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A Camille bouquet

Two MGM adaptations of the Alexander Dumas story, Camille (1936), have been placed in the same vase by Warner Bros. as a *WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#883929807666, \$22). Not only is the feature presentation the classic 1936 George Cukor romance starring Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor, but in the supplement, Metro's 1921 silent production, directed by Ray C. Smallwood and starring top-billed Alla Nazimova (as, simply, 'Nazimova') and Rudolph Valentino, has been included, as well. Indeed, we strongly recommend watching the silent film first. For one thing, while the presentation is fully viewable, the full screen black-and-white image is very soft and often accompanied by speckling or even some minor smearing. Then, when you turn to the main feature, the gorgeous, pristine, full screen black-and-white image transfer is all the more captivating.

Generally forgotten now, Nazimova was a huge stage star in her day and must have been catnip for drag queens of the time, with her big hair and exaggerated expressions. Of course, for reasons that are part of the mysteries of stardom, Valentino's fame has endured, despite his relatively brief career. While his part is secondary to hers, he is magnetic in every shot that he appears, and his performance is competently delivered (as is hers, when you get past the big posing moments). Running 70 minutes, the film still manages to tell the full story in a relaxed and involving manner. It takes place in the 'present day,' allowing for modernistic set designs that are incongruously offset by normal looking doors and hallways. Indeed, because everything is so antique from today's perspective, you forget that it isn't set in the Nineteenth Century until there is suddenly a shot of a jazz band or a fancy glass partition. Although there are brief digressions to a costumed depiction of *Manon Lescaut* (with the same stars), the reason for that is readily integrated with the narrative and not distracting. On the whole, it is an efficient, straightforward and relatively satisfying exposition of the tale.

Although it is set in the correct period, the first close-up of Garbo in the main feature has more of a modern feel than anything in the previous film. Her performance, as the consumptive playgirl who falls for an earnest young suitor and is then persuaded by the guy's father to give him up, has a compelling and even stellar naturalness. With the best of MGM's considerable production design resources (at what was the height of MGM's dominance in the field), the spare and oddball designs in the earlier film, once again, help to slingshot an excitement for the upgraded presentation, especially since every jewel, every carving and every fabric texture is exquisitely defined on the BD. Running 109 minutes, the narrative is also able to fill in and flesh out details that the earlier movie had to skim over, so that a viewer even watching the two films back-to-back will feel that the second film is an entirely new experience. In the scene where the father confronts the heroine, the silent film is actually better scripted than the sound feature, although Garbo and Lionel Barrymore more than make up for what the screenwriters weren't able to pull off. And when it comes to the ending, the later film is a hands down improvement over the earlier work. The suspense in the final 10 minutes has you hanging on the edge of your seat, and then most likely rushing to find a handkerchief. True, whatever it is that prevents Valentino had, Taylor does not have it, at least not in this film, and that prevents the movie from being within the highest tier of motion picture entertainment, but it is still an outstanding and highly satisfying production. The shortcomings of Taylor's performance are consistently outshone by Garbo's thorough and intricate delivery, and the vividness with which the BD brings her to the viewer immediately reinforces the readily obvious conveyance that she is someone a man would certainly fall heart and soul for, under any circumstance.

The monophonic sound on the feature film is reasonably clear and solid, and there are optional English subtitles. The musical score for the silent film is suitably inconspicuous, although it wouldn't have killed anybody to throw in *Brindisi* at the appropriate moment. Along with an early reissue trailer there is an audio-only MGM radio promotion from 1936 that pretty much conveys the entire plot of the film with 14 minutes of audio excerpts.

A caper cornucopia

Caper films were a staple of the Sixties, responding, perhaps, to an era of prosperity and abundance after WWII, and the idea that in these times of invention and wealth, anyone with intelligence, imagination and daring could garner a fortune. Caper films in America and England were hip, but France had a New Wave of cinema that was super cool, and no one outside of its shores paid much attention to the other movies France was making, including the studio features that wanted to cash in on the genres that were popular elsewhere. But now, in more enlightened times, three standard French studio films, following the exploits of an enduringly popular jewel thief character, have been gathered in a marvelous two-platter Blu-ray set by Gaumont, Kino Lorber and Kino Classics, Arsène Lupin Collection (UPC#738329261771, \$50). Set in the earliest parts of the Twentieth Century, Robert Lamoureux plays Lupin in the first two films, with a penchant for disguises and a jovial panache. Despite using so much cologne that you can smell it from here, the ladies can't get enough of him. The plots of all three movies involve heists and other clever robberies, and the films are gems that are too tempting not to grab. The BD set is a caper cornucopia.

On all three films, the monophonic sound is in decent shape. The films are in French with optional English subtitles (there is also some German and Italian, and since the subtitles don't differentiate them, you may miss a few gags that play upon the shifts in language).

Taking place before WWI, the first movie, *The Adventures of Arsène Lupin*, from 1957, runs 103 minutes, opening with several brief capers and a run-in with the law before settling on a longer exploit, with the hero invited to an emperor's castle because the emperor wants to test how foolproof his new safe is. Sandra Milo costars. The film is bubbly fun, never bogging down or feeling repetitive, and it is constantly witty—not brilliantly so, but clever and humorous enough to pass the time with a smile. Additionally, the film, although presented in a squared full screen format, has an impeccable color transfer, which serves the movie's lovely period décor extremely well. No, the film wasn't breaking new ground with jump cuts and lyrical tracking shots, but, directed by Jacques Becker, it was delivering a calculated yet playful series of cat-and-mouse interludes that have remained quaintly timeless.

You may want to take a healthy pause before moving on to the second film on the platter. The 1959 *Signed, Arsène Lupin* is initially a letdown because the film is in black-and-white and if you jump into it right away, as badly as you want to, you are probably still floating on the highs of the first film's hues. Fortunately, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the transfer is again immaculate. One reel is a little softer than the others, but otherwise the image is crisp and spotless, with finely detailed contrasts. Set immediately after WWI, the plot is not only stronger, but has a somewhat more mature tone, with the hero attempting to solve the mystery behind another thief's robbery of several paintings, which together form a puzzle leading to a treasure. Shot partially in Florence as well as on locations in France, the 99-minute film has even more momentum than its predecessor, and is consistently inventive and intriguing. Co-starring Alida Valli, the film was directed by Yves Robert, who also has a supporting part.

Set during the Roaring Twenties, the character played by Lamoureux has passed away in the 1962 *Arsène Lupin vs. Arsène Lupin*, but his two illegitimate sons, played by Jean-Claude Brialy and Jean-Pierre Cassel, carry on in his tradition. The lovely Françoise Dorléac co-stars. Running 111 minutes, the two heroes belatedly learn of one another's existence as they attempt to secure a royal treasure and damning documents ahead of gangsters. In some ways, the director, Édouard Molinaro, does everything he can to wreck the film, staging numerous scenes as if the film were a silent comedy, with accelerated movements and piano-roll music, but the format is just too foolproof to bungle. The charms of the two leading men readily outweigh the clowning of the supporting cast, and the inherent twists and turns of the story are consistently more involving than its farcical tone. If we were to rate the three, we'd say that the second film was the best, but this one does not fall far behind.

Caper (Continued)

Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the black-and-white image is again sharp and spotless. Presented on the second platter, the film is accompanied by a vigorous French trailer that headscratchingly places its white text promotions and cast listings against white backgrounds.

Woo swordplay

John Woo's 1979 *Last Hurrah for Chivalry* arrived essentially at the end of the 'kung fu' era in Chinese martial arts features, and feels as if it is a brilliant distillation of all that had come before it. Like the hero in a classic martial arts film, Woo began as an apprentice under the great Hong Kong directors in the Sixties and Seventies, essentially practicing his craft and learning from his elders. From this early victory, he would eventually become a master himself, moving the entire focus of the industry away from costume dramas and on to gangster films. Indeed, *Last Hurrah for Chivalry*, which has been released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#71551528-2512, \$40), is also a harbinger of Woo's gangster epics, dwelling as much on the friendships (and false friendships) between the characters as it does on the brilliantly staged fight scenes. Running 106 minutes, the film offers not so much an aura of discovery as one of exploration. In his fight scenes, Woo tries combinations and camera angles that were either underutilized or never utilized, integrating them so expertly with the standard approaches that you never notice what is normal and what is invention. It just feels more exciting. The same is true of the narrative (two fighters help a prince win back his legacy from a nasty villain). There isn't just one brotherly bond between two fighters. There are a number of brotherly bonds between a number of characters, so that the relationships become as complex as the swordfighting motions. Woo is equally adept when it comes to comedy—in one interlude, a fighter pretends to be asleep as he fights, creating a mix of slapstick and blood that we've never seen balanced so smoothly. Even the homoeroticism that wove its way through many martial arts features is embellished in delightful ways. Near the climax, two of the heroes who have set out to kill a powerful villain work their way through his anterooms, encountering different fighters with different skills. When they finally reach the shirtless villain's inner chamber, he has decorated it with scores of candles, like a young lady who has prepared her boudoir for a lover. As subliminally gripping as it is viscerally thrilling, the film is a quintessential martial arts entertainment, with all of the action and flourish a viewer could desire.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.4:1. The color transfer is spotless and the image is sharp, a great improvement over the LD we reviewed in Jun 97. We enjoyed the LD greatly, but the clarity of the image adds even more to the film's appeal. Colors are smooth and exact, and the image is spotless. There are three basic audio tracks—a 5.1-channel track in Cantonese, a monophonic Cantonese track and a mono English track—although there is also a fourth track that replicates the English track but substitutes the opening Cantonese title song for an instrumental. The English dubbing is adequate, although the Cantonese track is preferable. The 5.1 mix is lightly applied, giving the music and atmosphere an appealing dimensionality without distortion or distraction. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, a 3-minute audio-only reminiscence about the film by Woo from 2004 (he says it was a failure), and a 9-minute appreciation of the film and Woo's artistry.

Actresses acting

In an apartment with several rooms and tight hallways, a man is romancing one woman in his bedroom when the woman he is living with enters through the front door. She passes several people in the apartment's hallway, paying no attention to them, although they watch her as she passes. What then proceeds is a typical French farce as the man tries to keep each woman unaware of the other's presence. But who are those other people? Are they ghosts? Are they representatives of moral choices, a potential Greek chorus of sorts? No, it turns out they are an audience, and the man, played by Facundo Bo, and the two women, played by Geraldine Chaplin and Jane Birkin, are performing a location play, that the audience has paid to watch and enjoy. Thus begins Jacques Rivette's delightful 1983 film, primarily about actresses and acting, *Love on the Ground*. One of the members of the audience, played by Jean-Pierre Kalfon, turns out to have written the play, and chastises Bo's character for putting it on without permission. He then, however, invites all three performers to his much larger (riotously decorated but partially falling apart) mansion, where they are to rehearse a different play for the entire week and then put it on in the mansion location at the week's end. André Dussollier and László Szabó are also featured.

Released on Blu-ray by Cohen Media (UPC#738329261719, \$30), the film runs 176 minutes, and to some extent it downshifts after that glorious beginning, but Chaplin and Birkin are so entrancing and their performances are so meticulous (acting, 'acting,' and ACTING) that the film's good will carries through to the sweet finale. Along with the elliptical romantic ties that develop among the characters, the two actresses also have curious adventures during the brief times that they leave the mansion, and incidental hallucinations when they are there. While the narrative can become a little dense at times—Birkin's character is assigned a man's part in the second play—it does not feel as digressive or molasses-ine as Rivette's more heralded work and is one of his best, most accessible and most rewarding films. Essentially, while beginning with a near re-creation of the classic French artform—the farce—the film then proceeds to stretch, twist and knot the normal parameters of the genre, using the two native English actresses to explore even further what is French about it and what isn't.

The film is in French with optional English subtitles, and is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer is exquisite, and the textures of the fabrics the characters wear are palpable. At times, Rivette steps away from the characters and just gorges on the mansion with still montages. The picture quality is so accurate that such pauses convey a poetic force, underscoring the presence of the characters even through their absence. The DTS sound has a basic dimensionality, but the audio track is filled with environmental noises—Rivette is one of the few filmmakers in history who didn't give a damn if a plane was flying overhead while he was shooting—that pull a viewer further into the film's very magical and theatrical world. A trailer is included.

Film scholar Richard Peña supplies a passable commentary track. Because of the film's length, his comments are intermittent, but appear at a steady pace from beginning to end. He talks about the cast and Rivette (although he never mentions the other times Chaplin and Birkin worked for the director). Explaining what he can about the plot as it goes along, he discusses its themes, its meanings and its wonderful quirks. "This is a film in which the word, 'play,' in both its English meanings—that of kind of a stage presentation, and as a kind of diversion—really comes together."

4K Pierce

The larger the screen the more evident it is, but 4K format continually improves already great looking movies. We reviewed Criterion's regular Blu-ray release of *Mildred Pierce* in Feb 19 and noted that while the source material appeared to be the same as what was used on Warner Home Video's fine DVD (May 03), the smooth, spotless full screen black-and-white image was crisper and more engaging with the BD playback. The improvements offered by The Criterion Collection's 4K Blu-ray release (UPC#715515282413, \$50) of the Michael Curtiz Warner Bros. production are even subtler—the image is even smoother and contrasts are more precisely detailed. But what really happens is that a movie that is already highly entertaining becomes more involving because its presentation is, essentially, more film-like. From the Kafkaesque beginning, through Joan Crawford's radical mid-film hairstyle shift and to the final sun-is-rising conclusion, you are transported to 1945 when the film was first released. Pulled along by the knowledge that a crime has occurred, you follow Crawford's character as she works her way up both financially and socially after splitting from her character's husband, and for 111 minutes you are awash in a deftly executed entertainment that represented its times as much as it depicted its times. You're not watching TV, you're at the movies.

There are optional English subtitles. Criterion's two-platter set also contains their previous Blu-ray presentation of the film. The monophonic sound on the 4K version is essentially indistinguishable from the BD. Only the standard BD platter has special features, including a trailer, an 87-minute profile of Crawford, a 15-minute interview with Crawford from 1970, a 23-minute critic analysis of the film, a 24-minute interview with co-star Ann Blyth from 2006, and a 10-minute interview with author James M. Cain from 1969.

The brilliance of the motion picture is brought to light by Todd Haynes' earnest but misguided 2011 five-episode HBO miniseries adaptation of Cain's novel, *Mildred Pierce*, released in a four-platter *The Collector's Edition* Blu-ray and DVD set by HBO Video (UPC#883929201099). By necessity, the 111-minute feature film had to invent an audience-involving bookend so the story could be told in flashback. While we don't want to spoil what surprises the miniseries has, the lack of those bookends is like the removal of a fence for a corral. The plot points just wander off every which way. What is similar is that there is still a woman who pulls herself up from desperate straits during the Depression by starting a successful eatery (although a number of years pass, the feature film is not set in that earlier time and takes place in a blurred 'present day'), she still has a heartless daughter, and they still both have the hots for a slick playboy. Naturally, since this is not only an update, but HBO, there are a lot of good, erotic sex scenes. The period décor and costumes are terrific (although there was a sign in a store promoting Food Stamps several years before Food Stamps were created). Kate Winslet stars as the title character, and while she is more of a wet noodle than Crawford, she's a good enough actress to convey the heroine's range of emotional frustration and desire. Guy Pearce and Evan Rachel Wood co-star.

The program's primary flaw is that it follows Cain so closely it leaves the lumps in his plotting and characterizations, which become magnified when that camera is focusing on them (and were brilliantly smoothed out in the feature film). Although scattered details that the feature had to abridge are quite welcome (why the heroine chooses to serve chicken in her eating establishments is a memorable sequence the feature glosses over), location transitions are still awkward at times, as are emotional shifts. While the feature film very sensibly has the daughter singing in a waterfront dive, the series, true to Cain's original story, has her become a world famous opera

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singer not only overnight, but from singing in Los Angeles. Still, one of the nice things about the program is how much it is interested in replicating its source. The basic story has plenty of bestseller plot turns, and there are a number of individual scenes that are quite rewarding, although the show's tone has a curiously archaic feel, even with the sex.

Running 342 minutes, the series is spread to two platters in each format, and each platter has a 'Play All' option, with chapter encoding that takes you reliably past the opening credits. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The image is more crisply detailed on the Blu-ray playback. The program uses New York locations as effective and even impressive stand-ins for Southern California. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a reasonably nice dimensionality, with the BD's audio again providing a stronger presence than the DVD's audio. There are alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles on the DVDs, with an additional five subtitling languages on the BDs.

Haynes and his collaborators, screenwriter Jon Raymond and production designer Mark Friedberg, provide excellent commentaries on two episodes for both formats, reading passages from the book, discussing the period detail (as depicted in the film, Los Angeles really did have a ghastly Twenty-first Century rainstorm on New Year's Eve in 1933), sharing anecdotes about the shoot and otherwise discussing the production and the story. The BD also contains a reasonably good 29-minute production featurette.

It has been said, and supported with considerable proof, that in all of the Hollywood movies made before female directors finally gained some traction in the Seventies, the central female character in a film was always defined by the men around her. This has been seen as an artistic or even a moral failing, although not only was it a response to marketplace desires, but one would be hard pressed to find instances in English literature up to almost that same point in time—at least, up to the Twentieth Century—that were any different. Crawford made an entire career, however, presenting characters who had to cope with the men around them. Whether ineffectual or domineering, the men in her films define her only as a frame defines a painting. What you respond to is her character's energy and determination, as a female, to achieve what she wants in what is, realistically, a man's world.

Curtiz also directed Crawford in the 1949 Warner Bros. production, **Flamingo Road**, which has been released as a *WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#810103687547, \$22). While it doesn't have the artistic heft of **Mildred Pierce**, it does make a terrific double bill. Based upon another bestselling melodrama, Zachary Scott is a deputy sheriff being groomed for political office and Crawford's character is an itinerant waitress he takes a fancy to. Most memorably, Sydney Greenstreet is the town's sheriff and gravitational center (it's surprising he wasn't nominated for an Oscar), who forces Scott to drop the waitress and marry someone respectable. As with **Mildred Pierce**, you just settle back and let the melodramatic twists and turns take their course, with each new embellishment adding to your satisfaction from the emotional exchanges on display, and increasing your anticipation for what may come next.

Curtiz' direction is superb, which is why the film rhymes so well with **Mildred Pierce**. Scenes are tight, efficient and intriguing, while visually, the film is often subliminally striking—you aren't distracted by the cinematography, but you are continually engaged by it. Like the final shot in **Mildred Pierce**, the final shot in **Flamingo Road** has a wealth of layered meanings that ostensibly point to a 'happy ending' while reminding the viewer, subconsciously at least, that the problems Crawford's character is facing have by no means entirely disappeared.

The full screen black-and-white picture is spotless. The awkwardness of some of the rear projection is accentuated by the precision of the image, but that is the price of clarity. The beauty of Ted McCord's cinematography is also accentuated. The monophonic sound is solid and brings an appropriate heft to Max Steiner's musical score (due to its constant background appearances and a performance by Crawford's character, the song, *If I Could Be with You One Hour Tonight*, will be stuck in your head afterwards for well more than the suggested hour). There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, a 1948 *Looney Tunes* Porky Pig cartoon running 7 minutes entitled *Curtain Razor* in which the pig is a talent agent auditioning various animal acts, a marvelous 10-minute blooper reel for Warner's 1949 features, a very good 12-minute overview of Crawford's career at Warner Bros. including the intricacies of Crawford landing **Mildred Pierce** at a down moment, and an undated 24-minute *Screen Directors' Playhouse* radio adaptation with Crawford (but sadly not Greenstreet), which rushes through the plot quickly but manages to convey a couple of highlights. It has a quick little interview with Curtiz at the end, too.

Lynch's experiments and dreams

Sometimes a general consensus forms that a filmmaker has gone to the well once too often, and so an otherwise interesting feature will be cast aside and forgotten because it is too much like that filmmaker's other works. David Lynch's 2006 **Inland Empire** is one heck of a disturbing dream, but it doesn't quite have the narrative momentum that his other surreal films achieved (notably, a favorite subplot of Lynch's—the violently jealous husband—falls by the wayside after its promising introduction) and it has yet to enter the cinematic lexicon with the same fervor that **Mulholland Drive** and **Twin Peaks Fire Walk with Me**, or even **Lost Highway** and **Wild at Heart**, have ensconced themselves. Maybe the two-platter Blu-ray from The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515282611, \$40) will change that.

Shot in Ludz, Poland and Hollywood, USA, Laura Dern portrays an actress shooting a film, or is whatever she is playing within the film imagining that her life is a movie, or some blend of the two with other hallucinations mixed in for good measure. Jeremy Irons plays the director, and Justin Theroux is her co-star. Harry Dean Stanton has a nice supporting part that feels like it was originally composed for Jack Nance, and there are cameo appearances by Grace Zabriskie, Diane Ladd, William H. Macy, Julia Ormond, Mary Steenburgen, Laura Herring and Nastassja Kinski. Memorably, there are also scenes depicting three adults with rabbit head costumes on a somewhat bare stage living room, with minimal movements but a sitcom vibe. The 180-minute film has enough curiosities and mysteries to encourage repeat viewings, and from a stylistic approach, it is often exciting or rousing. In many ways, Lynch is at the top of his game, and the film is certainly engaging, even if somewhere around the beginning of the third hour, despite his attempts to build on what he has established, there is not enough new material to sustain the film's initial appeal from a narrative perspective. In our review of the WEA DVD (Sep 07), we called the film, 'poetry,' which is less dependent upon narrative, and that is the essential way to approach the creation and to be blown away by the depths of Lynch's imagination.

Using a video camera, Lynch actually did quite a bit of the cinematography himself (more so than his previous films, this one was impulsively experimental), and the film often cuts between vividly crisp images and images that have smears and separations. On the DVD, those flaws were exaggerated by the nature of the transfer, but the stability of the BD reduces those flaws to a minimal and even intended presence. The wonderful DTS sound is also embellished on the BD, particularly the eerie bass line hum that haunts the viewer throughout the film. There are optional English subtitles.

The second platter carries over several special features from the DVD, including 75 minutes of deleted scenes that form a less organized but still unnerving film in their own right, an additional 12-minute scene that combines some of the sleepier instrumental music from the film with impressionistic images of a dancing ballerina, and a fantastic 30-minute collection of raw and unrestrained behind-the-scenes footage. Additionally, there are several programs that are unique to the BD, including a trailer that plays more like an Internet promo; a 15-minute audio-only excerpt from Lynch's memoir, read by Lynch, about the seeds that grew into the film and a few shooting experiences; a wonderful 32-minute conversation between Dern and Kyle MacLachlan from 2022 about their experiences working with Lynch (don't shut it off when the credits appear, because there's more afterwards); and an 85-minute profile from 2007 entitled *Lynch* (Lynch has a group of Scandinavian videographers who follow him around and occasionally put these shows together—this one was made while he was working on **Inland Empire**), which is not one of the best of its kind, but functions viably under the assumption that any moment spent in Lynch's company is a moment well spent.

Heels over heads

We remember reading an interview with the United Artists marketing guru who was so proud of himself because he'd changed the name of Joan Micklin Silver's 1979 **Chilly Scenes of Winter** to *Head over Heels*, since obviously a cheerier RomCom title like that was going to do more business. The film failed anyway, and while the did a tiny bit better in 1982 when Silver changed the title back to the title of the Ann Beattie book she had adapted, and clipped off what had been Beattie's Hollywoodish finale, it became an infinitely better film, one that, in essence, embraces its bleakness in such a joyful way that you don't mind at all that things don't work out in the end. In most movies, they do, so this one is special because it is different.

The Criterion Collection has released the film on Blu-ray (UPC#715515282710, \$40). The story is set during two winters, or actually during the second winter with flashbacks to the previous winter to explain everything. A thirty-ish John Heard plays a civil servant who falls for a married colleague played by Mary Beth Hurt. Her marriage is having difficulties, and so she takes up with him, but a year later they are apart again, she is back with her husband, and Heard's character has reached a crazy/frustration level where he tries to unite with her once more. The cast is marvelous, including Peter Riegert as a witty roommate of Heard's character, Gloria Grahame as the emotionally unstable mother of Heard's character, and Mark Metcalf as the doofus husband of Hurt's character. Shot in Utah, the film's wintry atmosphere, embellished by the Toots Thielemans musical score, is cozy as all get out. As uncomfortable as the impulses of the characters become, the humorous tone of the 95-minute feature, and its rich character parade, prevent a viewer from being pulled down by what happens to them. This is clearly more like life than like the movies, and yet it is charming enough to sell the differentiation without an artificial makeover. Besides, if you want a happy ending, Criterion has obliged by including the 8-minute alternate closing in the supplements. If only life could be like a Blu-ray, right?

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is mildly grainy at times, but otherwise the colors are fresh and fleshtones are accurate. The monophonic sound is clear. There are optional English subtitles; a cheery trailer; a 15-minute interview with Silver from 2005 about her passion for film, the making of the movie, and the remaking of it into the cult hit it is today; a 46-minute profile of Silver from 1983 that provides a more detailed reflection on her entire career up to *Head over Heels*; and a great 2022 interview running 28 minutes with the film's three adventurous producers, Metcalf, Griffin Dunne and Amy Robinson.

Happy Easter

The outstanding Angel Studios streaming series about Jesus Christ and his followers, *The Chosen*, was clearly inspired from a tonal perspective by Martin Scorsese's excellent 1988 exploration of Christianity's roots (it also lifts some of his key camera angles), **The Last Temptation of Christ**, a Universal production that was handed over to The Criterion Collection for release on Blu-ray (UPC#715515092715, \$40). Of course, Scorsese's film, adapting the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis, incorporates only so much scripture as Kazantzakis chose to manipulate, but its realistically impoverished, semi-arid environment, with an accentuation on African-rooted artistic design, became a definitive canvas for subsequent filmmaking endeavors that sought to take the subject seriously. The dusty Michael Ballhaus cinematography is precisely balanced on the BD image delivery. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, the presentation's tentative stability matches the protagonist's conflicted determination in scene after scene, and were the image to look too solid or too distorted, it would spoil the delicate underscoring that it so deftly and subliminally achieves. As for the DTS sound, it delivers Peter Gabriel's inspired (and again, African colored) musical score with a confident power, and the environmental noises with a crisp and detailed surround distribution.

Willem Dafoe plays Christ, trusting that Scorsese has him covered in letting everything go for the role, as his character searches for his calling. The narrative conveys a strong implication of emotional and psychological torment in his backstory, so that as the film opens, he is already being pushed to his limits trying to determine how he should conduct himself and utilize the unique skills he has been given. Harvey Keitel and Barbara Hershey are on surer ground as his immediate compatriots. David Bowie has, sadly, just one scene, although he is wonderful in it, and Harry Dean Stanton has a more significant part near the end that he twists superbly. Running 163 minutes so that it can incorporate Kazantzakis' extended *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* sequence at its end, the film does follow the basics of the history surrounding Christ more closely than some people might give it credit for. Other viewers might simply be turned off by Dafoe's victimized performance, regardless of their ulterior beliefs, especially since one has to spend so much time with him as the film plays out, but that, too, can speak to what the filmmakers want to accomplish, expressing with the film the way in which the conflict of the time—which was tied closely to the economic exploitation of the populace through their governing bodies and the desire to be free of that exploitation—became an eternal conflict between the presence and denial of belief. In the film, not even Christ can decide whose advice he should embrace, and while others are more convinced that he knew what he was doing, that's a different movie.

We reviewed Criterion's DVD release in May 00. The picture and sound transfers were very good, but the stability and detailed clarity provided by the BD adds to the movie's textures and the audio's envelopment of the viewer. All of the special features are carried over, including a very good commentary pieced together from interviews with the filmmakers (talking not just about the making of the film, but the incendiary controversy that surrounded its theatrical release), a 12-minute interview with Gabriel, a 16-minute collection of footage gathered by Scorsese during his location scouting, and an elaborate and rewarding collection of production materials in still frame.

If one were to create a political continuum of films based upon the experiences of Christ, with movies such as **The Greatest Story Ever Told** (Dec 01) marking the center of the arc, then **The Last Temptation of Christ** would surely be very near one end of the continuum (we'll say the 'left' side, for the sake of convenience) and Mel Gibson's 2004 **The Passion of the Christ** would lodge very close to the other end (the 'right' side, in this convenience). That much of what has happened in American politics during the subsequent decades was foretold in the film's popularity cannot be dismissed as a coincidence. Gibson is a good filmmaker—the Barabbas sequence is marvelous, and several of the performances are equally deft—but the film seems to have one point only, and that is to articulate the pain and suffering Christ endured after being arrested the night following the 'Last Supper,' which is where the movie begins (throughout the film, there are a handful of brief flashbacks to reference other moments in his life). His relationship with his mother is an integrated aspect of the plot and the spectacle, but their interaction is relegated mostly to occasional eye contact.

Central to the explicit violence in the film is the lengthy whipping he receives before he is condemned to the Cross. For centuries, European villages have re-enacted the 'Passion Play,' a depiction of Christ's last days. Over time, the tradition mutated in different ways in different communities, and the film feels like one such evolution that grew with each performance trying to out-Grand Guignol the performance before it. The film is genuinely a horror movie, not just because of the gore, but because Gibson slips in quick hallucinations and images of Satan lurking amid the crowds. And yet viewers with delicate sensibilities, those who would never so much as glance at an advertisement for a normal horror film, flocked to Gibson's creation in droves. The film requires contextual knowledge, because there is not enough in those little flashbacks to explain who Christ, gamely played by Jim Caviezel, is and why these folks are so intent upon punishing him. But as a motion picture that fed upon that contextual knowledge, and an apparent emotional or perhaps spiritual (or, and you could write thesis on this—economic) thirst that accompanied it, Gibson's film is brilliantly executed and frankly deserves every piece of silver it earned.

20th Century Fox Home Entertainment released a two-platter *Definitive Edition* Blu-ray (UPC#024543565819, \$25), with the second

platter, a DVD, holding special features. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the picture is initially a little smeary in the nighttime sequences, but is otherwise finely detailed. Every drop of blood is clearly defined. The film has brownish tones, but that was the design of the day and one of the movie's few instances where Scorsese's influence could be felt. (Actually, if you have the capability to manipulate the image, the film is more effective in black and white.) We reviewed the DVD in Nov 04. The image transfer was quite good, but still looks blurrier and less detailed than the BD presentation.

The BD's DTS sound is stronger and clearer than the DVD's DTS track, delivering a decent amount of power and a dimensionality appropriate for its presentation of grandeur. Famously, the film's dialog was performed, impressively, in Latin, Hebrew and the less disseminated Aramaic, with optional English subtitles. There are seven other subtitling options, along with an option that brings up text descriptions of production details and Biblical references throughout the film. The DVD was one of the first to contain an audio track that describes the action, and that has been carried over to the BD.

The film comes with four commentary tracks. On one, Gibson speaks with cinematographer Caleb Deschanel and editor John Wright about the production, sharing anecdotes about the shoot, their strategies for various scenes and offering some background to the choices they made. On another track, another group of crewmembers speak in even more detail about the creation of each shot, including effects that viewers are likely unaware of ("His hand was sliding against the nail, so if you look carefully, we did a split along his palm where it's like, the bottom half of his hand is absolutely nailed to the cross, but it's like the bones are broken in the top half and his hand is still moving as he moves."). Composer John Debney supplies an intermittent but substantial talk, explaining the logic behind the creation of the music's individual themes and motifs. It was an exceptionally spiritual task for him, and while he talks around the matter, Gibson had to push him hard at times to get what was needed for a sequence. Finally, there is a commentary with Gibson and Biblical scholars, who enthusiastically deconstruct each sequence and offer some interesting interpretations (such as the lengthy parallels between Christ and Adam) amid their overt cheerleading. "Thomas Aquinas would have loved this movie."

Also featured on the first platter is a 122-minute presentation of the film that trims the gore and substitutes less explicit shots of violence for viewers who are weaker of heart, although the essential moments of pain are still conveyed clearly enough.

The second platter has 5 minutes of deleted scenes that, if you can believe it, push the envelope just a little too far; an edited 14-minute panel discussion highlighting comments from the crewmembers about the production strategies; a fairly comprehensive and informative 100-minute production documentary that works its way chronologically through the film's creation, including a discussion of the controversies that surrounded its release; a worthwhile 12-minute piece on Renaissance paintings and sculptures that depict Christ's experiences; a good 9-minute look at the actual locations where the event took place; a 13-minute segment on the languages used in the film; a gnarly 17-minute program on crucifixions; and sort of a 10-minute epilog that explains what happened to the other historical figures depicted in the story.

For a disciple of motion pictures, there is no more profound rapture than an MGM Technicolor musical. It is not just that the colors, which can put a basket of painted eggs to shame, are transcendent and glorious. It is the rhythm with which the colors move and change across the screen, and the harmony with which they complement and contrast one another. On a Blu-ray presentation, the delivery of the images is beatific, and the film accompanying those images is all the more joyous as a result. Warner Home Video has released the 1948 MGM production directed by Charles Walters, **Easter Parade**, on Blu-ray (UPC#883929265985, \$20). The story is negligible and is held together almost entirely by Judy Garland's performance, as she conveys with every muscle at her command her character's love for Fred Astaire's character. Ann Miller and Peter Lawford co-star. The music and lyrics are by Irving Berlin, with some of the greatest rhymes to ever come out of Tin Pan Alley ("...You'll find that you're/In the Rotogravure..."). But while Garland's presence and effort justify the 103-minute film, augmented by the spectacular dancing from Astaire and Miller (Walters is studious about taking in their whole bodies with his camera angles, so you can watch their feet perform magic), and assuaged by Lawford's calming nonchalance as the film's comedic workhorse, it is the movie's color design and delivery that elevate its pleasures to the heavens. The costumes, the décor, the stage productions and the proliferate holiday hats, delivered on BD in full screen format with a consistent chromatic perfection of intensity and detail from beginning to end, are iconic not just of the film, but of what the movies were during a key, irretrievable, ascendant moment in motion picture technology, fiscal dexterity and artistic sensibility.

The monophonic sound is solid and clear. There are two alternate Spanish audio tracks, an alternate German track, an alternate Portuguese track, alternate English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German subtitles, and a trailer. We reviewed a two-platter DVD in Apr 05. The picture on the DVD was already fantastic, but the BD's crispness and precision is even more captivating. The sound is also much stronger. Except for the feature length Garland documentary that was consigned to the DVD's second platter, the special features from the DVD are carried over, including a terrific completed

musical number with Garland that didn't match the film's tone and was sensibly left out, *Mr. Monotony*, running 3 minutes, along with 18 minutes of outtakes from which the number was constructed that any fan will find as captivating—and repeatable—as a regular movie due to Garland's slick professionalism, peppered with intermittent glimpses of a dropped veneer; a really nice 4-minute promotional radio interview with Astaire; a decent 34-minute retrospective documentary; a passable but rickety 54-minute *Screen Guild Playhouse* radio adaptation; and a really good commentary track featuring Astaire's daughter, Ava Astaire McKenzie, and film expert John Fricke.

Female martial artist

Hong Kong martial arts actress Angela Mao stars in the Arrow Video Blu-ray double bill, **Lady Whirlwind & Hapkido** (UPC#760137115465, \$40). Both Golden Harvest films were directed by Feng Huang. Each appears on a separate platter and is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Both are in Mandarin, with alternate English dubbed tracks and optional English subtitles.

Not the slickest martial arts feature ever made, the 1972 *Lady Whirlwind* (known in America as *Deep Thrust*), has enough basic entertainments to hold a viewer's attention, but it is easy to pick the film apart for its shortcomings, as well. Ostensibly about a heroine with martial arts skills, played by Mao, most of the narrative is about the man she wants to reek vengeance upon, played by Yi Chang, except that he is also a hero, who was injured by a group of ruffians and, when she finally catches up to him, is recovered enough to have another go at eliminating them. He begs her to hold off their fight so he can take care of the other guys first, and that leads to more complications and delays. Even though the story is more about Chang's character than Mao's character, it is reasonably brisk, running 89 minutes, and engaging. Yet, during the fight scenes, the punches often miss by a mile, but are still accompanied by sound effects suggesting that they landed. Once or twice, sure it happens. But here, it happens a lot, so that while the fights are energetic and display some level of athleticism, there is a limit to how much they can actually impress a potential fan. Even Sammo Hung, who has a cute supporting role as a scarred and bearded villain, while allowing a little more contact than the other performers, is not immune to pretending when a fist swings by in the air that he somehow got knocked down by it. Additionally, on both the monophonic Mandarin track and the monophonic English track, the sound effects are sometimes poorly timed, so that the clangs of swords and other impacts happen well before or well after you see them occur.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks good, with fresh hues and accurate fleshtones, but the cinematography itself is prone to go way out of focus at times. Most of the film looks sharp, but there are passages where you're tempted to rub your eyes. The catchy title music, incidentally, appears to have been lifted from Michel Legrand's score for **Picasso Summer**. Also featured are two trailers; a radio commercial; a passable collection of memorabilia in still frame; a 2-minute alternate English language opening credit sequence; a wonderful 13-minute interview with Mao from 2022 about her career and how amazing it was to have fans so long after she retired; an interview with Mao's son, Thomas King, sharing marvelous stories about the gradual recognition of who she was (she also appeared in **Enter the Dragon**), discussing the proliferation of Hong Kong film collector's editions, and even supplying the address of her restaurant in Bayside, Queens, if you're interested in checking it out (most of the talk, in fact, is about the restaurant); and three commentary tracks.

On one commentary, Asian film expert Frank Djeng and martial arts actor Bobby Samuels talk enthusiastically about the film and about working with Hung, although they also point out how the production limitations can affect the final output. "Notice how his face got bright all of a sudden. Probably, they were shooting and, 'Oh wait, the lights!' Remember, they couldn't see what they were shooting. They have to see the next day when they run the dailies. There's no monitor, nothing. In fact, in the fight scene before, you see that the shot was all blurry because of the light. They didn't have enough light. But they wouldn't know that, because they couldn't see it."

Although it is listed second, it is better to start with the commentary featuring Djeng and Asian industry expert Michael Worth. They talk more directly about the film's production background, the careers of the cast and the crew, and other contextual details. Worth also laments a lost innocence. "As a kid, I would go specifically for the technique of the fighting or the adventure or the thrill of being pumped up by a fight scene, and as I've gotten older and I work in the film business now, it's like I'm constantly looking at the filmmaking process."

The third commentary, from feminist genre expert Samm Deighan, is the best. She focuses primarily on the cast but also pays a great deal of attention to the shifting trends in the genre that occurred after the upstart Golden Harvest began making inroads in the market. "A lot of these films have this very clear, black-and-white morality, where you have this hero, who is studying some form of martial arts, sometimes multiple forms, out of this altruistic sense to do the right thing, be the right person, and there's this sense of honor and morality really tied to the study of martial arts that is often explicitly stated. Here it's definitely not." And she talks a great deal about Mao, her career, and her character in the film. "Not that she's trying to change the way that people think about women, but there just seems to be this deeply ingrained sense that she is strong and powerful, and has more advanced kung-fu than any of these idiots that she's fighting against."

We appreciate that the makers of *Lady Whirlwind* wanted to do something a little different with their narrative, but it was especially refreshing as a consequence to turn to the companion film in the set, *Hapkido*, from 1972. The film has a straightforward and common narrative, one seemingly

shared by the majority of martial arts films in existence, where bad guys are bullying a town and the good guys face off with them in bits and pieces so that by the end, only a couple of the strongest fighters survive on either side (specifically, the Chinese heroes, who have been training in Korea, try to open up a Korean martial arts school, something the head of the Japanese martial arts school does not take kindly towards). Mao and Hung are two of the primary heroes. Shot on soundstages, the picture is in excellent condition, with bright, clean colors and a crisp focus. The fights are better staged than those in *Lady Whirlwind*, so that you don't see the cheats unless you really look for them. Instead, the athletics are vigorous and inventive. Running 97 minutes, the film is well paced and continually engaging. The performances are fine, and everything about the film works the way it is supposed to work.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The cinematography is more controlled than it was on *Lady Whirlwind*, and as a consequence, the picture quality is more consistently pleasing, which adds to the film's pleasures. It looks terrific. The musical score is lifted from all over the place, but most notably uses a punchy electronic piece from Emerson Lake & Palmer. There are three trailers; a TV commercial; a passable collection of memorabilia in still frame; three alternate opening credit sequences each running about 2 minutes including one with the title, *Lady Kung Fu*; a terrific newsreel-style 7-minute featurette from the Seventies promoting the 'hapkido' fighting style, including demonstrations from Mao and Hung; a 17-minute interview with co-star Carter Wong about his life; a very nice 9-minute interview with Hung and Yuen Biao; a very good 17-minute interview with Mao about making movies and being in martial arts; and an equally engaging later interview with Mao from 2022 running 18 minutes specifically about the film and her experiences during the time it was being shot.

There are also two more commentaries with Djeng and the partners he had in the two talks on *Lady Whirlwind*, Samuels and Worth. Once again, the Worth commentary is a little more informative, although between the two, you get a pretty decent idea of the film's background (a very young Jackie Chan can be seen in some of the fight scenes; Hung was also doing the fight choreography) and the context of the film's production (while the Japanese made great movie villains, Chinese filmmakers loved Japanese movies). Djeng is forthcoming when it comes to the quality of the fight scenes ("This is what I call 'assembly line' fighting. People just waiting. They don't go at him at the same time.") and despite some repetition between the two talks, fans will find both of them to be rewarding.

Sixties Bliss

One of those modern bawdy British stageplays—all wide-eyed innuendo and snickering, but no actual sex—**The Bliss of Mrs. Blossom**, was turned into a messy 1968 Paramount motion picture directed by Joseph McGrath. The story, about a woman whose lover lives in her attic unbeknownst to her husband, is told erratically, with British comedians in the bit parts (John Cleese even shows up in a scene) making broad, insinuating expressions amid harried misunderstandings. This is the sort of film that gets off on presenting a montage of London's nude statues. But, it was made in 1968, if not at the height of Carnaby Street, then still during its peak. The production designs and costumes are not credited to Peter Max, but it sure looks like whoever was responsible for them was looking over his shoulder or gazing at photos of his creations. Paramount and Kino Lorber Incorporated have released the film on Blu-ray as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC#738329261894, \$25), and the transfer is gorgeous. Despite the occasional stray speckle, the hues are so bright and colorful, and so crisply Sixties-ish, that the BD becomes a wayback machine to the time when color had no restraint. The fleshtones are also lovely, and none more so than the tender complexion of the film's star, Shirley MacLaine, who somehow manages not to embarrass herself even as all the men around her do so in spades. James Booth plays her lover, who dons disguises when he comes downstairs so that the husband never catches on. Richard Attenborough is the distracted husband, the owner of a brasserie factory who regularly feels up his models with a straight face and the supposed wink-wink purpose of checking out the manufacturing process. The film is tiresomely absurd and ridiculous, but its chromatic display, from beginning to end, more than makes up for its worst offenses.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The monophonic sound is fine and the musical score, by Riz Ortolani, is sometimes delightful, even though it succumbs at other times to British marches and such. Jack Jones sings one song on the soundtrack, and The New Vaudeville Band (remember them, oh bo dio doe?) plays a number during a party sequence. There are optional English subtitles.

Although he should ban the word, 'would,' from his vocabulary when referencing something that actually occurred, film historian Daniel Kremer supplies a great commentary track, celebrating not so much the film, but the film's representation of the glorious excesses of the Sixties. Describing the movie as, 'organized anarchy,' he not only compares the movie to British films from the same era, but also looks at what Paramount was doing in England at the time and how their films differentiated from those of other Hollywood companies conducting business across the Atlantic. He goes over the careers and talents of the cast ("The lovely Ms. MacLaine we're seeing here, at the height of her appeal, of her physical appeal, she never looked better, in my opinion, than in this picture.") and the crew, particularly, once again, during the heightened use of color and devil-may-care décor of the Sixties. "I think the filmmakers of the Sixties charted a path that we can follow without being pigeonholed as being kitsch or as being camp or being affected, and when I see a film like **The Bliss of Mrs. Blossom**, and how so fearless it is with just throwing colors and filters and refraction and this and that and everything. I think it has everything but the kitchen sink, but it is definitely grist for the mill."

Agnès Varda, everything all at once

A year can be spent casually sitting down with each film in a spare moment, or a marathon can be conducted where the films are played with minimal interruption between them, but either way you approach it, your life, your attitude and your spirit will be enhanced immeasurably by The Criterion Collection's magnificent, if daunting, fifteen-platter Blu-ray set, **The Complete Films of Agnès Varda** (UPC#715515247917, \$250). From her first feature made in 1954 to her final retrospective documentary compiled the year that she died in 2019, here career shadowed that of French cinema as a whole, from the birth of the New Wave to the Twenty-First Century. She even married another French filmmaker and followed him to Hollywood for a spell. And yet, for all the men who have surrounded her, worked as technicians on her sets, sought funding to produce her projects or even collaborated in their staging, her films may have retained a feminine perspective, but they are most uniquely the creation of a singular human being, one who has an instinctive eye not just for composition, but for juxtaposition, and one who is in touch with her heart and eternally cognizant of the hearts of those around her.

The collection weighs three pounds and is presented in a very nice, oversized but easily accessible album. Including the supplements, there are 57 hours of programming. The films are organized thematically, bunched in groups where Varda's filmmaking was similar, not so much in subject matter but in cinematic approach, from shorts or outright documentaries to narrative films and films that blended fiction and nonfiction. Hence, the one big Blu-ray set is actually subdivided into a number of smaller sets, each presented on a separate platter. Many of the films on those platters have individual supplementary sections, even when they share a platter with other films. Collectors should be forewarned that a few of the programs contain male and female child and adolescent nudity. All of the films are in French with optional English subtitles except where noted.

Neither an appetizer nor a prolog, but an overture, the first platter, a set entitled *Agnès Forever*, offers up a film Varda put together at the end of her life, in 2019, looking over her art and her career, *Varda by Agnès*. Just as orchestras can play overtures separate from the works those overtures introduce, so, too, does the film stand magnificently by itself. Yes, it gets you chomping at the bit to dive into the rest of the collection, but it is even stronger in its presentation of Varda as a human being and artist. From her incisive creativity to her warm humor and palpable empathy, a viewer's own soul grows immensely just from watching the 120-minute program. It begins as a presentation of several lectures or talks that Varda gave about her career in front of audiences, although individual interviews are also slipped in as the program, jumping back and forth chronologically, looks not only at her movies, but at her still photographs, her travels and, in a nice lengthy sequence that would otherwise slip into ephemera, her multi-media exhibitions. We'll probably be saying this a lot, but the film is so profound in its charting of over a half-century of creativity and life experiences, that it alone is worth the price of the set.

The aspect ratios in the film clips vary appropriately, and the transfers are crisp and accurate. The DTS sound is stereophonic when appropriate, with very smooth tones. In the supplement for the film, there are a pair of very nice intercut 2020 interviews with Varda's two grown children, Rosalie Varda (who did costumes on some of her films, and later helped in the production of Varda's projects) and Mathieu Demy (who appeared in some of her films as a child and became an actor as an adult), running 17 minutes. A wonderful 39-minute reminiscence about Varda at a live event includes more insightful comments by her two children, but also some marvelous stories by Martin Scorsese (she liked to pop up unannounced while he was working on films) and film organizer Tom Luddy, who squired her around San Francisco in the early days. Also featured in the film's supplement is a very cute 30-second short from 2019 of Varda talking to her cat on a windowsill, entitled *A Chat with Nini*; an 8-minute 2019 compilation of the credit sequences from her films, *Agnès Varda's Credit Sequences*, made by Alex Vuillaume-Tylski, which draws interesting generalities about her art, her attention to thresholds and her respect for her collaborators; a 2-minute split screen montage without narration of Varda's depictions of the human body; and a trailer, as well as a trailer for a Varda retrospective.

Also offered on the platter is an exquisite and magical 11-minute surreal short from 2015, *Les 3 Boutons*, about an adolescent milkmaid who loses three buttons on her chemise during the course of her day as she explores the countryside and walks through town. Shot on video, it is vivid proof that even in her nineties, Varda had not lost her touch for entrancing a viewer with fantasy, humor and delight. Indeed, there is such a confidence, particularly in the fantasy transitions, that she seems at the height of her skill.

The second platter is entitled *Early Varda* and features her first feature film, *La Pointe Courte*, as well as two of her earliest shorts. As she mentions in the 2-minute introductions that accompany each short, she got her start with a feature, and then advanced to shorts, rather than vice-versa. *La Pointe Courte*, from 1955, is flawed, but still utterly captivating and highly repeatable. Filmed in the small fishing village of the title, in the south of France, there are two interwoven narratives, each shot with a different approach. Ironically, one narrative, which presents a neorealism-style portrait of the townspeople attempting to hide illegal fishing activities from the authorities (such as harvesting shellfish from toxic inlets), is flawless, despite its splashdash use of non-professional actors and quasi-documentary camerawork. It is the other narrative, about a former resident, played by a very young Philippe Noiret, and his wife, played by Silvia Monfort, who come to the town on vacation from Paris to repair their faltering relationship, that doesn't play quite as well. Varda films their story in an ultra-modernist fashion, with camera setups that are often so stylized they bring undo attention to themselves. There is also a moment when Monfort clambers up a rock

though as if she had done it several times before the camera started rolling, even though it is supposedly the first time she has ever been there. These mistakes and misjudgments are minor, however, and not only do they not interfere with the play of the 81-minute film as a whole, the back-and-forth shift in tone and focus is, on the whole, a masterstroke, preventing the film from succumbing to the distancing and dreariness that often infected Italian neorealist productions.

Featured in a supplement for the film is a lovely 9-minute introduction from 2012 that Varda shot in which she shows how she would work on the screenplay every morning, although it also turns into an interview with filmmaker Mathieu Amalric, talking about his first film, and a subsequent discussion about first films in general, as well as more about the creation of *La Pointe Courte*. Also included is a great 2007 interview with Varda running 16 minutes describing the film's gestation and production details, including a wonderful story about how she persuaded Alain Resnais to be her editor (the film was so innovative it could be considered the beginning of the French New Wave); a good 1964 French TV interview with Varda running 9 minutes in which she talks about her early films and how the world is changing (while there are many interviews in the collection with the elder Varda, interviews with the younger Varda are less ubiquitous); and a 4-minute appreciation of the film. By the time all of it is done, you're dying to go back and watch the movie again.

It was probably the wonderful depiction of the town's local fishing skiff 'jousting' tournament that got Varda the gig making the 1958 travelog shorts. *Ô Saisons Ô Châteaux*, running 22 minutes, is a look at the various and surprisingly diverse châteaux in the Loire Valley, while *Du Côté de la Côte*, running 28 minutes, promotes the sights and attractions of the Cote d'Azur. Both demonstrate a superb feel for composition and editing, and provide a wealth of information along with steadily compelling images, but both also, in subtle but unmistakable ways, undercut the positive promotional messages the films were intended to convey. In *Ô Saisons Ô Châteaux*, while having Parisian fashion models prance about the barricades, it is revealed that the mansions no longer serve as homes for anyone but the caretakers. In *Du Côté de la Côte*, the beaches are crowded and the sunbathers are, well, something less than chic. From a cineaste perspective, the pieces are terrific. From a sales perspective, not so much. We reviewed a copy of *Du Côté de la Côte*, which had no subtitled, in the Warner collection, **Short IR International Release**, in Mar 01.

All three programs are in a squared full screen format and all three have fresh restorations. The black-and-white *La Pointe Courte* has a line through one shot and a little grain at times, but is otherwise sharp, clean and finely detailed. The color shorts are vivid and hues are dazzling. The monophonic sound on all three programs is clear.

The third platter, *Around Paris*, contains the 1958 documentary short that truly represented Varda's learning experiment, *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, a compilation of footage she shot at a fruit and vegetable market in Paris in what was at the time a rundown area of the city, combined with a portrait of a pregnant woman and a few other odds and ends. Running 17 minutes, Varda experiments with rhyming images, movement and pacing, thematic transitions and other aspects of cinema, while formulating methods of political and spiritual expression through documentary imagery.

The full screen black-and-white picture is in good shape and the monophonic sound is fine. Georges Delerue provided a very nice musical score (he also wrote the somewhat less interesting music on *Du Côté de la Côte*). There is a 2-minute introduction by Varda.

Varda's big breakthrough came with her second feature, the 1962 **Cleo from 5 to 7**, about a young pop singer, played by Corinne Marchand, spending the afternoon roaming around Paris as she awaits the results of a test for cancer. The 90-minute film is again a mix of staged dramatic scenes as Marchand's character visits different friends, documentary images of her on the streets and semi-documentary scenes of her in various shops, interacting with the salespeople. In the final act, she meets a young soldier played by Antoine Bourseiller, and they get to know one another as they wait for her doctor's appointment and his train back to his outfit. The film was huge in its day simply because nobody had really looked at a woman's life and worries the way Varda was presenting them. While such films are more common now, however, the film retains an air of freshness and discovery, aided as much as anything else by the idea that every time the heroine turns the corner on a street, a new image of Paris comes into view.

Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the film's opening credits, placed over a scene in which the heroine consults a tarot card reader, is in color, while the film itself is in black and white. Needless to say, the color segment looks gorgeous, while the black-and-white images are sharp and spotless. The monophonic sound is clear. We reviewed Criterion's original DVD, which has weaker colors in the opening sequence and weaker contrasts throughout, in Jul 00. Included in the film's supplement is a wonderful 36-minute collection of retrospective interviews from 2005 overseen by Varda, who gathers the individuals together in groups and then talks to them about their memories and experiences with the film; a 2-minute clip of Madonna and Varda in a joint 1993 interview about the film (Madonna was trying to get it remade); a 9-minute 2005 then-and-now look at the path the heroine takes through Paris with a map charting the course in the upper left corner; an excellent, engaging 10-minute analysis of Michel Legrand's musical score; and a trailer.

At one point in **Cleo from 5 to 7**, Marchand's character and a friend visit the friend's boyfriend in a projection room and watch a modern comical silent film short the projectionist is running. The short, which stars Jean-Luc Godard and Anna Karina (with Eddie Constantine and others) plays in its entirety within the film, but is also presented separately on the platter with full opening and closing credits under the title, *Les Fiancés du Pont MacDonald*.

Running 5 minutes, it is about a man who puts on sunglasses and thinks his girlfriend has been killed and is being taken away in a hearse, only to take them off and see she has simply fallen down and an ambulance has arrived to help her. In the 3-minute introduction, Varda says that, along with picking up the spirit of **Cleo from 5 to 7** as a bridge between sequences, she also wanted to capture Godard on film without his dark glasses on, because she thinks he has beautiful eyes. Criterion had also included the short on their release of Godard's **Band of Outsiders** (Apr 03).

Along with a cute 3-minute piece featuring Isabelle Adjani from 1984 promoting the Cinémathèque française (which has pronounced stairwells to its exhibition and screening halls) with a montage of famous movie staircase scenes (and Varda's half-minute introduction), *T'as de Beaux Escaliers, Tu Sais*, there is an excellent 1984 documentary, *Les Dites Caritatives*, about a particular type of decorative statue found on Parisian buildings, which give the impression that the figures are assisting in holding up a portion of a building's weight. Varda discovered that many of the decorations were done during the 1860s, and so she includes the poetry of Charles Baudelaire from the era on the narration for the 12-minute piece, thus drawing a parallel between the often nude statues and Baudelaire's erotic musings. In addition to Varda's minute-long introduction, there is also a very nice 2-minute piece in the supplement, from 2005, which quite excitedly adds a few more statues that Varda had not come across during her original compilation.

With an even more specific geography, the fourth platter, *Rue Daguerre*, contains Varda's wonderful 1975 documentary, *Daguerreotypes*. In a recent review of **The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant** (Feb 23), we marveled at the skills of filmmaker Rainer Fassbinder, who could make a captivating film in a single apartment with a handful of characters. Well, Varda had the equivalent skills, and was able to create an engrossing documentary simply about the shops on the Parisian street where she lived. Perhaps (or not—she doesn't really say) she chose to live there in the first place because the street in the 14th Arrondissement is called Rue Daguerre, after the promoter of the famous portrait camera, but the whole project was understandably irresistible to her, and she made an irresistible film. In 1975 the street was filled with working class shops, some still holding on against the tides of progress (a store run by an elderly couple—indeed, the wife has dementia—sells shop-made perfumes and sewing supplies), while others, such as the butcher, the baker and the hair stylist, have a more assured presence. Running 79 minutes, she lingers in several different shops, and uses footage where the patrons ignored the camera and sound equipment. She also interviews the shop owners and travels up and down the street to watch them open in the morning, observe the flow of traffic during the day and watch them shut down at night. A magic act performed in a café for pretty much the whole neighborhood allows her to energize the second half of the film, but even if she had not used the material, the program is fascinating from start to finish. The full screen picture can be grainy at times because of the available lighting in the shots, but otherwise the colors are fresh and the monophonic sound is clear.

Naturally, we immediately ran to Google Street View to see what the place looks like now (the traffic is a lot different and the shops are substantially gentrified), but Varda beat us to it, returning in 2005 for a 22-minute piece included in the supplement, shot on video with stereo sound, in which she interviews some of the people who are still around and others who have replaced the former business owners. She also reveals that not all of the inhabitants of the street were happy with her film and how unsophisticated it made them look, although Varda clearly made the earlier film with nothing but love. Additionally, the supplement has an 8-minute piece Varda shot in 2005 following up on a specific bakery and its advancement to the Twenty-first Century (including a sequence she shot in the bakery for another film and an addendum about a nearby accordion shop); a good 6-minute piece Varda made in 2005 about daguerreotypes; and a nice 3-minute look at an evening of street music (with lots of adorable little kids dancing) Varda shot in 2005.

Also featured on the fourth platter is a cute 2003 short that Varda made right round the corner from Rue Daguerre, *Le Lion Volatile*, about a lunchtime romance between a young woman working as an apprentice to a local fortune teller and a young man taking tickets at the Catacombes de Paris exhibition. Running 11 minutes (and with Varda's 2-minute introduction), it is a sweet little movie that uses the romance and some business with a prominent traffic circle statue of a lion to let Varda showcase her favorite neighborhood haunts.

The fifth platter starts to get to the heart of Varda's filmmaking mastery with two feature-length movies and a short that address a potent topic, *Married Life*.

If there is a kind of film that we cannot stand, it is when a male director makes a movie about a guy who has two gals who love him and it all sort of works out. It is clearly the director's dramatization of a personal fantasy (we're looking at you, Ingmar Bergman), which he imposes upon his viewers under the assumption that they will share or envy his acumen when it comes to juggling the female heart. Thus we were blown away (we'd say "blown out of the water," but that is too close to a spoiler) by Varda's stunning 1965 feature, *Le Bonheur*, which, for those of you not up on high school French, means, "happiness." It has precisely that plot we described above, but while the characters on the screen are all la-la-la at the end, viewers will unanimously hope that they boil in oil. If you are interested in unintentional omens, when Varda shot the film's opening in 1963, in which two parents and their two young children are relaxing peacefully in an overgrown field, and then driving home afterwards in a small van, nobody at the time and in France knew or cared about either Lyme disease or car seats, but that is all you can think about as you watch the scene, i.e., something is wrong. Jean-Claude Drouot plays a happily married carpenter, and in an inspired, semi-documentary touch that enabled Varda to manipulate the two kids, who have a lot of screen time, Drouot's wife in real life (who wasn't a professional actress), Claire Drouot (credited in the film's opening titles as just, "sa femme Claire," under his name), plays the wife, and their

two children play the children. He then meets a pretty postal worker played by Marie-France Boyer, who is sort of a younger version of his wife, and they start seeing one another on the side. The film runs 81 minutes and never blinks, but in playing it out with a straight, seemingly objective viewpoint from beginning to end, Varda harnesses an incredibly deep and devastating emotional power, which is subsequently unleashed in the viewer because it is never unleashed in the film.

Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the color cinematography is reasonably solid, although it is not as glossy as, say, the opening credit sequence in **Cleo from 5 to 7**. The image is never grainy, and fleshtones are accurate, but Varda's approach, showing the lives of the characters amid unscripted surroundings, has a documentary tone to it, and sometimes lighting to match. The monophonic sound features overbearing performances of seemingly lighthearted Wolfgang Mozart pieces, another disturbing omen that you can't quite put your finger on and may even dismiss as being aged recordings and not deliberately jacked up a touch from what they should be. The supplement includes a great 4-minute collection of black-and-white behind-the-scenes footage with Varda; Varda's 3-minute 1998 introduction to the film; a nice 6-minute retrospective interview with the two actresses from 2006; an interesting and occasionally irritating 15-minute discussion of the film's themes and dynamics; a 6-minute documentary Varda made in 2006 asking people on the street and in other interesting locales for their definitions of 'happiness'; a cute 2-minute collection of interviews with people whose last name is 'Bonheur,' interspersed with quotations about happiness; a 10-minute piece from 2006 with Jean-Claude Drouot, who has put on a few pounds, returning to the film's locations (in one amusing segment he sits with a group of aged women who remember him quite clearly when everyone was much younger); and a trailer.

First, even Varda's 'bad' films are better than the good films of many directors. Second, it is precisely packaging like **The Complete Films of Agnès Varda** that can allow a fan or a viewer to savor a movie such as her 1966 *Les Créatures* without feeling shortchanged or ripped off. Indeed, it feels more like a discovery than a waste of time (and talent). **Belle de Jour's** Catherine Deneuve and Michel Piccoli portray a married couple living in an island community that can only be accessed by car at low tide. He has a large scar on his forehead, and she is mute, using a notepad and pen to communicate. Piccoli's character is a writer, and just exactly what of the movie is the fantasy of his science-fiction story and what is the reality of the island's inhabitants is not entirely discernible. It is the abstract silliness of the story he is writing, however, that will frustrate viewers although, as we indicated, we have labored through similar efforts, even by prominent French directors (this time we're looking at you, Claude Chabrol), that are far more inelegant and uninteresting. Within the tale, Piccoli's character plays a game very much like the board game in **Star Wars**, with an effective use of special effects presenting the townspeople as pawns that he and an evil mastermind take turns moving about. The goal of the 'hero' character is to save the relationships when the characters share a square (the entire film has a prominent and playfully applied checkerboard design motif) and the goal of the villain is to wreck the relationships. During these moments of decision, the film's black-and-white picture is tinted in red. Running 94 minutes, the structure of the film allows Varda to present miniature portraits of these different relationships, and that part of the film isn't bad at all. It even rhymes, in some ways, with *Daguerreotypes*, and would make quite an interesting and unique computer game. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the film's star power (the performances, at least, are decent) and its consistently appealing cinematography raise expectations to an unreachable level, but if a viewer approaches the film with curiosity, patience and an accepting imagination, the time watching it will feel well spent.

The picture is not meticulously restored and still has an occasional line or scratch, although the image on the whole has well-defined contrasts and is fairly captivating, particularly since the aspect ratio stands in contrast to most of the other films in the collection. The monophonic sound is okay. There is a 3-minute introduction by Varda (she says it might have played better if she'd made it nastier) and a terrific 19-minute collection of black-and-white behind-the-scenes footage, mostly about scoring the film, which, somehow, composer Pierre Barbaud did with the aid of a primitive computer (Varda says that if the music is really good, sometimes you have to cut the film to suit it, rather than vice-versa).

Filling out the platter is Varda's sweet 21-minute full screen black-and-white documentary short from 1966, *Elsa la Rose*, about a pair of elderly writers who were together for several decades and still very much in love with one another. Piccoli reads their love poetry in voiceover as the film supplies a bit of their backstory, has them re-enact how they first met and includes a workable overview of their history and careers, with an emphasis upon the persistence of their affections. It comes with a 2-minute Varda introduction.

The sixth platter, *In California*, compiles films that Varda shot when she tagged along with her husband, Jacques Demy, after Hollywood summoned him. Her first was a 1968 full screen color documentary visit with a relative—her father's cousin, born in Greece and immigrated to France as a child before moving to America on the eve of WWII—who lived in Sausalito on a houseboat. Made at the height of Haight-Ashbury, the film, *Uncle Yanco*, running 20 minutes, is as good a view as you will find of what life was like back then for artists who were more content with living than with advancing. Jovial, and as avuncular to the hippies who flocked to his abode as he is to Varda when she comes to visit, he is a natural subject for a film profile (Henry Miller once wrote about him, too) and worth the attention. The film is a cute effort that probably means more to Varda herself than to other viewers, but thanks to her skills and choices, the moments she preserved in time have a viable cultural resonance. There is both an English language track and a French track, but since they speak French most of the time, the original French track is preferable, and there is a minute-long Varda introduction.

Agnès Varda (Continued)

In 1968, Varda ran up to Oakland to cover the protests over the trial of Huey Newton and came away with a very interesting 28-minute documentary compiled in 1970, *Black Panthers*, that looks at what the organization wanted to accomplish and how media savvy it was. From a contemporary perspective, where relations between African-Americans and the police remain a point of great controversy, the film serves as a reminder of how long the problems have been going on and the need to find creative solutions, since the militarization of the black community turned out not to be a long-lasting solution. In any case, the film includes thoughtful interviews with Newton, Stokely Carmichael and other figures, and is a solidly objective view of what was quite a radical place and time. The entire program is in English and there is a minute-long Varda introduction ("I think this short film bears witness to one brief, specific moment in the tormented history of Black Americans.")

Both shorts are in full screen format and have very fresh colors, compromised only by the makeshift conditions under which some sequences were shot.

It takes a half hour of fine tuning to get onto Varda's wavelength for the 1969 Hollywood satire, *Lions Love (...and Lies)*, but what seems at first like a tiresome reworking of Sixties street theater gradually, carefully and purposefully becomes a highly amusing spoof about the presumptions of the Free Love era and the eager attempts by filmmakers to cash in on the trend. It is also Varda's answer to **Contempt**. *Hair* creators Jerome Ragni and James Rado (who were at the time the epitome of hippies) star with Andy Warhol 'superstar' Viva, all three playing themselves. They hang out in a Hollywood Hills pad the week that Robert Kennedy was shot (as was Warhol, that same week). Shirley Clarke, who is so much playing a director like Varda that sometimes Varda steps in for her, intends to make the film that we are now watching. But mostly, everybody just hangs out in the digs, drinking Dr. Pepper, standing around or swimming in the pool in various states of dress and undress, and otherwise being themselves. Viva has a wonderful sense of comic timing in her dialog delivery, and quickly becomes the flame around which all of the movie's moths flutter (Constantine shows up for one quick scene and tries to make out with her). Running 112 minutes, the film proceeds from one segment to the next, as Varda slips in documentary footage about Hollywood, a fairly complete timeline of the Kennedy assassination, and a non-documentary look at how producers, agents and studio heads cut deals. Clarke even acknowledges at one point that they are essentially making a New York movie in Hollywood, which is not so much a conflict of ideals as an oil-and-water failure to synergize. Since Varda's eye for visual dynamism and her instinctive sense of pace remain sharp, the film never bogs down in the improvisational way that it constantly feels like it is going to bog down. Nevertheless, it is only as the film goes along for a while that you gradually understand how much of a put-on it is, and that is when the film's riotously funny highpoint occurs—when Ragni, Rado and Viva have to babysit a group of toddlers and youngsters in the apartment. The two groups are not just from opposite worlds, but opposite universes, and mixing them together is as brilliant as it is cringe worthy—when one baby doesn't want his bottle any more, Rado's character mixes it with Dr. Pepper, which the baby then downs enthusiastically. A little while later, two of the older kids are really smoking a joint, and it doesn't surprise you in the least.

The film is in English. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The colors look terrific, but the film is lit more for a natural presence than to make the hues really 'pop.' The monophonic sound is fine, and while beyond a single line of dialog, nothing is lifted directly from *Hair*, there are smidgens of Rado's other music now and then. The film is accompanied by a 2-minute introduction from Varda and a wonderful 9-minute interview with Viva and Varda from 1970, on a bed.

A basic, excellent 82-minute documentary about the murals of Los Angeles, Varda's 1981 *Mur Murs* goes all over the city, interviewing artists, patrons and passers by. The combination of the visual strength of the murals and the economic, social and spiritual weight of their narrative content with Varda's acumen as a documentarian is more than enough to create a highly satisfying motion picture. The full screen image is often a bit grainy, but colors are reasonably fresh. The monophonic film is mostly in French and English, but there is some Spanish as well. There is also an alternate, all-English track, and there are optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer, there is an interesting 2012 profile of two French street artists, running 5 minutes.

A captivating fiction film running 65 minutes, Varda's 1981 *Documenteur* would qualify as a family film, except that there are passages of substantial nudity and eroticism. Sabine Mamou plays a single mother trying to make a living in Los Angeles, and Varda's young son, Mathieu Demy, in a fairly elaborate performance, plays the child. Although she works (and even picks up some extra cash by fictionally providing voiceover narration to *Mur Murs*), Mamou's character has difficulty finding a living space that she can afford, and the arc of the narrative is basically the portrait of the pair's life as they adjust to the place she finally locates. The film does position the two actors amid real people and settings, as well as having non-professionals responding to them with a line or two. Overall, the film is impressive on many levels, capturing the reality of life on a limited income, exploring the pain and difficulties felt by both mother and child in a single parent environment, and bringing the viewer into a memorable examination of the lives of two people. It also demonstrates Varda's seemingly effortless ability to create compelling cinema just from what is around her. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the image is very grainy most of the time, but colors seem to be fresh, all things considered. The monophonic sound is okay. One audio track offers the original mix of French and English dialog, while a second is entirely English, all with optional English subtitling.

Although *Documenteur* appears on the sixth platter and was made several years later, it also provides an ideal segue into the seventh platter, *Her Body, Herself*, which opens with Varda's most successful and commercial film, and perhaps her masterpiece, **One Sings, The Other Doesn't**, from 1977. The film follows the lives of two women from the end of their teenage years to the beginnings of middle age. Running 121 minutes, it is not about their friendship per se, but Varda uses the friendship very effectively to intercut what are essentially two separate stories together, with the added narrative device of voiceover updates as each one writes to the other. Valérie Mairesse is a singer who travels with a street band (making the film a quasi-road movie). She meets an Iranian economist, has a child with him in Iran, and then works out a negotiation so she can return to France when she decides the gender divisions in Iran are too restrictive. Thérèse Liotard is an unwed mother with two children, who eventually finishes her education and starts a women's clinic. The topic of having babies and having abortions is also laced through the film from the beginning to the end, not just with the experiences of the heroines, but also with those they interact with. Not only does Liotard's character counsel pregnant women, but Mairesse's songs (the film is also, in a distinct if low key manner, a musical) are about pregnancy and womanhood. The topic is presented even-handedly and compassionately, even though its message is clearly that all decisions in the matter rest with the women themselves. Hence, while the film entertains with its vaguely soap opera tales of female struggle, heartache and hope, it also constructs—quite specifically by not jamming any issue down a viewer's throat—a very powerful message. This makes the film's last shot, which is ostensibly of Liotard's character's now teenage daughter, but as is noted with some prominence in the subsequent credit scroll, played by Varda's own teenage daughter, an exceptionally moving and inspirational personification of hope.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The color transfer is fresh and consistently sharp, although the cinematography is relaxed and easygoing. Fleshtones are accurate and grain is minimal. The sound is centered, but is worth a mild amplification to draw out the songs. Along with a trailer, there is an outstanding, full-fledged profile of Varda (they call her, "The Mother of the New Wave") from 1977 running 47 minutes and shot partly on the set of the film. Capturing the atmosphere on the set, the program is uplifting and fascinating, while also showing how confident and accomplished Varda can be regardless of what she chooses to tackle. Not only is she held up as an example of a 'female filmmaker,' the interviews with her get to the very heart of what is the same and what is different between the two genders when it comes to directing (she points out that male filmmakers rarely let their young children hang out on their sets). It also goes over her previous films, her philosophies on filmmaking, why she prefers Los Angeles to New York, and many other marvelous topics.

Going off topic in the supplement, a 1970 telefilm that Varda created has been included, *Nausicaa*, about the dictatorship in Greece that was instigated in the late Sixties (see **Z**) and Greek refugees living in France. Before the program could be broadcast, all copies of it mysteriously disappeared, but fortunately, there was a workprint stashed in Belgium, and that is what is presented. The colors look surprisingly good, but the source material is loaded with scratches, speckles, empty leader and so forth. Nevertheless, running 98 minutes, it is not just coherent, but fairly satisfying. Varda mixes straightforward documentary material, including background reports (it was not one of America's shining efforts in the support of democracy) and interviews with refugees, with a jokey satirical stage allegory about the takeover, and a fictionalized romantic drama in which two Parisian co-eds studying Ancient Greece accept an older male refugee as a temporary roommate and one falls for him. As was revealed in *Uncle Yanco*, Varda has Greek roots, so not only is her interest in the topic personal and heartfelt, but her compulsion to weave vaguely autobiographical material into the program gives it a compelling complexity that lends depth and even metaphor to its informational details.

As for the remainder of the platter, there are two briefer pieces, *Réponse de Femmes* from 1975 and *Plaisir D'Amour en Iran* from 1977. Playing like a music video but without music, Varda lifted footage from the Iranian sequence in **One Sings, The Other Doesn't** and then embellished it with further displays of semi-erotic Iranian architecture in the 6-minute *Plaisir D'Amour en Iran*. It does make a nice little epilog. The 8-minute *Réponse de Femmes* was intended as part of a larger anthology by multiple directors about womanhood. Varda's segment is a wonderful tease, loaded with nudity and practically daring viewers to complain about the sensibilities of her images or the practical dissertation that accompanies the images, about the conflict between how women see themselves and how the world sees them. Each piece comes with a minute-long Varda introduction.

The eighth platter, *No Shelter*, opens with Varda's 1985 story that we originally reviewed twice on LD, in Sep 88 and then in May 98, **Vagabond**, retracing through a dramatization of an apparently true story the last days of a young drifter, played by Sandrine Bonnaire, who is found dead in a ditch in the film's opening moments. Set in the countryside during the fall and winter, Bonnaire's character settles in one place for a bit, becomes irritated and moves on to another place, usually living in fields or abandoned buildings. Since her aimless movements are confined to one general area, she does cross paths with some characters more than once, which then advances the development of those characters. Like many of Varda's films, the plot is actually composed of separate vignettes, camouflaged by a strong narrative premise and an airy or relaxed mise en scène. Bonnaire's performance and the indelible nature of her impenetrable character (she does laugh once in a while, but often bristles when confronted with responsibility) makes the 105-minute film a memorable experience, but in Varda's hands she also becomes an intriguing representation of female independence and its challenges.

Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the image transfer is excellent. The picture is by no means glossy or anything like that, but compared to the previous versions we have seen (we also reviewed a DVD in Jul 00), the image is never actually grainy, no matter how often it teeters on becoming so. Colors are steady and accurate, and the image is free of wear. The monophonic sound is solid and there is an exceptional abstract jazz musical score by Varda's most often used composer, Joanna Bruzdowicz, that underscores the heroine's isolation.

The supplement contains a 41-minute retrospective piece by Varda from 2003 that is as good as one of her films, beginning with a captivating montage of the landscapes where the picture was shot and then going on to explore the film's creation in a thoughtful and enlightening manner. In one amazing sequence, she compares, in slow motion, a shot that she did use with an alternate take that she didn't use to explain why the one was preferable to the other. Also featured is a 4-minute piece about an elderly non-professional actress who appears in the film (the source material is severely damaged, but that adds to the uniqueness of the segment); a 12-minute interview with Bruzdowicz (it was her first gig with Varda, who wanted music to match the many dolly shots conveying the heroine's wandering) that also replays all of the film's music sequences; a 9-minute segment about author Nathalie Sarraute, whose writing was one of the inspirations for the film, particularly one of the subplots (most of the segment is an audio-only interview from 1986 with Varda and Sarraute); a good 15-minute analysis of the film's narrative structure and Varda's innovative technique; and a trailer.

The companion film on the platter is one of Varda's weakest efforts, a 28-minute program from 1984 entitled *7 P., Cuis., S. De B.... (A Saiser)*, depicting a decent sized house in the countryside that is being shown to the viewer by an unseen realtor. Ghosts from the building's previous use as a nursing home appear, and glimpses of a narrative featuring the most previous owners, a doctor's family that resided there for several decades, forms the bulk of the film. As Varda explains in her 2-minute introduction, she was taking advantage of an abstract art display in the empty house, and she incorporated its surrealism into her images, so the humor of those moments are worthwhile, but on the whole, the piece does not have the lasting spiritual resonance that her other shorts manage to convey. There is a lot going on, but it is superficial and deliberately showy, without an underlying thematic sensibility.

The ninth platter, *Jane B.*, is dedicated to a project Varda had with the expatriate actress, Jane Birkin. The first part of that project, which was the highpoint of the collection so far as we are concerned, is a 1988 profile of Birkin, *Jane B. par Agnès V.*, which is unlike any other feature-length profile of a movie star ever made. Not even close. It combines interviews with skits of all sorts, from the simple re-creations of famous paintings with Birkin filling in sometimes more than one character in the painting, to an elaborate and yet subdued reproduction of a Laurel & Hardy pie fight, with Birkin as Laurel. Delivering in 98 minutes a wonderfully comprehensive sense of what Birkin is like and what her skills are, while also exploring the presumptions of Western culture, society's expectations of femininity (there is quite a bit of nudity), the nature of filmmaking and Varda's own concepts of directing, the film is joyous and toy-like.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Although some of the footage is very grainy, the color transfer is excellent and other footage is smooth. The monophonic sound is terrific (among other things, Birkin sings a number at a live concert—her first). The supplement has a trailer, a very nice 2-minute introduction from Varda, and a great 16-minute retrospective interview with Birkin from 2020.

Ostensibly, *Jane B. par Agnès V.* could be considered a promotional film, because at one point, Birkin presents Varda with a story she has written, and subsequently, several scenes from a movie they made from that story are integrated with the rest of the feature. That story, *Kung-Fu Master!* (named for a video game, the film has nothing to do with martial arts), which Varda also made in 1988, is deliberately presented as the second option on the platter and should be approached as such, because to watch it first would be to give too much weight to its presence in the documentary. Although not as starkly dispiriting as *Vagabond* or *Le Bonheur*, the film, running 79 minutes, does have a melancholy air. Birkin portrays a variation of herself, with her real-life daughter, Charlotte Gainsbourg, playing her young teenage daughter, and Mathieu Demy, now also a young teenager, playing the daughter's schoolmate. Birkin's character becomes obsessed with Demy's character and eventually arranges an idyllic vacation getaway with him. Fortunately, Varda, who is never restrained when it comes to appropriate eroticism in a narrative, does not indulge in that perspective here, focusing instead on the opaque breakdown that Birkin's character goes through because of how her life has unfolded. While the film might call to mind a gender-reversed version of *Stealing Beauty* and the intriguing moral differences that would entail, it is actually closer to the tabloid stories of female high school teachers who have gotten into trouble with their male students. Nevertheless, Birkin's performance is so good as to be unsettling, and the film demonstrates the true strengths of Varda's artistry, balancing an interesting drama with an exceptional feel of psychological and cultural environments.

The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, and the picture is in good shape, with decent colors. The monophonic sound is okay. In her 2-minute introduction, Varda explains that the film was shot in the middle of shooting the other movie. Also featured is an engaging 1988 Swiss TV interview with Varda and Birkin about the films, running 18 minutes.

Another remarkable aspect to the collection is how each platter

transitions to the next. Jacques Demy died of AIDS in 1990, and coped with it for several years before that point, so while it has no relevance to the direct plot of *Kung-fu Master*, Varda emphasizes the dawning awareness of the disease as part of the film's social atmosphere, not just with background news reports and urban fliers, but with the conversational dialog, as well (it is offered up as a new danger the teenagers face when contemplating sex). And then, the tenth platter, *Jacques Demy*, is dedicated to him and his films (we reviewed a group of them in Aug 14). Its first film is Varda's outstanding 1991 story of Demy's formative years, *Jacquot de Nantes*. Mixing black-and-white with color, the 120-minute feature is an adorable and moving dramatization of Demy's childhood (including the Occupation) and teenage years (and his accumulating fascination with the performance arts), interspersed with loving snapshots of Demy himself during his final days. Clips from Demy's films are also slipped in to accentuate his childhood experiences (he grew up next to a garage), and other marvelous Easter Eggs pass without attention, for fans. If you enjoyed *The Fablemans*, this is even better.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and the transfer is spotless. The black-and-white footage has sharp contrasts and rich blacks, and the color footage is bright and glossy. Along with a trailer, the supplement has a wonderful, delicate 17-minute interview with Varda from 2008 about the film (Demy was present during much of the shoot and did not pass away until after the filming was completed); and a cute 7-minute piece from 2008 in which Varda's crewmembers talk about how they became attracted to filmmaking as a profession.

We reviewed Criterion's release of Demy's divine *The Young Girls of Rochefort* in the Aug 14 piece. Varda's 1993 *The Young Girls Turn 25 Years* runs 67 minutes and was inspired by Rochefort's own (and smart marketing) twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the film, which brought out Deneuve, Legrand and many others. Varda, who was also on hand to do behind-the-scenes footage for the original film and had special access during the reunion to everyone involved, created both an incisive retrospective (during the shot of a counterbalance on a camera crane: "Behind those light-hearted scenes, there was, as in most films, the counterweight of technique: the crane, dollies, tracks...") and a vigorous tribute to the film and the filmmakers. It is also a touching memorial not only to Demy, but to Deneuve's sister and co-star, Françoise Dorléac. The film is presented in full screen format, but clips from the movie are windowboxed to retain their original aspect ratio. The clips look gorgeous. The archival footage and the fresh footage Varda shot varies in levels of grain depending upon the lighting, but otherwise looks fine. Varda's 2-minute introduction is also nice and informative. The program was also part of Criterion's *Young Girls of Rochefort* release.

And so, buried in the depths of a complete collection of films by one filmmaker is its heart, a collection of films about another filmmaker. With Varda's comprehensive 1995 overview of Demy's entire career, *The World of Jacques Demy*, Varda's own dexterity at organization and execution is on display, of course, but so is an intriguing exercise in comparative analysis—how the creations of two separate filmmakers are informed or affected by the unseen (Varda never mentions and even denies any sort of collaboration with Demy, although obviously they monitored and aided each other's works intensely) emotions, preferences and acumen of one another. In any case, the film, running 91 minutes, includes retrospective interviews with many of the artists who worked with Demy, as well as tantalizing clips from all of his major films and knowledgeable explanations of what motivated him to create each movie, along with the challenges he faced along the way. You'll also be humming *I Will Wait for You* for days afterwards. We reviewed a release of the film on DVD by Wellspring, as well as its inclusion in the collection of Demy films by Criterion, in Aug 14. The transfer appears similar to Criterion's previous presentation. There is a minute-long introduction by Varda.

The geekier you are about movies, the more you will enjoy Varda's whimsical 1995 tribute to the history of cinema, *One Hundred and One Nights*, the sole offering on the eleventh platter, *Simon Cinema*. Unlike Godard's impenetrable sleep fest, *Histories du Cinéma* (Feb 12), Varda's celebration of cinema's centenary is loaded with movie lore and enthusiasm for the arcane. It is the ultimate guilty pleasure of Varda's oeuvre, even though viewers not steeped in the traditions of American and European motion pictures (references to films from other cultures are almost nil) will just think it is all a silly mess. Piccoli plays a character who is a hundred years old and whose name is 'Simon Cinéma.' He seems to be motion pictures incarnate, that is when he is not playing Michel Piccoli. A student, played by Julie Gayet, has been hired to visit him every day and share her film knowledge with him, while other visitors, such as Marcello Mastroianni and Gérard Depardieu, also hang out with him off and on. The film has innumerable cameo appearances, some lasting just a second or two, while others develop into complete skits, such as a segment with Alain Delon. If you just watched *Vagabond* a few hours before, then the brief appearance of Bonnaire, in costume, will generate an appropriate chuckle. The mansion where Piccoli's character is living is cluttered to the brim with film memorabilia, which also changes depending upon the topic being discussed or what happened in the previous skit. When a man in a dirty overcoat steals a bicycle from the estate, the next shot has in its background the appropriate Italian poster. Running 104 minutes, there is a vague sort of plot (the students conspire to present Piccoli's character with a long lost great-grandson), but the film is primarily comprised of scores of blackout sketches and gags celebrating the movies in every way imaginable (with the subtitled, the manner in which the dialog is laden with movie titles becomes readily noticeable), and if you do love movies, then every moment in the film is another delight.

Agnès Varda (Continued)

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Colors are bright and the image is sharp. Following the enthusiasms, many different but familiar snatches of theme music from all sorts of different films pop up on the soundtrack now and then. In the supplement, there is a 9-minute featurette (Varda admits retrospectively that the film was a horrendous bomb, but everybody, and especially Piccoli, had a great time making it), an irresistible 11-minute promotional collection of clips and behind-the-scenes footage with the stars, and a trailer. The supplement also contains a thoughtful 20-minute discussion with Varda about the shorter films that are featured throughout the collection, and then four even briefer pieces: Preliminary color footage from two projects that subsequently fell through—4 minutes of silent footage for *La Mélangite* from 1960, on pink salt flats that includes one indelible image of the shadow of a couple embracing; and 5 minutes of silent and sound footage for *Christmas Carole* from 1966 with three friends (including a young Depardieu) palling around Paris during the holidays—and two remarkable commercials for women's products (panty hose, Tupperware), each running a minute, using exceptionally complex and impressive long takes with multiple players to grab and hold a viewer's attention by not cutting away. They would make an especially effective counterpoint to today's frantic ads.

From the leftover snippets of unmade movies, the collection proceeds to the twelfth platter, *Gleaners*, which contains two excellent documentaries Varda made about recycling, the 2000 *The Gleaners and I* and the 2002 *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later*. Running 82 minutes *The Gleaners and I* is the primary film, which begins with a portrait (literally, one painted by Jean-François Millet) of peasants gathering leftover wheat after a harvest, and then proceeds, in Varda's typical (but masterful) episodic fashion to explore the history of the word, "gleaning," to look at modern situations where people gather produce either missed by automated harvesters or rejected afterwards, to visit a group of people very similar to those profiled in the Varda-like *Nomadland* (Jun 21), to examine people who turn discarded items into art, to contemplate the problems with homeless people scavenging through garbage, and to present profiles of the scavengers themselves. By 2000, Varda finally had her own little video camera, and had great fun making close-ups of grapevines and otherwise shooting what she pleased on the fly, so that while she had a standard (although minimal) crew for most of her adventures in the film, she was also able to contribute to it in ways she could not do so previously. Presented in a squared, full screen format, the image is fresh and sharp. The stereo sound is mostly centered and is clear. In the supplement, there is a minute-long observation of a few gleaned objects, and an exhilarating 24-minute look at (mostly) Nineteenth Century paintings of gleaners entitled *The Gleaners Museum*, which Varda made in 2002, deconstructing the individual paintings, filling in the backgrounds of the artists and the history of each painting, and searching for common themes among the compositions.

The reaction to the film was generally enthusiastic and that inspired Varda to follow up with *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later*, talking to several of the previous interviewees about the fame they had gained with the dissemination of the first film or what has happened in their lives, and examining what else has changed in the interim. Running 63 minutes, the film also elaborates on some of the situations depicted in the first film and includes a lengthy self-examination by Varda about her goals for the films. The full screen image is bright and crisp, and the stereo sound is clear. Holding to the theme of recycling, the supplement has a rushed 3-minute presentation of the original *Gleaners and I* (intended as a reminder before the presentation of the sequel), along with a 4-minute piece from 2002 Varda made about a cat that dominates her office (she had to jerry-rig a protective device because cat hair was getting into her computer), *Tribute to Zougou*.

Before and after Varda became a filmmaker, she was a photographer. She is not an exceptional photographer. Her compositional sense seems better suited for the dynamism of cinematography than the absolutism of still photography, but there is an inevitability to her proficiency and competency in the latter, given how closely entwined the two disciplines can be. Throughout her life, she retained an understandable passion for photography that naturally bled into her some of film projects, and the most prominent instances of this are highlighted on the thirteenth platter, *Visual Artist*.

The first film, Varda's penultimate feature, *Faces Places*, produced by Cohen Media, is a charming 2017 documentary of a trip the elderly Varda took through the countryside with the young photographer known as JR, placing enormous blowups of JR's photos on the sides of buildings, barns, factories and so on. Running 93 minutes, the film is a road movie of sorts, presenting the different projects they staged along the way, while recording the relationship that grows between them as they proceed. While there is about a half-century age difference between them, they seem to be in synch far more often than they are not, and the film's sense of discovery and creative passion is invigorating. As Varda's films advanced, they became more documentary-oriented, but they also became more and more about Varda, as well. In that the movies are still highly entertaining, she seems to have developed a sort of unique, autobiographical genre, so that regardless of the topic, she is the star.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and the color transfer, from the video cameras, is crisp and flawless. The stereo sound is also a welcome embellishment from the mostly monaural tracks of the previous programs, and there is one fantastic moment in a bell tower that you will want to play at the loudest volume you dare. A 4-minute deleted sequence that would not have fit properly into the film but retains the same appeal as the rest of the movie is offered in the supplement, along with a trailer, a comprehensive 47-minute interview with Varda and JR about making the film, and a jovial 4-

minute piece about soundtrack composer Matthieu Chedid.

Jumping way back to 1963, Varda was not allowed to bring her motion picture cameras to Cuba but she did bring a still camera, and subsequently created a 29-minute montage of those black-and-white snapshots, *Salut Les Cubains*. It is the sort of thing that even amateurs could piece together today on a computer, but when it was made, it represented an exhausting and monumental editing effort. Varda provides some narration and other narration is read by Piccoli, along with snippets of Fidel Castro speeches and terrific Cuban music. The film promotes a positive attitude toward the Cuban Revolution and its achievements that might well be scorned today, but manages to convey a fair sense of atmosphere both in the countryside and in Havana. As an introduction to Cuba in its day, it was a viable effort. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the image is clean, although it still looks its age because of how the photos were transferred. There is an interesting 2-minute introduction where Varda admits that the general perspective of Cuba now differs from the perspective of 1962.

In 1982, Varda made a 22-minute documentary about one of her photographs from the Fifties, *Ulysse*, which depicts the back of a man, a little boy and a dead goat on a beach, exploring the photo's history (including new interviews with the man and the boy), soliciting the opinions of others about the photo (including a group of children) and explaining why it still fascinates her. And yeah, she works a goat into the program, as well. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the transfer is crisp and accurate. There is a minute-long introduction by Varda. Also featured in the supplement, Varda deconstructs fourteen photographs by other photographers in a 2007 compilation, *Une Minute Pour Une Image*, discussing the history of each photo and pointing out thematic or design intricacies that are not readily apparent, laced occasionally with autobiographical insights. The piece runs 27 minutes (each talk is preceded by the same opening credits) and is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1.

A straightforward 42-minute documentary from 2004 about a photography show featuring more than a thousand photographs of people with teddy bears, *Ydessa, Les Ours et Etc....*, is an ideal project for Varda, who analyzes a number of the individual photos (sometimes the bears are readily apparent, sometimes they are not), but also profiles the fascinating curator of the show, Ydessa Hendeles, and records reactions from the show's visitors. Presented in full screen format, the color transfer is solid and the stereo sound has a pleasant dimensionality. An English track is offered in addition to the French track. There is a good 2-minute introduction by Varda, explaining why she was drawn to the show.

Varda's propensity for vignettes comes to the fore on the fourteenth platter, *Here and There*, which presents a wonderful five-episode documentary series Varda made for TV in 2011, *Agnès De Ci De Là Varda*. Each episode runs 47 minutes, and there is no 'Play All' option. In a totally peripatetic fashion, Varda visits art exhibits, art installations and art festivals, or when invited to a prominent city for a film event honoring her, she makes use of her spare time on the trip (and the supplied drivers and translators) to visit prominent museums, art galleries, craft shops and so on. The eclectic material she gathers is jammed into each episode, as she describes and depicts what she finds, while she interviews artists, curators and observers, and offers her own opinions and interpretations. Each episode is constantly stimulating and quite delightful, from Varda dressing as a potato for an exhibition in Venice to Jean-Louis Trintignant reading poetry on an open-air stage in Sète, France, with the sea behind him. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The DTS sound provides a satisfying dimensionality to the musical score and occasional environmental noises.

Coming full circle, the fifteenth and final platter, *Beaches*, highlights another autobiography that Varda put together in 2008, *The Beaches of Agnès*. Running 113 minutes, the film goes into more detail about her childhood, her photography and her relationship with Demy, but it also revisits, well, pretty much everything in the collection. By this point, some of the material has appeared previously more than a half-dozen times, but it is nevertheless a thoughtful and touching introspective look at the life of an artist who has arrived at her endgame, even though she's still moving a few pieces around. With clips from many of her films included, the aspect ratio of the presentation changes from one shot to the next. The color transfer is solid and the 5.1-channel sound has a periodic dimensionality.

The remainder of the platter is all presented as a supplement to *Beaches of Agnès*, including a trailer; a very good 15-minute analysis of the film and of Varda's career in making quasi-documentaries (by examining Varda's self-portraits over the years, the segment reveals what someone watching the entire collection would readily recognize—that while her hair color has periodically changed, the style of her haircut remained remarkably consistent across the many decades of her life); a really good 10-minute featurette directed by Varda on the acrobats who appear in one of the film's sequences; and another nice 9-minute piece about another sequence, where Varda turned the street outside of her office in Paris into a beach for the film.

In 2005, Varda shot interviews with fourteen widows living on the island where she originally filmed *Les Créatures*, and while those interviews were intended for a museum exhibit where each one is heard separately, they have also been combined in an excellent 2006 telefilm running 72 minutes, *Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier*. Some have been widowed for many decades, others for just a few months. Some of their husbands died from disease, some from fishing accidents (a common danger for the island's inhabitants) and one was even a suicide. They talk about loneliness, their

coping mechanisms, and their lives, with the presence of Varda herself, also a widow, reinforcing the sense of both love and grief that filters through all of the interviews. It is a simple, but very moving documentary.

In Varda's later years, while maintaining a bond with filmmaking, she was also drawn to creating multi-media projects and art installations, and while they are presented extensively in other supplements and films throughout the collection, there is a specific 67-minute segment devoted to them to close out everything. The program manages to include most of the footage that appeared in her multi-media displays, from a profile of Alexander Calder to a piece on the people in France who protected Jews during the War. But there are also montages of her own photography showings, and visits to shacks she constructed with physical strips of films. For a display in Beijing, she took Western statues and replaced the heads with Chinese dragons and masks. It is a terrific program that ties it all together quite nicely while highlighting not only Varda's creativity and imagination, but her irrepressible wit.

Criterion previously released a four-platter DVD set, **4 by Agnès Varda** (UPC#715515025928, \$100), with *Le Pointe Courte*, **Cleo from 5 to 7**, *Le Bonheur* and **Vagabond**. In comparison to the presentations on **Complete Films**, although the source material appears to be the same, the images are softer and more prone to smearing, and the sound is weaker. The supplement for *Le Pointe Courte* contains the 1964 and 2007 interviews with Varda. The supplement for **Cleo from 5 to 7** has the trailer, *L'Opéra Mouffe*, the separate *Les Fiancés du Pont MacDonald*, the 36-minute collection of retrospective interviews, the piece with Varda and Madonna, and the retracing of the heroine's path through Paris. Unique to the DVD is a brief still-frame segment of paintings by Hans Balding Grien that Varda displays and discusses in other supplements. *Le Bonheur*, which has blander colors, comes with everything that is in the **Complete Films** supplement for the film, plus *Du Côté de la Côte*. The colors on **Vagabond** are more in line with the presentation in **Complete Films**. The supplement contains everything featured in the collection, except the 15-minute analysis of the film.

Criterion released an *Eclipse Series 43* DVD collection, **Agnès Varda in California** (UPC#715515153713, \$45). The three platters contain the five films presented on the *In California* platter in **Complete Films**. The language options are replicated, but no special features are included. The picture quality on *Uncle Yanco*, *Black Panthers*, *Mur Murs* and *Lions Love (...And Lies)*, while a little softer, is reasonably similar to the **Complete Films** presentations. The picture transfer on *Documenteur* is much blander than the BD presentation, making the latter look very nice despite the grain. On all five, the monophonic sound has a somewhat weaker presence.

Criterion's individual BD release of **One Sings, The Other Doesn't** (UPC#715515230315, \$40) looks and sounds identical to the presentation in **Complete Films**. The profile of Varda and the two short films, *Réponse de Femmes* and *Plaisir D'Amour en Iran*, are included, along with the trailer. The only fresh offering is a delightful jacket insert replicating the film's pressbook, which includes, among other things, the sheet music for one of the songs that Mairesse sings.

The Beaches of Agnès was originally released on Blu-ray by Cinema Guild (UPC#881164000187). While the presentation looks fine, Criterion's image transfer is a touch smoother, and a little sharper. The sound is the same on both presentations, but the chapter encoding is different. The two shorter featurettes about making the trapeze sequence and the office beach sequence are included, along with *Le Lion Volatile*, a trailer and a two-screen text biography and filmography of Varda.

Finally, Cohen Media Group's Blu-ray release of **Faces Places** (UPC#741952841999, \$26) has slightly different chapter markers than Criterion, the colors are not quite as intense, and Criterion's image is a little sharper. The DTS sound is indistinguishable on the two discs (Cohen also offers a 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track and Criterion does not; the bells sound fantastic on both). All of the special features specifically accompanying the film on the Criterion release are present on the Cohen release, but Criterion missed something—there is one additional and quite delightful 3-minute piece about shooting the 'eye chart' sequence in film that appears only on the Cohen release, which will surely be enough for fans to consider adding the disc to their collection.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: Catching up on the gaps in their library, The Criterion Collection is releasing **Pasolini 101**, a collection of nine Pier Paolo Pasolini's films from the Sixties, **Accatone**, **Mamma Roma**, **Love Meetings**, **The Gospel According to Matthew**, **The Hawks and the Sparrows**, **Oedipus Rex**, **Teorema**, **Porcile** and **Madea**. Included with the films will be two shorts made by Pasolini for anthology films: *La ricotta* (1963) and *The Sequence of the Paper Flower* (1969); two documentaries made by Pasolini during his travels; a program on Pasolini's visual style as told through his personal writing, narrated by Tilda Swinton and writer Rachel Kushner; commentaries on **Accatone** and **Teorema**; documentaries on Pasolini's life and career featuring archival interviews with the director and his close collaborators; an episode from 1966 of the French television program *Cinéastes de notre temps*; and interviews with filmmakers and scholars. Jean Renoir's **The Rules of the Game** is being issued in 4K format with an introduction to the film by Renoir; a commentary written by film scholar Alexander Sesonske and read by Peter Bogdanovich; a comparison of the film's two endings; a selected-scene analysis by Renoir historian Chris

Faulkner; excerpts from a 1966 French television program by Jacques Rivette; Part one of *Jean Renoir*, a two-part 1993 documentary by film critic David Thompson; a video essay about the film's production, release, and 1959 reconstruction; an interview with film critic Olivier Curchod; an interview from a 1965 episode of the French television series *Les écrans de la ville* with Jean Gaborit and Jacques Durand; and interviews with set designer Max Douy, Renoir's son, Alain, and actor Mila Parély. A 4K presentation of Terry Gilliam's **Time Bandits** will have a commentary featuring Gilliam, Michael Palin, John Cleese, David Warner, and Craig Warnock; a program on the creation of the film's various historical periods and fantasy worlds, narrated by film writer David Morgan and featuring production designer Milly Burns and costume designer James Acheson; a conversation between Gilliam and film scholar Peter von Bagh, recorded at the 1998 Midnight Sun Film Festival; an appearance by Shelley Duvall on Tom Snyder's *Tomorrow* show from 1981; and a gallery of rare photographs from the set. Joseph Losey's **The Servant** will have a program on Losey by film critic Imogen Sara Smith; a rare interview from 1976 with Losey by critic Michel Ciment; an interview from 1996 with Harold Pinter; and interviews with Dirk Bogarde, James Fox, Sarah Miles, and Wendy Craig. Barry Jenkins' debut feature, **Medicine for Melancholy**, will come with a new commentary featuring Jenkins; a commentary from 2008 featuring Jenkins, producers Justin Barber and Cherie Sautler, and editor Nat Sanders; a program about the making of the film, featuring Sanders and actor Wyatt Cenac; camera test footage; and a blooper reel.

CLOSED OUT OF TOWN: The following titles have been removed from our *Coming Attractions* listing—*Nana's Boys*, *Eddie and Abbie and Ellie's Dead Aunt*, *In the Blood*, *Cranked Up*, *Hex*, *Nutcracker and the Magic Flute*, *Basic Lessons for Babies & Toddlers V.5 Colors & Shapes, Dawn, Of the Devil*, and *The Killing Tree*

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray—I Spill Your Guts, Mind Melters 6, Mind Melters 7, Slash-Mates 2 Second Semester (Acid Bath); Glow The Story of the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling (AGFA); Left Behind Rise of the Antichrist (Amcomri); Christmas Bloody Christmas, Doc Martin Season 10, Glorious (AMD); An Awesome Action Movie, Bloodless The Path to Democracy, Born to Be Human, Drive All Night, Frantic, In Her City, Make Up, Ride Hard Live Free, Scared Crazy, The Witness, The Yellow Wallpaper (Bayview); 21st Century Demon Hunter Season 1 (Burning Bulb); Hitman Hart Wrestling with Shadows (Canadian); Bio Zombie, Curucu Beast of the Amazon, The Devonville Terror, Flesh and Fantasy, Goodbye 20th Century, Wild Reeds (CAV); Crazy People, Critical Condition, Dr. Giggle, NFL Super Bowl LVIII Champions Kansas City Chiefs, Razorback, Sorry Wrong Number, Streets of Fire (Cinedigm); The Long Wait (ClassicFlix); Chilly Scenes of Winter, Inland Empire, Last Hurrah for Chivalry (Criterion); Thrust! (Culture Shock); The Son of the Stars (Deaf Crocodile); Amigo (Dekalog); TT 2022 Isle of Man 2022 Official Review (Duke); The Residents Triple Trouble (Eternal Flame); Who Done It The Clue Documentary (ETR); For the Plasma (Factory 25); The Man without a World (Film Movement); The Bug Life and Times of the People's Car (Firewater); The Seven from Texas (First Line); Giantess Attack vs. Mecha Fembot, Puppet Master Doktor Death (Full Moon); Party Girl (Fun City); Satan Lives! The Rise of the Illuminati Hotties (Gatorblade); Head Rush (Glasshouse); Texas Chainsaw Mascara (Grimoire); The Apology (Image); Asphalt, The Belle Starr Story, Border River, Counselor at Law, The Crusades, Double Crossbones, Flaming Ears, If I Had a Million, Let It Be Morning, Little Miss Marker, Love Letters, Lucky Jordan, Mairget Season 4, Making Mr. Right, The Man without a World, No Man Is an Island, Search for Beauty, Secret Admirer, Secret Defense, Sumurun, Thanks for the Memory, Tomahawk, The Wildcat (Kino); Alice Darling, Plane, Seriously Red, The Walking Dead Season 11, The Whale (Lionsgate); Dawson's Creek Complete Series, The Fan, Fear, Problem Child (Mill Creek); All Quiet on the Western Front (MPI); Leonor Will Never Die (Music Box); Anything Goes, Attack Force Z, Black Sunday, Blood on Méliès' Moon, The Devil's Game, The Five Days, The Grand Tour, The House That Screamed, Knockabout, Tonight or Never (MVD); Babylon, Dan Brown's The Lost Symbol, Drillbit Taylor, Rick and Morty Season 6, The Running Man, Star Trek Strange New Worlds Season 1 (Paramount); Fill 'er Up with Super (Radiance); Lonesome (Random); Last Rites, The Legend of Fong Sai Yuk 1 & 2, Who'll Stop the Rain, Wild Orchid 2 Blue Movie Blue (Ronin); Deep Undead (Saturn's Core); A Man Called Otto, Missing, The Son (Sony); The Collective Movie (Trialside); Frank Borzage 1922 Silents Back Pay / The Valley of Silent Men (Undercranked); Chucky Season 2, The Locksmith, M3GAN (Universal); American Rapstar (Utopia); Lullaby (Vertical); Calling Nurse Meow, Skarecrow A Curse (VIPCo); Batman The Doom That Came to Gotham, Camille, Confessions of a Nazi Spy, Doctor Who William Hartnell Collection, Duck Dodgers Complete Series, Flamingo Road, I'll Cry Tomorrow, Neptune's Daughter, The Prince and the Showgirl, Women Talking (Warner); Code of the Assassins, Legend of Gatotkaca (Well Go); Foxhole (Yellow Veil)

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently issued in 4K format—Sidekicks (CAV); Dead Silence, The Exorcist III, Wanted (Cinedigm); The Long Wait (ClassicFlix); Mildred Pierce (Criterion); Rawhead Rex (Kino); Plane (Lionsgate); All Quiet on the Western Front (MPI); The Five Days (MVD); Babylon, The Core, Dragonslayer, G.I. Joe Retaliation, Red Eye (Paramount); Air Force One, The Mask of Zorro (Sony); The Prince of Egypt, Puss in Boots The Last Wish (Universal); Batman The Doom That Came to Gotham, Frozen Planet II (Warner)

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Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time:
 Adalynn (Summer Hill)*
 Aftertaste 2 (AMD)
 Alice, Darling (Lionsgate)
 All Creatures Great and Small Season 3 (Paramount)
 All Eyes Off Me (Film Movement)
 All Our Fears (Arizatal)
 All Quiet on the Western Front (MFI)
 The Amazing Race Season 34 (Paramount)
 Anything Goes (MVD)
 The Apology (Image)
 Arthur Malediction (MPI)
 As Good As Dead (Samuel Goldwyn)*
 Asylum (DigicomTV)*
 Babylon (Paramount)
 A Bag of Marbles (Film Movement)
 The Beast Below (Digital)
 Bloody Mary Returns (ITN)
 Blue's Big City Adventure (Paramount)
 Breathing Happy (Cinedigm)*
 Broadcast (VMI)
 Brothers in Blues (Freestyle)*
 Buriesque Heart of the Whitter Tribe (Kino)
 Business and Money NFTs The Movie (Wownow)
 Business and Money What Is a Cryptocurrency Wallet (Wownow)
 Chicken House (Glasshouse)*
 Christmas Bloody Christmas (AMD)
 Chuckey Season 2 (Universal)
 Clear Lake WI (Stonecutter)*
 Code of the Assassins (Well Go)
 The Collective Movie (Trialside)*
 Dawson's Creek Complete Collection (Mill Creek)
 Dear Mr. Brody (Kino)
 Doc Martin Season 10 (AMD)
 Don't Talk to Strangers (Glasshouse)*
 Drilbit Taylor (Paramount)
 Easter Bunny Massacre The Bloody Trail (ITN)
 Ed Gein The Musical (SRS)
 Effel (Breaking Glass)
 End of Loyalty (Uncork'd)
 Escape through Africa (VMI)
 Fatal Influence (Glasshouse)*
 Father Stu Reborn (Sony)
 Femalen Starlight Saga (Full Moon)
 Fisherman's Friend One and All (Samuel Goldwyn)*
 The Five Days (MVD)
 5000 Blankets (Sony)
 For Walker and Josiah (Buffalo 8)*
 Forever in My Heart (Cinedigm)
 Frank Borzage 1922 Silents Back Pay / The Valley of Silent Men (Undercranked)*
 Frozen Planet II (Warner)
 Gaslit Complete Series (Universal)
 Giantess Attack vs. Mecha Fembot (Full

(Moon)
 Glorious (AMD)
 Goliath (Film Movement)
 Goliath (Twin 27)
 The Good Fight Final Season (Paramount)
 The Grand Tour (MVD)
 Hank and Jolene (Random)*
 The Haunted Palace (Cheesy Flicks)
 Head Rush (Glasshouse)
 The Hunters Seasons 1 & 2 (Kino)
 I Got a Monster (Kino)
 I Spill Your Guts (Acid Bath)*
 In From the Side (Strand)
 Jim Gaffigan Stand-Up Spotlight (Mill Creek)
 John & Jen (MVD)
 John Monteleone The Chisels Are Calling (Street Singer)*
 Joyride (Magnolia)
 Lamy's Poem (Freestyle)*
 A Land of Books (Dreamscape)
 Last Chance Charlene (Freestyle)*
 Latin Lover (Dreamscape)
 Left Behind Rise of the Antichrist (Amcomn)
 Legacy Peak (Sony)
 The Legend of Gatotkaca (Well Go)
 The Legend of the 81-Port Games (Vision)*
 Leonard Will Never Die (Music Box)
 Let It Be Morning (Kino)
 The Letter A Message for Our Earth (Paramount)
 The Lincoln Project (Paramount)*
 The Locksmith (Universal)
 Lonesome (Dark Star)
 Lonesome (Random)*
 The Long Wait (Classic Fix)
 The Love Destination Courses Breathe (Dreamscape)
 The Love Destination Courses Relaxation for Sleep (Dreamscape)
 The Love Destination Courses Self-Compassion Meditations (Dreamscape)
 The Love Destination Courses Sleep Meditations (Dreamscape)
 The Love Destination Courses Understanding Attachment Styles (Dreamscape)
 Lullaby (Vertical)
 A Man Called Otto (Sony)
 Mantra (Indican)
 Merry Go Round/Wedding of a Lifetime (Cinedigm)
 Mask of the Devil (Level 33)*
 McEneer (Paramount)*
 M3GAN (Universal)
 Mike Birbiglia Stand-Up Spotlight (Mill Creek)
 Mind Melters 6 (Acid Bath)*
 Mind Melters 7 (Acid Bath)*
 Missing (Sony)*
 The Mojo Manifesto The Life and Times of Mojo Nixon (Freestyle)*
 Moonrise (Sony)
 NFL Super Bowl LVII Champions Kansas City Chiefs (Cinedigm)
 Night of the Zodiac

(Cinedigm)
 When Men Were Men (Indican)
 Wild Reeds (CAV)
 Women Talking (Warner)
 WWE Elimination Chamber 2023 (Cinedigm)
 *Did not appear on last month's Coming Attractions listing
Coming Attractions
 The following select DVD titles are promised for the near future. How many of them will show up is never a certainty. Logical subdivisions appear unmarked within each division. Titles which did not appear on last month's list are marked with an arrow (→) and are added to the bottom of subdivisions so that the longest awaited titles appear at the top within each grouping:
From AMD:
 Scare Package II Rad Chad's Revenge
 The Suspect
 Midsomer Murders Season 23
 → Blood Relatives
 → One Lane Bridge Season 3
 → Under the Vines Season 2
 → The Madam Blanc Mysteries Season 2
 → Litvinenko
 → Detectorists Complete Collection (6 platters)
From Bridgestone:
 Time Boys
From CAV:
 Amnesia
 → Beautiful Beings
From Cheesy Flicks:
 The Killing King (Realty)
 The Lazarus Syndrome Idaho Transfer
 I Wonder Who's Killing Her Now
 → Moonrunners
 → Purple Death from Outer Space
From Cinedigm:
 Groundswell
 A Splash of Love/High Flying Romance
 → To Her with Love
 → Love Fall & Order
 → Hidden Gems/Two Tickets to Paradise/Caribbean Summer
 → The Wedding Veil Expectations
 → WrestleMania Goes Hollywood
 → Super Sentai Complete Series (8 platters)
From Classicflix:
 → Life with Father
 → Hi Diddle Diddle
From Community:
 → All Wiggled Out The Musical
From Criterion:
 Triangle of Sadness
 Targets
 Petite Maman
From Dark Star:
 El Hunch
 Pouch
 → Chrissy Judy
 → Daughter
 → The Strange Case of

(animated)
 The History of Flight Let There Be Light
 Highlights Holiday Fun!
 Highlights Healthy Living!
 Highlights Imagination Station!
 Highlights Zoom Zoom!
 Highlights Rhyme Time!
 How to Live to a Hundred
 Gustavo The Shy Ghost
 The Hanukkah Magic of Nate Gadol
 The Fabled Stables
 Willa the Wisp
 How Do Bridges Not Fall Down?
 How Do Molecules Stay Together?
 How Do Ants Survive a Flood?
 How Do Seesaws Go Up and Down?
 How Did Romans Count to 100?
 How Does Soap Clean Your Hands?
 Julian Is a Mermaid
 Mambo Mucho Mambo Love in the Library
 Amy Wu and the Warm Welcome
 The Golden Acorn
 One Day University A Different America
 How Our Country Has Changed from 1969 through Today
 The Magic Sword
 Adventures in Wild California
 The Last of the Mohicans
 Daniel & Majella's B&B Roadtrip
 Walking through History with Tony Robinson Season 1
 Walking through History with Tony Robinson Season 2
 Walking through History with Tony Robinson Season 3
 Mushroom Rain
 The Boomer Revolution
 Five Fables
 The Borrowers
 Black History Aviators
 Mother Father Dear My Papi Has a Motorcycle
 Dragons Love Tacos
 Llama Unleashes the Alpacalypse
 Dolores Theasaurus
 Lulu the Lamacorn
 Juneteenth for Maizie
 Lola at the Library
 Finn's Fun Trucks V.1
From Duke:
 Formula One World Championship 2022
 The Official Review
From Earth Libraries:
 → A Life in Waves
From Film Chest:
 Mike Hammer Private Eye 1997-1998
From Film Movement:
 A Family for 1640 Days
 The Mission
 → Martin Roumagnac
 → Chess Story
From First Run:
 Scrap
From Flicker Alley:
 → Foolish Wives
From 4Digital:
 Night of the Killer Bears
From Full Moon:
 Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama 2
 Baby Oopsis 3 Burn
 Baby Burn
From Grasshopper:
 Keane
From Greenfield:
 → Swim
From High Fliers:
 Ripper's Revenge
From Image:
 A Lot of Nothing
 Kids vs. Aliens
 → Children of the Corn (remake)
From Indican:
 Carp-E Diem
 Lovers in a Dangerous Time
 → Millennium Bugs
From Indiepix:
 Pilgrimage The Voyages of Fernao Mendes Pinto
 A Handful of Water
 → Shabu
From ITN:
 Dinosaur Hotel The Next Level
 Meteor First Impact
 → Breathe
From Jinga:
 → After
From Kino:
 Filmmakers for the Prosecution/Nuremberg It's Lesson for Today
 Juniper Swim
 iMordicai
 → Scrap
 → WHAAMI! BLAM!
 Roy Lichtenstein and the Art of Appropriation
 → Arab Israeli Dialogue / Imagine Peace
 → Woodcutters of the Deep South / Working Together
 → Rowdy
 → The Forger
 → UFOs Seasons 1 & 2
 → Everything Went Fine
 → La Civil
 → Wartime Girls Season 1
 → Joy House
 → Tintin and the Mystery of the Golden Fleece/Tintin and the Blue Oranges
 → Prison Girls 3D
 → The Worst Ones
From Leda:
 Leda
From Lionsgate:
 → Righteous Thieves
 → Transfusion
 → Jesus Revolution
 → Invitation to a Murder
 → My Happy Ending
From Magnolia:
 War Trap
 → Kompromat
From Mainframe:
 Weekenders
From Mill Creek:
 Battle Kaiju V.1
 Ultraman vs. Red King
 → The Center Seat 55 Years of Star Trek
 → Becoming Evil Serial Killers Among Us
 → Heaven Sent
 → Maria Bamford Stand-Up Spotlight
From Miramax:
 Confess, Fletch
From MPI:
 → The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet Season 11
 → The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet Season 12
 → Consecration
 Other People's Children
From Full Time:
From MVD:
 Birdemic 3 Sea Eagle
 The Swiss Family Robinson
 Film Hawk
 → Le Petite Mort 2
 → Nastly Tapes
From Paramount:
 South Park Season 25
 Sanditon Season 3
 Marie Antoinette
 Soul of the Ocean
 Zara Neale Hurston Claiming a Space
 → Faster
 → Star Trek Lower Decks Season 3
 → 80 for Brady
 → The King Who Fooled Hitler
 → Dogs in the Wild
 → Star Chasers of Senegal
 → Yellowstone Season 5 V.1
 → Ancient Builders of the Amazon
 → New Eye on the Universe
 The James Webb Space Telescope
 → Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood 20 Tiger Tales
 → Friday the 13th The Series Complete Series (17 platters)
 → Bonanza Complete Series (112 platters)
 → Tom Jones
 → SEAL Team Season 6
From Random:
 → It Came upon a Midnight Clear
 → Teenage Girl Skip Day
 → Teenage Girl First Wheels
 → Apache Leap
From Samuel Goldwyn:
 → The Devil Conspiracy
From Sandpaper:
 Bulletproof Monk
 The Quiet American
 → The Fantasticists
 → I Could Go On Singing
From Sewell:
 → 100 Miles from Hell
From Sony:
 → One Fine Morning
 → Living
 → Turn Every Page
 The Adventures of Robert Caro and Robert Gottlieb
From SRS:
 Streets of Darkness
 Doll Shark
 The Hood Has Eyes
 → Puppet Shark
 → Re-Flesh
 → Be and Purge
From Strand:
 Tony Takitani
 → 99 Moons
 → Borders of Love
 → The Blue Caftan
From Synergetic:
 Junk Head
 Breakthrough the Kennedy Assassination Solved
 Oink
 → Transhumanism
 → My Missing Valentine
From 360:
 → Space Womb The Documentary
 → Dinner with Lloyd
 → 5 Pointz An Historical Journey
 → A President Speaks
From 1091:
 → Swamp Lion
From Timelife:
 Russell Simmons' Def Comedy Jam Collection (12 platters)
From Trialside:
 The Collette Movie
From Uncork'd:
 → Space Wars Quest for the Deepstar
From Universal:
 Devil's Peak
 Wicked Games
 → Marlowe
 → Fear
 → The Ritual Killer
 → Knock at the Cabin
 → Kate and Allie Complete Series (16 platters)
From Vertical:
 Maybe I Do
 → Last Sentinel
From Warner Bros.:
 Gennady Tartakovsky's Primal
 His Dark Materials Season 3
 → Hour of the Gun
 → Kings Go Forth
 → The Last of Us Season 1
 → Magic Mike's Last Dance
 → The Outlaws Season 1
 → The Venture Bros. Complete Series
From Well Go:
 Jackie Chan Action Collection (1911, Police Story
 Lockdown, Railroad Tigers, Little Big Soldier, Shaolin)
 → Fist of the Condor
From Wild Eye:
 → Stale Popcorn and Sticky Floors
From Wownow:
 Otis & Lewis Lewis and Clark Expedition
 Health Hacks Quick Tips for a Happy and Healthy Life
 Health Hacks Simple Tricks to Transform How You Feel
 Psychedelic Phenomenon
 Secret CIA Project
 Workout Hacks Quick Exercises to Burn Fat
 Weight Loss Tips
 Exercises to Help You Slim Down
 E.B. White and Charlotte's Web
 → Kid Brainiac History of Flight
 → Bonksters Gross Science The Movie
 → Dog Geniuses Season 2
 → MonkeyBrains Learn Colors
 → Little Alice's Storytime Alice in Wonderland
 → BabyLearning.TV I Love Animals
 → Little Historians Benjamin Franklin
 → Dorothy and Toto's Storytime The Road to Oz V.1
 → Dorothy and Toto's Storytime The Road to Oz V.2
 → Dino Rampage
 → Dark Magic
 → Satoshi Nakamoto
 → Technocracy
 → Amazon
From Yellow Veil:
 Living with Chucky
 → Calvaire