells, who shifts from enemy to colleague when the milky-eyed victims come back to life as undead zombies. Both actors maintain their dignity during all the ridiculousness of the crazy horror, sniping and sabotaging one another before finally teaming up. There's also a beautiful spy, a Rasputin-like monk, a pair of aristocrats in a private car, and Telly Savalas adds a blast of personality in a small but memorable role as a Cossack officer. It's a minor but very entertaining production, filled with incident and paced by director Eugenio Martín like a speeding train. Extras include audio commentary by film historians Stephen Jones and Kim Newman, an introduction by *Fangoria* editor Chris Alexander, appreciations by filmmakers Steve Haberman and Ted Newsom, and interviews with Martín, producer Bernard Gordon, and composer John Cacavas. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

La Vérité ★★★1/2

Criterion, 128 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Brigitte Bardot gives the most complex and committed performance of her career in this film by Henri-Georges Clouzot, a mix of courtroom drama and romantic melodrama set in the collision between conservative morality and the young adult culture of bohemian Paris. Bardot is Dominique Marceau, a wild child from the provinces who is on trial for murder. Witness testimony paints her as a "bad girl" indulging in the decadence of Paris nightlife while her serious sister Annie (Marie-José Nat) studies music, but dramatic flashbacks reveal that she is a free-living young woman who embraces the beatnik culture of casual sex