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PO Box 382, Glen Cove, NY 11542-0382 • (516) 594-9304 • www.DVDLaser.com

Off we go, into the wild Blu yonder

Are demo sequences still a thing? In the Eighties, they rocked home video. If you wanted to show off your set up to your friends, or if you were an electronics store manager who wanted to excite a potential customer in a demonstration room, you would put on some well crafted and aurally detailed action scene from a hit movie. Our favorites were the forest chase scene from **Return of the Jedi** and the motorcycle chase from **Terminator 2: Judgment Day**. Others, however, swore by the dogfight training sequence in **Top Gun**, and perhaps, especially in stores that wanted to sell equipment to customers, the subliminal call of patriotism added to the whoosh, whoosh, whoosh punch of the scene. In the days since, however, such sequences have become less ubiquitous, and we are not entirely sure why. Like sound mixes in general, perhaps, there is more attention paid to film as a gestalt entertainment, served up in its totality and less arresting if a portion of that entertainment is somehow pruned and placed in an individual vase. We have a friend, a professional home theater designer no less, who uses numbers from Bollywood movies instead, but we won't go there. Nevertheless, we can't think of any recent movie that has had a sequence comparable to those from the early days of home video entertainment. All of the superhero movies since then have been blasting away, for sure, but not in small, removable segments. Maybe the subway battle in the second **Spider-Man** film? But even that was a long time ago. Certainly nothing in the **Batman** chases, or even the **Iron Man** battles. Maybe something in **Transformers**, but who wants to admit watching, let alone enthusing about, **Transformers**? And the later **Star Wars** movies? Again, some of them are terrific films, but they don't have an individually removable scene that can stand on its own, showcase fantastic separation and directional effects, and basically make somebody who is watching it think that you own the most fantastic home video set up in the universe.

Until now. The 2022 sequel to **Top Gun** released on Blu-ray by Paramount, **Top Gun Maverick** (UPC#032429343338, \$32), is a throwback to the Eighties, sure, but not just as a last ditch resurrection of Tom Cruise being a boyish hotshot. It also has the perfect demo sequence, which is basically an upgraded version of the demo sequence in the first **Top Gun**, with stronger, more precise sounds, better, more vivid images and a clearer vision of what needs to be accomplished, home video-wise. It is, again, a training montage, and this time it is set to The Who's *Won't Get Fooled Again*, an appropriate tune since dogfight training is all about deceiving an aerial combatant. Now sure, if you didn't grow up wearing you're copy of The Who's *Who's Next* album down to its vinyl base, then maybe the sequence won't be quite as captivating, but we are already wearing the BD platter down to its acrylic innards.

Oh, the rest of the film? Eh. Cruise's character is called in to prepare a group of young pilots on a combat mission so similar to taking out the Death Star in **Star Wars** that nobody will be surprised when Han Solo, or a flimsy substitute, finally turns up at the last moment. The film runs 130 minutes, and the last 30 minutes (before 10 minutes of credits) of the actual mission is, **Star Wars** references aside, effectively and rousing plotted, with enough twists to keep a viewer guessing, for a while. Building up to the final act, the practice sequences are good fun, as well, that is if you can get past just playing that initial one over and over and over again. But otherwise, the movie is a pale imitation of the original when it comes to both the male bonding and the female romance parts, giving lip service to those concepts and rolling out old horses (Val Kilmer has a small but key part, Anthony Edwards scores a privileged flashback) as a substitute for deeper or more expansive explorations. That the male bonding and the female romance in the first movie wasn't all that great to begin with is probably why we were not as infatuated by the movie or even its demo sequences as others were, but that does not alter how vacuous the new attempts at emotional connections are. The performances are passable, with Miles Teller doing a decent job in the most critical role, as the son of Edwards' character. John Hamm is fun as the shortsighted commander, and Jennifer Connelly is hiding the fact that Kelly McGillis opted out to give the film a fresh generational appeal. Technology may advance, but some things in Hollywood never change.

Anyway, back to the fun part, the demo sequence is so good that even Paramount's DVD (UPC#032429343352, \$26) looks and sounds terrific, at least if you have no other discs to compare it to. Not only is the picture on the BD sharper, however, but the sound has more distinctive detail and a heftier yet smoother punch. Unfortunately, the demo segment is not marked directly with the chapter encoding, so you have to scan a bit through talking (although the dialog is positively silken thanks to the audio quality) before getting to the good stuff. The aspect ratio of the letterboxed picture changes periodically, from 2.35:1 to 1.9:1. Both the BD and the DVD have an audio track that describes the action ("The jet nears the carrier. Maverick focuses. The jet hits hard, plowing into the net, sparks flying from the nose. Men with fire extinguishers douse the plane.") and alternate French and Spanish audio tracks. The DVD has optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. The BD has an alternate Portuguese audio track, eleven subtitling options, including English, and 30 minutes of great production featurettes that show how much the cast was actually in the planes, flying around, along with a Lady Gaga music video and a Onerepublic music video.

A DVD you can't refuse

An epic ten-part telefilm that is not only loads of fun, but should be required viewing for film schools, **The Offer**, has been released in a four-platter set by Paramount (UPC#191329234716, \$26). Running a total of 540 minutes—not a moment of which is not a delight—the program dramatizes the making of the 1971 classic, **The Godfather**. Conceived by Michael Tolkin, the series is based upon a book by **Godfather** producer Albert Ruddy, and sure, it is self serving in that regard, but the story is so rich and so entertaining that you don't mind if it is stretching the truth now and then to fit everything together. Miles Teller, who has to have absorbed lessons for his own career while going along, plays Ruddy. Quite cleverly, the story of mob boss Joe Colombo, played by Giovanni Ribisi, is also woven into the tale, adding genuine suspense and excitement to the narrative, with the film facing threats not only from the corporate owners of the production company, Paramount, but also from a groundswell movement spearheaded (as a cash generator) by Colombo to improve the image of Italian-Americans. Hence, as a work of art, in addition to its celebration of Italian-American culture, the show draws rich and witty parallels between the power struggles in the mob, the corporate power struggles in the boardroom, and the more immediate power struggles in the studio offices, how all of these relate to the power struggles in **The Godfather** story itself. The show also does the same for the familial bonds within each group—yes, even the corporate boardroom.

Although many people are familiar with **The Godfather**, those who grew up with it know it by heart, and seemingly every nuance within the film is acknowledged or explored, as is, for that matter, the entire lineup of early Seventies Paramount films (none of the executives can summarize **Chinatown** in the requisite single-sentence pitch). There is delightful gossip—when Ali McGraw takes up with Steve McQueen on the set of **The Getaway**, Paramount head Robert Evans, played with a wonderful, damaged-nasal voice by Matthew Goode, goes into such a funk that the suits from the corporate headquarters try to oust him and almost take over the editing and marketing of **The Godfather**, nearly destroying it with blandness. There is adventure—the show itself goes on location in Sicily to share what happened in Sicily when the production crew went there, including the reason that the town of Corleone was not used in the film. There is film education—not only are many details of how a film is made clarified, but it is demonstrated that filmmakers often have to be constantly prepared to react to unexpected events and to break established rules when necessary. And there is humor—Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo spend as much time eating junk food as they do working on the screenplay. Basically, each episode is carried effectively by the primary tale of getting the movie to the screen, with personable characters whose lives and loves provide a valid emotional weight, but each is also loaded to the brim

Can't refuse (Continued)

with re-enactments, revelations and retrospective cultural delights—the pop tunes on the soundtrack are terrific, and the cars are great fun. As compelling as it may be to watch the program in a single sitting (many of the episodes have marvelous cliffhangers), it is even more compelling to stretch it out so that each episode can be fully savored and absorbed before proceeding to the next. And at some point, maybe before it starts, maybe halfway through, or maybe when it's over, you're going to want to watch **The Godfather** again, as well.

Each platter has a 'Play All' option, and the chapter encoding takes you reliably past the opening credits. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.4:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is slick and sharp, and the pop tunes sound super when amplified on the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack. There is an alternate audio track that describes the action ("The horse head lies on gold sheets. Bruno paints the horse's neck with a bucket of fake blood.") and optional English subtitles. Hidden in the platter menus in the individual 'Episode Selection' options are terrific featurettes on each episode, mostly about the challenges of the performances (but including some nice moments with the real Ruddy), running a total of 39 minutes, along with a few incidental deleted scenes, running a total of 6 minutes. Additionally, and more obviously accessible on the fourth platter, there is an excellent 67-minute examination of the show's background, along with a 46-minute collection of good featurettes (some of the material is duplicated from the other programs), a few of them intercutting scenes from the show with scenes from **The Godfather** and others that look at the different technical challenges the show presented, such as set designs, costumes and so on, as well as imparting the enthusiasm with which everyone embraced the project. "The thing that I think is most fascinating about the series on the whole is the hundreds of thousands of miracles it takes to make a movie."

Pilgrimage

Writers live in houses, and if their art attracts attention, their houses do, as well, after the writers have passed on. A writer's home can become a Mecca for fans, but it is not just because you can step where the writer once tread. Look out the windows of Emily Dickenson's house and you can see the hills she described in her poems. You can, at least a little bit, understand the writers by understanding the environment that greeted them every day. Hemingway's cats may have advanced a number of generations, but they are still for all intents and purposes the same bizarrely extra-toed cats, lazing around his chairs and benches. The places where painters live attract the same attention, much to the delight of the souvenir vendors in Arles. But filmmakers don't make movies in their homes. Oh, once in a while a filmmaker does, but it usually isn't the sort of filmmaker who attracts that type of attention. Films are shot on locations and those locations sometimes become gravitational, but visiting a location is simply a shared experience with other fans. Visiting a location does not enable a glimpse of a filmmaker's psyche. John Ford didn't conceive in Monument Valley, although he often gave birth there. Even filmmakers who make all of their movies, or many of their movies, in large metropolitan areas are not that specific in binding their own emotional life to the locations they choose in their hometowns. It is said that while Federico Fellini did have a house, he spent much of his time basically living at Cinecittà, but you can't really connect with him there, because the film studio was his blank canvas, not his muse. To connect with him, you're better off traveling to Rimini, hoping to absorb what is left of his childhood, again to the delight of the local souvenir vendors.

There is one prominent exception to this rule, however, and that would be Ingmar Bergman, who lived on a little Swedish island at the northern tip of a larger Swedish island in the middle of the Baltic Sea (exactly halfway between Sweden and Latvia), called Fårö. He didn't shoot every movie he made within walking or bicycling distance from his house, but he shot many great classics there. Plus, he lived in a place only people living substantially north of it would be interested in visiting for a vacation, since it is fairly dreary most of the year and its rocky beaches are still rather chilly, even in summer. But these factors have also prevented any sort of dogmatic development, and so Bergman enthusiasts can not only visit his compound, but his neighborhood, oodles of locations and the entire island, and experience it pretty much as he did. Oh, there are probably a couple of souvenir vendors, but it is doubtful they make a fulltime living off of it.

And since the compound was sort of set up for filmmaking, that is how it has been preserved, as a working retreat for filmmakers and film historians. Vicky Krieps is a young screenwriter and Tim Roth is a director who, as a couple, land a chance to spend the summer on the compound, working on screenplays in Mia Hansen-Løve's 2021 **Bergman Island** (not to be confused with Marie Nyrerød's 2006 documentary—see page 11), a Criterion Collection Blu-ray (UPC#715515281119, \$40). Roth's character also participates in screenings and film discussions, and goes on an organized tour of Bergman's local locations, while Krieps' character, when not pondering over her story treatment, wanders around the island on her own.

At first, the film is delightfully infuriating, dropping references and opinions about Bergman and his movies as it gorges on his locations and living quarters. At the halfway point of the 113-minute feature, however, Krieps' character complains to Roth's character about writer's block, Roth asks her to share what she has come up with so far, and Krieps begins telling a story that is suddenly enacted on the screen, also set on Fårö, where another young film enthusiast, played by Mia Wasikowska, attends a destination wedding and meets an old boyfriend she had never really gotten out of her system. The story-within-the-story is also abundant with Bergman lore, although it ends with the heroine dancing to an ABBA single, thus encapsulating the breadth of Sweden's contributions to world culture.

In that Bergman's films, and the era in which he made them, were a challenging contradiction of sincere feminist explorations and unwavering male presumptions, the glee with which Hansen-Løve has her heroines dive into the chilly Baltic waves, jellyfish and all, places the film's own multitude of romantic perspectives in a beneficial light, justifying its clever if somewhat dreamy ending. It doesn't have to carry the weight of Bergman's moral and emotional contradictions, nor does it even have to carry the weight of its own requisite lessons in enlightenment. **Bergman Island** is there just to see the sights and have a little fun, finding joy in the sheer audacity of the film's premise and story turns. Perhaps someday, fans will journey to Fårö to follow Hansen-Løve's footsteps, and to swim at the beaches where Krieps and Wasikowska frolicked.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 (no, that isn't Bergmanesque, but Hansen-Løve discovered that the landscapes of Fårö were so empty that it was the best way to do them justice). The color transfer is smooth and exact. The DTS sound has a terrific dimensional presence—you not only see where Bergman thought up his movies, you also hear what he was hearing while he was thinking—and the musical score is positively ethereal, even after it starts in with Lee Hazlewood. The film is mostly in English, with optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer and a 5-minute collection of somewhat blurry behind-the-scenes footage accompanied by Hansen-Løve talking about the film, there is a full-fledged and rewarding 20-minute interview with Hansen-Løve, in which she speaks about making the film (which had to be split into two separate shoots a year apart) and what she wanted to achieve, along with a very nice 16-minute interview with Krieps, who talks a little bit about her career and explains how she was hired at the last moment and had to start shooting pretty much without preparation, adding perfectly to the nervousness and frustration that her character experiences.

Kant help falling in love

We remain in awe every time we watch Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1972 drama, **The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant**, which has been released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515135511, \$50). One studio apartment, six female characters, and he creates a viable movie. Anybody can do that, right? No, actually. Yes, the story was originally a play and its five-act structure is readily apparent since each act otherwise unfolds in real time. But still, it is his blocking, and the gloriously cluttered set decoration within that apartment, which very few filmmakers have the vision, the talent, or just the plain instinct to duplicate. Fassbinder often has his actresses stand perfectly still when the dramatic attention is not on them. Normally, that might seem artificial. On the stage, it would certainly seem artificial. But as a film, with editing, it works because they simultaneously function as characters and as props, aiding Fassbinder in pointing the viewer toward what is to be concentrated upon at the moment (the character doing the talking) and what is to be, not ignored, but noticed only as a presence registered. If the talk goes on for a long period of time and your eyes do wander, they do not linger since there is no distracting movement. Margit Carstensen stars as a fashion designer who has an affair with a young model played by Hanna Schygulla and becomes destitute after their romance runs its course.

The cinematography of Michael Ballhaus calls forth Fassbinder's adoration of Douglas Sirk with its deep, rich hues and accentuated plays of light and shadows. Running 124 minutes, the film is a workable entertainment thanks to the queasy ride of Carstensen's performance (nicely counterbalanced by the steady, non-speaking presence of Irm Hermann as her constantly hovering secretary) and the delightful, 'I Spy' discoveries in the decorations and bric-a-brac of the apartment, but it is perhaps more importantly a compelling lesson in the art of filmmaking, perpetually fascinating for the choices made by Fassbinder and his collaborators in front of the camera and behind it. Our only real criticism of the filmmaking—the movie opens with a pair of cats who clearly live inside the apartment, but after that first shot, they are never seen again. When you're making a movie in 10 days, it obviously is not a good idea to include cast members who can't follow instructions, but it could have been fun to keep them around.

The squared full screen picture is in excellent condition, with bright hues and smooth textures. We reviewed a very nice Wellspring DVD in Apr 04, and while that transfer was decent, the updated colors and sharpness of the Blu-ray presentation add significantly to a viewer's concentration and pleasure. Wellspring also toyed with an artificial stereo soundtrack, which was cute, but the standard monophonic track is fine and the solidity provided by the BD playback brings a strength to its detail that the DVD could not achieve. The film is in German with optional English subtitles and comes with a great 7-minute interview with Ballhaus about coming to terms with Fassbinder while making the film; an excellent 59-minute collection of

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interviews with Schygulla, Hermann, Carstensen and co-star Rosel Zech about making the movie and their rollercoaster experiences with Fassbinder; another terrific 30-minute collection of interviews with Schygulla, Carstensen, and co-stars Eva Mattes and Katrin Schaake about their memories (not all of them positive) and intimacies with Fassbinder and the film; and a decent 23-minute deconstruction of the film's meanings and artistry.

The climax of one of the featurettes in Criterion's release has the not-all-that-surprising revelatory suggestion that the character, 'Petra von Kant,' is actually a stand in for Fassbinder. Doubling down on that premise, the Strand Releasing Corporation has issued François Ozon's intriguing 2022 remake on Blu-ray, Peter von Kant (UPC#712267422036, \$25). Ozon hasn't just upended the film's genders by making half of the characters in the story men, however. Set in 1972, the protagonist, played by Denis Ménochet, is a portly filmmaker with a brushy walrus mustache. In other words, he may not be Fassbinder, but he is much more than just Fassbinder-ish. His wardrobe also comes straight out of film magazine photos of Fassbinder.

The movie runs just 85 minutes and Ozon uses ellipses within the scenes. Coming off of Petra, one is immediately aware of, while stylish, how much more mundane and 'safe' Ozon's filmmaking is, less a lesson in how to make a movie and more of an investigation into why the original film worked so well. The cinematography is gorgeous, and the action itself is still limited to the apartment, although the apartment has a few extra rooms and, sadly, less clutter. There are also outdoor establishing shots, however, and even titles appearing on the screen to denote the passage of time between what is left of the acts. When Schygulla first meets the other characters in Fassbinder's film, she looks at them and is polite, but her gaze also wanders around room, and she seems somewhat apprehensive about the visit. In Ozon's feature, Khalil Ben Gharbia's character marches into the room with standard and dull introductions, looking straight into the eyes of the other two characters and completely disinterested in his surroundings. Still, as the film proceeds, it explores the male dynamic of attraction and rejection perhaps more accurately than Fassbinder, attempting to transpose such feelings onto a pair of female characters, could achieve, and it ends up being a satisfying drama even if it fails to be as captivating a work of art as its predecessor. Besides, there is a wonderful surprise in the last act, when the hero's mother arrives, because—and we kind of hate to spoil it—she is played by Schygulla. Isabelle Adjani is also featured.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The colors are smooth and slick. The DTS sound has a workable dimensionality that comes alive whenever the characters put on a record (one, the Walker Brothers' recording of *In My Room*, is carried over from the first film). The film is in French with optional English subtitles.

Cashing in on Marvin

After Lee Marvin won his Oscar for Cat Ballou and then skyrocketed to action hero superstardom in The Dirty Dozen, Universal dusted off a very good 1963 Kraft Suspense Theatre double-length episode entitled The Case Against Paul Ryker, starring Bradford Dillman, which could have served as a pilot for an earlier version of JAG, and, since Marvin had a critical supporting part in the title role, released the show in 1968 as a feature film with Marvin top billed, Sergeant Ryker, which has now been issued on Blu-ray by Universal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a KL Studio Classics title (UPC#738329261375, \$25). Universal's ad art, which has admirably been duplicated for the jacket cover, was flagrantly dishonest, and the film was clearly meant to play for no more than a single weekend in theaters before word of mouth would get out to report that no, Marvin doesn't so much as hold a gun in the film, let alone make things explode around him, at least physically. But, like we said, it's a very good drama—and Marvin's emotionally explosive performance is excellent—even if it isn't in any way, shape or form an action movie (oh, there is a bit of inconsequential gunfire in one sequence, to underscore the wartime milieu, but nothing involving Marvin).

Set during the Korean War, Dillman is a JAG lawyer who volunteers to defend Marvin's character in a retrial after an initial court martial found the sergeant guilty of desertion and treason. One of the appealing aspects of the program is that it is loaded with Universal stock players. Vera Miles plays the wife of Marvin's character, Murray Hamilton (with a very nasty, awesome mustache) is another officer, Lloyd Nolan is the general, Peter Graves (perhaps cast to evoke his role in Stalag 17) is the prosecuting attorney, and Norman Fell is the driver for Dillman's character. Directed by Buzz Kulik, the narrative has a very nice blend of ambiguity and courtroom conflict. Marvin's character is both volatile and something of a cipher, and his performance brings a compelling reality to the uncertainties surrounding his motivations. More often cast as a villain than as a hero, Dillman is also effectively studious and confused, motivated as much by his feelings for Miles' character as he is for uncovering the truth (he would go on, with Graves, to star in a TV spinoff series). The film may have bombed in theaters (since it cost Universal nothing but the marketing expenses, it likely turned a decent profit anyway), but it was originally designed for television, and as a home video program without the interruption of commercials or a break between halves, it is fully engrossing and satisfying.

The picture, which can seem a bit tight on the top and bottom at times, is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Overall, the color transfer looks great, and is especially satisfying during the big close-ups of the various movie stars. Once in a while there is a stray scratch, or a flurry of tiny speckles right before a dissolve, but such flaws are few and far between. The monophonic sound is solid (John Williams did the distinctive musical score) and there are optional English subtitles. A hyped up trailer is also included.

Film historian Daniel Kremer supplies a passable commentary track, going over a history of TV shows and telefilms that were released theatrically after broadcast, summarizing the major court martial movies up to the Sixties, discussing the careers of the cast and the crew, and detailing the history of the film's initial production and subsequent theatrical release ("The ad copy was not entirely true. The poster appears more like the artwork from The Dirty Dozen than it appears from anything in this movie."). Be warned, however, he has a bad habit that can become rather irritating if you listen to him talk for 90 minutes straight, constantly using the word, 'would,' in the past tense where 'was' or 'did,' signifying that something actually happened, are more appropriate.

Japanese thrillers

A police detective investigating a series of murders that were committed by different people in the same gruesome and unique manner surmises that there is a mastermind controlling their behaviors through hypnotic suggestion in the carefully composed 1997 Kiyoshi Kurosawa feature, Curse, a Criterion Collection Blu-ray (UPC#715515278010, \$40). Eventually, the detective, played by the dashing Koji Yakusho, and the villain, played with an exceptionally creepy blandness by Masato Hagiwara, begin a psychological dance. The next step can never be predicted, but the two are consistently synchronic. The film does not have an American story arc, but it is still suspenseful and unnerving, seeming to have been inspired by everything from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari to The Silence of the Lambs. The force of its carefully framed screen compositions, which have an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, is hypnotic in its own right, and the plot is intriguing enough to hold a viewer's attention, wondering when some character on the screen will suddenly start murdering another, even if one is very aware that the most desired answers and explanations are never going to come. It also helps that the picture transfer is exquisite, conveying a steady crispness down to the smallest detail, and the DTS sound—Kurosawa often uses environmental noises in the place of a score—has a smooth and finely separated dimensionality. Running 112 minutes, the film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles.

Drive My Car director Ryusuke Hamaguchi was in a film class taught by Kurosawa when Kurosawa was originally developing the script and shared what he had with his students, so their 35-minute talk about the film and its meanings that is included in the supplement is especially enlightening. Hamaguchi points out how the original story ideas were altered, and then asks about the film's execution—how much of it was intentional and how much of it (like the weather, which always seems absolutely appropriate) was random. Kurosawa summarizes his intentions by explaining, "I wanted to see if I could make a movie where everyone would be on edge, fearful, wondering when someone else is going to get killed. It was an experiment." Also featured are three trailers; a 14-minute interview with Yakusho who was excited to play the part even though he didn't entirely understand what was happening in the story, and believes that it turned out to be the most significant role in his career; a 21-minute interview with Hagiwara talking about the apprehension he had over taking the role and the challenges he faced to carry it out (he's not really sure he knows how he did it); and another 20-minute interview with Kurosawa talking about the different themes he was exploring in the film, providing a revelatory take on what happens at the movie's end (it is what inspired the title) and reiterating when discussing the cinema that influenced him what we have always felt, that the period for movies between 1960 and 1975 was the greatest of all.

An untapped potential for suspense stories, there are barely a few non-supernatural feature thrillers intended for grownups where the protagonist is a child. We recall being riveted by the Italian Flight of the Innocent (Jul 94) for just that reason. Children learn corruption and are exposed to evil by adults, but they begin with morally blank slates that feel especially compelling in narratives when they are subjected to the dangers and duplicities created by those whose needs and desires have grown far more complicated. The thrill is immediate, because a viewer easily grasps the child's vulnerabilities and limitations.

Dark Star Pictures has released a great 2021 Japanese crime film, Missing, on Blu-ray (UPC#850029824442, \$25). The heroine, played by Aoi Itô, is a middle school student living with her widowed father, played by Jirô Satô, who wakes up one morning to find that her father is not there. The day before he had mumbled something about seeing a serial killer the police are looking for on a train. While trying her best to avoid being placed in foster care, she and a boy who likes her scramble for clues and begin a search that leads them into peril. The 124-minute film eventually jumps back in time and starts telling the story again from the father's perspective, but it is that initial story hook that separates the film from many, many others. It is still quite a grown up movie, with violence and sex, although not even the hammer murder is as viscerally unnerving as when the heroine realizes her whole class is watching with devilish glee when the boy asks her out on a date. Sometimes evil does begin at an early age.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, and the color transfer is slick and glossy. The DTS sound as a terrific, immersive dimensionality that contributes greatly to keeping the viewer gripped by what is happening on the screen. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. Also featured is a cute but unnecessary 2-minute deleted scene, a lightly informative 23-minute Japanese post-screening interview with the cast and the director, Shinzô Katayama, and a 41-minute interview with Katayama that is slowed a bit because the interviewer has to wait for the translation but is somewhat more substantive when it comes to production insights.

Sirk's up!

Some filmmakers use the images in a movie solely to identify the population of its characters, to advance the narrative, and to define a setting where that narrative is taking place. The really good film directors, however, also use the images as underscore, to reflect either palpably or subliminally the emotional or spiritual states of the characters. They don't just tell a story, they immerse the viewer in the story's turmoil with every filmmaking tool at their command.

Born in Germany but immigrating to the United States after the Nazis took over, Douglas Sirk was an accomplished, popular film director, but from a critical standpoint, his movies are something of an acquired taste. Superficially, his films can seem almost pandering in their blatant emotionalism and melodramatic excess. But, like the works of Vincente Minnelli and Michael Powell, there is a consummate mastery in the construction of his features, and a particular sensitivity to all of the elements of design—the costumes, the decorations, the props, the landscapes—and to how those designs are lit and colored. This makes his films, just as it makes the films Minnelli and Powell, especially welcoming to Blu-ray, where a careful transfer of the original source materials can present an experience of such overwhelming beauty it hardly matters what is going on in the story itself. A Sirk Blu-ray isn't just worthwhile, it is endlessly repeatable.

Not only is Sirk's romance, All That Heaven Allows, a great motion picture, but it was the direct inspiration for two other great motion pictures—Rainer Werner Fassbinder's Ali Fear Eats the Soul (Apr 04) and Todd Haynes' Far from Heaven (Apr 16). We reviewed the gorgeous Criterion Collection's DVD release of the 1955 Universal feature in Aug 01, but Criterion's upgraded three-platter DVD + Blu-ray (UPC#715515117319, \$40) is even more captivating. Universal's legendary cinematographer, Russell Metty, working with Sirk, used colored lighting to amplify or otherwise accentuate the emotions the characters feel and express. On the older DVD, it looked okay, but with the precision and stability of the BD image along with an improved transfer, the film's array of colorful illuminations is riveting, pulling a viewer's attention to the depths of the psychologies of the characters, while at the same time massaging a viewer's own emotions with chromatic stimulants. Even the upgraded DVD looks nicer and more stable than the older DVD, which was not only overly lit, spoiling intentional shadows, but was marked with an occasional stray speckle and scratch that has now been eliminated. The new presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.75:1, which Criterion explains in its content notations is a suitable compromise for the many different aspect ratios that were used when the film was first released to theaters.

Set in New England, Jane Wyman plays a recently widowed housewife whose two children are nearing the end of their educations. Rock Hudson is her landscaper—it is never stated directly, but the evidence suggests that his character may have roots in the Portuguese immigrant community; in any case, he's not in her social circle—and a friendly afternoon chat about trees gradually turns into a genuine romantic attraction. Hudson's character is younger (supposedly more than the 8 years that separated the two actors in real life, but nevertheless, it comes across less like a May-December romance and more like a June-August attraction) and so the film gets away, just barely, in justifying his lack of a previous attachment. But the focus is really on Wyman's character anyway, and the hell she goes through with her family and her supposed friends because her new idea of happiness does match their old ideas.

Running a quick 89 minutes, the film moves through its emotional build up steadily and efficiently. While there is nothing unique about the characters—the wonderful supporting cast includes Agnes Moorehead, Virginia Grey, Conrad Nagel, and Gloria Talbott—the film is positively archetypal in how the romantic story advances and the two protagonists overcome the blockades that arise in their relationship. You don't just enjoy the movie yourself, you also think, 'This is a movie that a person who likes romances would really, really enjoy,' as if it were some sort of definitive example of an appealing romantic film. Not only is it, conceptually, a terrific romantic story, but it has been meticulously composed so that you might also think, 'This is a movie that a person who appreciates the dynamics of an artistic masterpiece would really, really admire.' And it is in the merger of those two aspects to the film where its greatness is certified by the Blu-ray presentation.

The monophonic sound is solid and clear, and there are optional English subtitles and a trailer. Film historians John Mercer and Tamar Jeffers-McDonald provide an excellent commentary track, stepping the viewer through each scene with observations on the lighting, the costumes, the set designs and so on, while also discussing the film's primary themes, its performances and Sirk's direction. The DVD that is included in the set is compromised only by the disadvantage in crispness and color definition one encounters in all DVDs when compared to BDs. The same is true of its weaker sound.

The second DVD platter contains the same special features that appear with the film on the BD platter. There is a very good 57-minute interview with Sirk from 1979 stepping through his various movies (as well as his later experience teaching film) that appeared on the previous DVD in an abridged form about half its length, along with a nice 16-minute reflective interview with Sirk from 1982 in which he talks about cinematography (and

its components, from mirrors to lighting), editing, blocking a scene and other aspects of direction, and a 23-minute interview from 2007 with supporting player William Reynolds about his career, the different roles he played, his co-stars and the different directors he worked with.

Finally, Criterion has included, on both the BD and the DVD, Mark Rappaport's 1992 pastiche documentary, Rock Hudson's Home Movies, which is also available separately on DVD from Re:VoiR and Kino Classics (UPC#738329258009, \$20). Rappaport is creating an entire documentary career using computer editing systems to upload the complete works of a particular performer or filmmaker and then meticulously combine images and moments from them to seek out commonalities in theme. Although reportedly inspired by a reel that Hudson himself used to show to his friends for amusement, the 64-minute program draws images and scenes from nearly two-dozen Hudson films that when taken out of context can be read, sometimes pointedly, sometimes randomly, as suggestive of homosexuality. For naïve viewers, it will be an enlightenment, since even moments in films such as All That Heaven Allows can be used to reinforce its central argument, while other films, such as Man's Favorite Sport? (Apr 03), have always been intended to carry a double meaning. Rappaport's supporting narration for his films is to have an actor, pretending to be the film's subject, speak about the clips in a personal manner, which can initially seem to be off-putting or plain awkward, but actually helps to coalesce the images and disguise the arbitrariness of his choices. The presentation is in a squared, full screen format, and the quality of the clips is very weak, which is genuinely alienating (much more so than the similarly weak transfers on the clips in the Sirk interviews), with Criterion's presentation being slightly darker than Kino's. The monophonic sound is okay (it is stronger on the Criterion presentation). Kino's presentation has optional English subtitles, but Criterion's does not.

There is a great reason to obtain Kino's release if one already has the Criterion disc, however, and that is its supplements—four more Rappaport films, three of which are terrific, establishing that the format he worked out with Home Movies was not just a singular film but—like we said, thanks to computers—a career endeavor in the art of the documentary.

First, the one forgettable piece is a rumination on pornography that Rappaport shot in 1971 entitled Blue Streak. Running 16 minutes, it intercuts silent footage of a dozen or so naked people sitting in the living room of an apartment as words associated with cursing and with sex appear in soft block letters at the bottom of the screen (who knew there were so many?), intercut with shots of a spring hillside landscape as male and female voices read passages from erotic literature (or, outright porn—there's one about a horse) on the soundtrack. Sure, you got that out of your system, now move on.

And so he did. A 2003 piece entitled John Garfield runs just 9 minutes but provides an excellent encapsulation of Garfield's screen career, his Jewish heritage and his political troubles, illustrated entirely by clips from his movies (and other, appropriate references to him or to the situations he encountered), with a normal third party narrator explaining the dynamics of Garfield's career. Even better is a full 60-minute film from 2018 entitled Conrad Veidt—My Life. Although Rappaport goes back to the faux narrator who pretends to be the subject, the work focuses entirely upon Veidt's screen career and how it intersected with the Nazis, forcing him to immigrate to Hollywood. The wealth of clips and the dexterity with which they have been integrated with the narrative is outstanding, and unlike the Hudson piece, Rappaport has no specific agenda to sell—he is just charting Veidt's accomplishments, first as a renown actor in Germany and then as a more pigeonholed character performer in Britain and America. There are digressions, including a thumbnail profile of Valerie Hobson and an esoteric link to Stanley Kubrick's wife, and wonderful trivia (Veidt inspired two major cartoon characters—Jafar, of course, and The Joker), but there is not a moment in the program that is not wholly fulfilling for cinema enthusiasts.

In the concluding piece, Rappaport follows his Rock Hudson format very closely with an excellent 2016 film running 36 minutes about Sergei Eisenstein entitled Sergei / Sir Gay, which doesn't just deconstruct Eisenstein's films for their plentiful gay imagery (he also digresses into a cute montage of Hollywood films about the Navy, and manages to sneak in fully letterboxed clips of Querelle, as well) but also postulates as to which of the performers Eisenstein was specifically attracted to (thus setting off another digression about Jean Cocteau/Jean Marais and others). Once again, it is the abundance of the carefully selected clips (which also make use of drawings from Eisenstein's notebooks) that makes the movie so invigorating, and once again, the faux narration, supposedly coming from Eisenstein, is an ideal way to undercut the distancing that a more academic narration would probably cause.

Sirk made a number of films with Hudson for Universal and producer Ross Hunter, but none was so impactful as the 1954 narrative rollercoaster, Magnificent Obsession, a two-platter Criterion Blu-ray (UPC# 715515233613, \$40). This was the initial pairing of Hudson and Wyman, and while the story details are often a bit misleading when it comes to the film's purpose, what essentially happens is that Hudson's character is a playboy whose actions cause a great tragedy for Wyman's character, and he spends the rest of his life trying to make it up to her. Running 108 minutes, the film's plot has such innate momentum that all Sirk really has to do is set back, sustain a sensible pace and not mess anything up. The performances are lovely—Moorehead also has the best friend role again—and the rest is Sirk's

confident sense of design, augmented by Metty's precise lighting. Neither of the latter is as intense as it would become in **All That Heaven Allows** (you even see a reflection of the sound boom in one shot), but there is a concentrated balance of hues and a careful manipulation of mood and atmosphere in every scene. Shots are less cluttered (sound boom aside) and whites are used excessively as a color, but the plot is too forceful for the film to feel at all spare or stark. You don't connect with the characters right away, but they grow upon you indelibly. It should be mentioned that the story has a distinctive spiritual component as well (it presents a kind of pay-it-forward philosophy that was the exact opposite of Ayn Rand's beliefs, who was in her heyday at the time), which is used to set it apart from a standard romance, not so much making it deeper as making it more expansive. Hence, while the story is memorable, the film's intonation, stretching as it does from the abstract stimulation of faith to the visceral satisfaction of aesthetics, is unique, making the experience of watching it, particularly on Blu-ray, exceptional.

Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1, the picture transfer is not as perfect as **All That Heaven Allows**, although it still looks terrific. During scene transitions involving dissolves and other optical processing, the crispness of the image momentarily weakens. At one point, a green halo forms very briefly around several objects, and at another point, the entire image becomes noticeably fuzzy. These flaws, however, are fleeting, and for the most part, the image is sharp and crisply detailed. Criterion also released the film on a two-platter DVD (UPC#715515034821, \$40) with what is essentially the same transfer, but softer. The film remains highly entertaining, although the enhanced sharpness and clarity of the BD playback is consistently more transfixing. The monophonic sound, which has a nice, big theatrical presence on the BD, is weaker and less forceful on the DVD. Both have optional English subtitles. There is a 9-minute appreciation of Sirk by Allison Anders about what his movies meant to her, and a 13-minute appreciation of Sirk by Kathryn Bigelow, who met him several times and shares some of the advice he gave her (adapt an imperfect novel so there is room to grow). Appearing only on the BD, there a very nice 19-minute interview with scenarist Robert Brees, talking about his career, working with Sirk and a few details about the composition of the film's script.

Film historian Thomas Doherty provides a very good commentary track on both the BD and the DVD. Although he does not concentrate as much on the film's frame compositions (he does touch on it a bit), he speaks extensively about the narrative's manipulations, the film's syntactical standards ("One of the real differences between 1950s cinema and contemporary cinema is a little scene like this where you actually follow the couple as they're walking to the door, you watch them knock on the door, and then you have the interior shot where they come in. This is the kind of thing a modern director would do like in a matter of nanoseconds. Just the sheer pacing of a film like this is so different from the post-1980s MTV style."), the nature of melodrama and the talents of the cast and the crew. He also discusses the arguments for and against the validity of Sirk's artistry, which can be difficult for some viewers to appreciate because Sirk was working to deliver the popular entertainment that was expected from him by the studio, even though his personal touches, drawn from a lifetime's exposure to the foundations and explorations of literature, art and drama, are apparent in every scene. "On the surface, he accords with Hollywood convention, but the seething resistance to confinements of the culture radiate long after the end credits have rolled."

The second DVD platter has two more programs, one of which appears as well on the first BD platter, a fascinating 1991 German interview with Sirk that runs a feature-length 83 minutes, in German with optional English subtitles. For all intents and purposes, Sirk never repeats anything in this interview that he has said in other interviews. Instead he shares details about his experiences making films in Germany (there is a lengthy anecdote about pairing a tall actress with a much shorter actor) and in the United States, and talking specifically about his intentions and experiences working on the next two movies reviewed below. He also touches upon the reasoning behind the European fascination with American melodramas. "We were all intrigued by the aesthetic form of American film, which was really melodrama. That is, these strange stories in which the bizarre, the impossible, the accidental, and the odd were boldly embraced to expose a force that lay underneath, whereas German, but also French and European novels and stories in general, were finely polished, and the same was true for film."

Appearing on the second DVD platter, and by itself on the second BD platter, is Universal's initial 1935 adaptation of the Lloyd C. Douglas bestseller, *Magnificent Obsession*, directed by John Stahl and starring Irene Dunne, Robert Taylor and Betty Furness. Charles Butterworth is woefully miscast as Furness' love interest, but that is just one of the film's many wild eccentricities.

In the German interview with Sirk, he talks about how contemporary films are immediately dated by their costumes, to their detriment, but that really isn't true. As Doherty points out, films are dated much more by the manner of their construction and the basics of their grammar. In older films, particularly those that are imperfectly made, there is an alienating sense that the filmmakers are casting about, trying to meld a story together and not entirely sure how to pull it off as they advance from one scene to the next. There is almost as much difference between the 1935 film and the 1955 film as there would be between the 1955 film and one that was made today. Where viewers today will look at Sirk's movie and see its expressionism viably glossing over its narrative improbabilities, viewers will look at Stahl's effort and see an absolute mess, logically and tonally, that is only rescued by

the blatant sentimentality of its final act. Isaac Newton's adage about standing on the shoulders of giants, however, applies to filmmakers, as well. Sirk and Brees could not have succeeded with their version if they didn't have Stahl's initial adaptation of Douglas to understand what aspects of the story had potential and what aspects were best adjusted. Any filmmaker taking on the story today would simply be doing the same thing with what Sirk created, nipping and tucking to speed things up for today's audiences while retaining the essential moments that make the story so emotionally compelling.

The full screen black-and-white picture has many speckles and scratches, but is watchable. Here there is a distinctive difference between the DVD, which is trying to share the film with another program on the platter, and the BD platter, which has the movie all to itself. Other than the age marks, the image is sharp, smooth and stable on the BD, while the image on the DVD has smearing, hazy contrasts and other image presentation weaknesses in addition to the scratches. The monophonic sound is adequate on the DVD but stronger and clearer on the BD. The sound mix, however, leaves much to be desired. In one scene the heroine is supposedly in a hotel room in Paris. She opens up the room's window and there is not a single moment of noise from the outside. That is the sort of filmmaking oversight that the advance of time corrects.

We reviewed Criterion's DVD release of Sirk's **Written on the Wind** in Aug 01, but while the picture quality looked great for a DVD, it is a bit more inconsistent when pushed to the purity that Criterion's Blu-ray (UPC#715515268417, \$40) can offer. Some shots look perfect, but others are a touch subdued. On the other hand, Lauren Bacall's facial hair is less noticeable, so perhaps things have been dialed down a touch in spots for a reason. On the whole, the BD's colors—or more accurately, its color temperatures—feel more correct, and the image is smoother. Oh, and Metty strikes again—you can see the shadow of the camera on one shot as it moves through a window and into a living room party.

In any case, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, the 1956 Universal feature still has a vivid, fantasyland feel to it, allowing its melodrama to gush forward with the gusto of over-pressured crude bursting out of a fresh well. Set in a Texas that has phallic oil rigs in the place of trees, Robert Stack is the spoiled son of a petroleum millionaire and marries Bacall's character, an executive secretary, much to the chagrin of his less wealthy but better than him in everything friend, played by Hudson. Dorothy Malone (who won the Supporting Actress Oscar) plays the equally spoiled sister of Stack's character, who wants Hudson's character in the worst way and turns into a tramp when she can't have him because he's still pining for Bacall's character. Around and around they go until somebody gets shot. It is a great challenge to the actors just to get through the story with a straight face, but viewers who are fully aware that they have left reality and entered Sirk's world will readily accept the exaggerated behaviors, evocative production designs, and storytelling shorthand (freeze almost any frame in the film, and you can deconstruct the décor and colors as representative of a character's inner being). Sure, the characters fall in love in a flash, but that is necessary so they can get on with the frustrations and complications that the film wants to put them through, and at 99 minutes, there is no time to accommodate subtle behavior or gradual awareness. Because the story is a basic triangle-plus-one, viewers who are not attuned to Sirk's excesses may ignore its designs and dismiss its simplicities, but those who are forgiving of obvious faults will find endless satisfaction in the film's magnification of human feelings and its distortion of reality, which allows those feelings to escape the confines of the heart. Under Sirk's guidance, emotion not only decorates the world the characters live in, but it manifests as movie stars to express its various intensities and inclinations.

The monophonic sound is solid and smooth, delivering a more complete audio range than the DVD soundtrack could manage, and there are optional English subtitles. Criterion kept the trailer but ditched the elaborate still-frame filmography of Sirk that appeared on the DVD. In its stead, there are two really good featurettes, an insightful 21-minute deconstruction of the film's attributes and machinations, and a fantastic 23-minute collection of retrospective interviews with Sirk and the cast that is specifically about their acting and his work with them on their performances.

William Faulkner was one of the great literary stylists of the Twentieth Century, doing in many ways what Sirk did—enriching melodramas with perspective and technique that brought both an artistic resonance and a human resonance to a superficial story that could easily be dismissed as emotional exaggeration in someone else's hands. Nevertheless, one can readily imagine Sirk's 1957 adaptation of a Faulkner novel, **The Tarnished Angels**, released on Blu-ray by Universal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC#738329233921, \$30), alienating even audiences that had flocked to **Written on the Wind**. Hudson, Stack and Malone star again (the retrospective interview on **Written on the Wind** about acting for Sirk actually covers both films), with Jack Carson (and, seen briefly, Troy Donahue). Set in the early Thirties, Stack is a former war pilot who makes a living in the air race circuit, flying around phallic pylons in competition with other airplanes. Easy to see why the sport didn't last too long, as it seems that a year doesn't pass these days where an air show that doesn't even involve racing experiences some sort of tragedy. Anyway, Malone is his wife, Carson is his mechanic (also pining for the wife) and Hudson is a local reporter in Louisiana who is sent to cover the show and gets drawn into the nery relationship the husband and wife have, risking their lives in the air and ignoring one another on the ground.

Sirk (Continued)

On paper, what happens is convoluted since, like almost all Faulkner film adaptations, it is substantially simplified for the screen. While it is in Cinemascope, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, it is in black and white, taking away a significant tool from Sirk's kit. What's more, Irving Glassberg was the cinematographer instead of Metty, and the lighting is not as daring. Nevertheless, the images are still confidently structured, rich with ulterior meaning, and are particularly appealing because the BD transfer is so sharp and clean.

The flying scenes are thrilling, even though the aerial shots clearly display California landscapes (although set during Mardi Gras, you never really get a New Orleans vibe). Hudson's performance, sort of a mix of manliness and naïveté, is quite good, and since the entire story unfolds through his eyes, he does exactly what is needed to sustain an interest in the other characters as well as in his own. While the arc of the story might be a turn off for some viewers, it is its embrace of Faulkner, particularly in Hudson's climactic, drunken soliloquy in the newspaper office, that rescues it, essentially explaining what we already knew had happened, but casting the actions in such a lilting and poetical light that you suddenly comprehend the souls of the characters, and realize that in Sirk's films, the human heart in conflict with itself is everywhere you look.

The monophonic sound is clear, and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer. Film historian Imogen Sara Smith provides an excellent commentary track, deconstructing the film's artistry and supplying appropriate background information on the cast and the crew. Everything she has to say not only enhances one's appreciation of the film, but deepens one's understanding of movies and life. "Sirk referred to melodramas as, 'dramas of swollen emotions,' and this kind of overwrought, unreasonable behavior is one of the things that turns many people off about the genre, and that what they often consider unbelievable plot twists. People who defend melodrama point out that actually, life often is this way, that the emotional responses that we have to events like death or breakups are often over the top and messy in a way that we would probably not want to watch on screen. Far from being unrealistically heightened, the emotions and illogical behavior they cause tend to be toned down even in melodramas."

The excesses of Sirk's melodramas are celebrated, so it would be easy to understand that viewers might not immediately embrace a romantic drama that is largely the opposite of excess, which is the case with his beautifully understated and seemingly inconsequential 1956 black-and-white feature, **There's Always a Tomorrow**, another Universal Kino *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329249304, \$25). Before it was known as a midlife crisis, a successful businessman runs into an old flame and briefly considers abandoning his family—who pretty much take him for granted—until his eldest son gets wind of it and puts the kibosh on the romance. It is no happenstance that the stars of the film are Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck, for even though the absurdity of the melodrama in **Double Indemnity** hangs over the film as a reminder of where these movies so often lead, that only adds to the edginess when the plot goes nowhere near that direction. Instead, it is a simple portrait of a family, much like the one MacMurray would go on to serve as patriarch for on the TV and in his Walt Disney movies, and Sirk's brilliance comes from depicting how easily that family structure—which was the core of the American myth in the Fifties—could collapse, not through crime but through simple innocuousness. Running 85 minutes, the film is actually quite suspenseful, but you just don't notice the ulcer it is creating inside of you as it unfolds because everything in it seems so normal. Joan Bennett co-stars as the wife of MacMurray's character.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is often substantially grainy, although otherwise it is free of flaws and it may be that the precision of its focus adds to an awareness of the grain's presence in Metty's cinematography. The monophonic sound is presentable and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer. Feminist film expert Sann Deighan provides a very good commentary track, not only going over the careers of the artists, but analyzing Sirk's approach to the drama while looking specifically at the film's historical context and why it is so exceptional. "It's just so unusual to have a film from this period that takes these domestic themes and puts a man at the center of them. What makes the film so effective is this use of restraint. It doesn't go over the top showing how miserable he is, but it is really kind of meticulous in how realistic it tries to be and how sort of somber and subdued these performances are, particularly contrasted with Sirk's other films."

Sirk lived for several decades after making his final film in 1959, **Imitation of Life**, even though the film was a tremendous success. While reasons of health or a general desire to leave Hollywood (he moved to Switzerland) may have stayed his hand from continuing at first, the only reason we can think of as to why he never made a film again is that **Imitation of Life** is such a masterfully directed feature, he could never hope to do better. The film, about mothers and their daughters, does not have the catchy romantic pizzazz that makes movies like **All That Heaven Allows** or **Written on the Wind** so delectable, but it is a remarkable accomplishment, weaving together, across 125 minutes, several separate narratives involving inter-related character. The true manner of a daytime soap opera is not how it designs its narratives with continual emotional cliffhangers to draw viewers back day after day. Instead, it is how effectively it weaves various stories together so that they peak at different times (thus encouraging viewers by generating climaxes while at the same time dangling more climaxes to come).

What Sirk manages to do is to compress that format into a complete film so that, with the same set of characters, one part of the story gets a boost, and then the camera turns just slightly, and a different part of the story gets a boost. The precision with which every scene is designed and executed is incredible, especially since not only is the intricacy of the narrative advanced in several fronts at a time, but everything—the sets, the costumes and so on—is simultaneously designed and colored to underscore each emotional conflict or character status.

The film begins innocuously with its two primary stories—Lana Turner is a struggling model who wants to become a star and Juanita Moore is a destitute housekeeper who latches onto her when their daughters strike up a friendship—but because of its pacing and the performances, it is initially intriguing. Then, gradually, the characters are developed and their emotional lives become clearer, so that no component of the story lingers long enough to wear out its welcome before shifting to a different component. That freedom is given to Turner's character to succeed because Moore's character can take care of the chores and watch the kids is just one of many ways that the movie stealthily comments upon social mores of the Fifties. As the film advances, the daughter of Turner's character grows into a character played by Sandra Dee, who falls for a photographer played by John Gavin, while Gavin's character pines for Turner's character, unrequitedly because of her career desires. Meanwhile, the daughter of Moore's character, played by Susan Kohner, wants to deny her racial heritage and is the only one in the film who exhibits any sort of self-consciousness whatsoever about racial identity. Until the end, that is, when Mahalia Jackson shows up in a brilliantly staged cameo to reveal that there is an entire African-American culture that Moore's character had been a daily part of but that the viewer, like the white characters, was completely unaware of. In addition to staging the film with such incredible exactness that every camera angle and movement could not be better than it is, Sirk also manages to elicit decent performances from what are often movie stars of questionable talent, including Dee, Gavin and even Turner. Moore and Kohner were nominated for an Oscars. Dan O'Herlihy and Robert Alda co-star, with Donahue showing up for another single scene—but it's a doozy.

Universal Studios Home Entertainment has released **Imitation of Life 2-Movie Collection** on a single-platter Blu-ray (UPC#025192284601, \$27), pairing the Sirk film with Stahl's original 1934 feature, **Imitation of Life**. While the two films are easily chosen on Universal's menu, accessing their special features once they are chosen requires that the 'Pop Up Menu' button on the remote be activated for the selections, which are otherwise inaccessible. Stahl's film has also been released singularly on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515280617, \$40).

Universal's picture transfer of Sirk's feature is fantastic. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1, the image is sharp and colors are spotless, turning an ordinary shot of two people talking in a living room into a breathless experience where you just want to freeze the image and stare forever at all it has to offer. At its weakest moments, a scene transition will appear slightly soft, but just slightly, and for all practical purposes, the transfer is as perfect as the film. The monophonic sound is fine and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer and a terrific 32-minute featurette about both movies.

Additionally, Sirk expert Foster Hirsch provides an excellent commentary on the Sirk feature, having interviewed many of the participants. He talks in detail about the actors, makes note of Sirk's eye ("Notice the low angle. The camera placement in the house is starting to change. If you thought of the house as something beautiful and open in the earlier scenes, now the house begins to close in on the characters. Notice that the banister has a black trim over white. White and black. Not an accident."), and discusses the film's social orientations in terms of its own era as well as the era of the previous film (and Fanny Hurst's novel) and the present day ("Here is the mother giving the white daughter a horse as a present. The film is convicting the white mother and daughter of trivality. Sympathetic to them—we like them, and ultimately, they're redeemed. But their problems are insignificant compared to the problems of the black mother and daughter, so that, ideologically, I think the film is very politically correct if you want to read it in those terms, in the sense that the commanding sympathy is for the tragic situation of the black mother and daughter, emblematic of the problems facing black people in America of the time.")

Based upon the Hurst novel, Stahl's film is more compartmentalized, so that the African-American component, while prominent, is experienced primarily through the eyes of the white characters. Although Sirk's version has components that would be frowned upon today, there is nothing about it that is as outright embarrassing as the paternalism of the white characters and the subservience of the black characters in Stahl's version. On the other hand, for it's day, the mere existence of Stahl's feature is a significant social accomplishment, so that the baby steps it takes in racial equality are still important steps, even if they now make the blood curdle.

Eschewing the show business angle, Claudette Colbert stars as a working mother who opens a pancake restaurant with the assistance of her housekeeper, played by Louise Beavers, using the housekeeper's family recipe. They eventually turn it into a multi-million dollar pancake mix product (a terrific plot hook early in the film that boosts a significant amount of good will toward the feature as a whole), but while Beavers' character is an equal partner in the company, she still insists on being the housekeeper and remains determinedly oblivious to her fortune (in Sirk's version, she remains

more believably the loyal maid, although she's making a decent income for her labors). It is an awkward story point, yes, but it facilitates the breakthrough aspect of the story, which is the anguish Beavers' character feels when her fair-skinned daughter, played by Fredi Washington, rejects her and her racial heritage. Running 111 minutes, the film spends plenty of time building up a romance between Colbert's character and a playboy scientist played by Warren William, so that the secondary story remains little more than an exceptionally curious subplot, but in 1934, as we said, the film was a progressive milestone that was nominated for the Best Picture Oscar, and if you can overlook its blatant indiscretions, the performances (Ned Sparks and Rochelle Hudson co-star) are rewarding, and the drama is adeptly executed. It may not generate nearly as many tears as Sirk managed to achieve, but it is not exactly dry-eyed, either.

The Universal presentation is indistinguishable from Criterion's presentation. The full screen black-and-white picture is grainy at times, but is otherwise in excellent condition, with sharply defined contrasts. When no grain is present, the image is smooth and unblemished. The monophonic sound is workable and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer that was designed specifically for black audiences by emphasizing critic quotations praising the film's two black stars.

Universal also supplies another commentary track, by historian Avery Clayton, who speaks intermittently about the history of the film, the story and the actors. He says nothing about Stahl or Hurst. He reiterates a defense of the film as being groundbreaking for its day (virtually no black character in a Hollywood film had demonstrated an emotional life before this) even as he points out its dated and embarrassing shortcomings. He does analyze the film in terms of the Great Depression, which he suggests was more impactful on white audiences, because blacks had always suffered from economic hopelessness. Nevertheless, his talk is fairly limited, especially since the featurette accompanying the Sirk film covers almost everything he has to say more effectively.

Along with the same trailer, Criterion has a very good 24-minute appreciation of Stahl that goes into great detail about his career and his approach to the material, and a thoughtful 20-minute piece about the film's perspective on African-Americans and how it was interpreted in its day.

The Universal double bill is also available on a two-sided single-platter DVD, **Imitation of Life Two-Movie Collection**, a *The Franchise Collection* title (UPC#025192423321, \$15), with optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, and a trailer for the 1959 feature. The transfer on the 1934 film looks identical to the BD, although the image quality does have the limitations that DVDs encounter in comparison to BDs, and the sound is also weaker. The color transfer on the 1959 film appears to be same as the BD transfer, but the image is darker and much less stable, giving it a grainier appearance, and the monophonic sound, once again, is also weaker.

In one of his interviews, Sirk explains that the first movie star he worked with in America was George Sanders, and they had so much success they ended up becoming friends and making several films together. Two of the full screen black-and-white features Sirk made with Sanders for United Artists are presented in the two-platter Cohen Film Collection eOne *Classics of American Cinema* Blu-ray release, **A Scandal in Paris / Lured**, subtitled *Two Films from Director Douglas Sirk* (UPC#741952827696).

Set in the early Nineteenth Century, Sanders is a roguish thief who wangles his way into becoming the head of the police in the 1946 **A Scandal in Paris**, which is also available by itself on DVD from Kino (UPC#73-8329030223, \$25). There are a handful of incredible sets and Sirk gets good use out of them, often returning to them at unexpected moments. A gorgeous carousel that serves as a nice romantic setting during one scene in the film becomes a terrific obstacle for a fight to the death in another scene. Running 99 minutes, the story is lighthearted but enjoyable (Sanders' character and his cronies plan to rob a bank), upturning the normal Production Code stringent about good and bad behavior with the nominal acknowledgement of a proper moral code at the end. It would be just as easy to imagine the film failing if a lackluster director had tried to maintain the balance of its complications, and it is also easy to imagine why Sanders was so taken by Sirk's skills, since Sirk basically lets Sanders do his thing while making sure that everything around him looks as good and moves as smoothly as it can. Gene Lockhart, Carole Landis, Signe Hasso and a young Akim Tamiroff, co-star.

The picture on the Blu-ray is pretty much spotless, with finely detailed contrasts, and looks much nicer than the speckle-ridden DVD, which also has a softer image. The monophonic sound on the BD is more problematic. Not only is it unusually noisy for a movie from its era, but there are a couple of passages where it is outright distorted for a moment or two. The DVD's sound isn't much better. The DVD has no captioning. Both films on the BD have optional English subtitles, and there is a trailer on the BD for **Scandal in Paris**.

Film historian Wade Major provides a very good commentary on the BD. Not only does he discuss the backgrounds and careers of the cast and crew, but he also goes over the history of the historical figure that Sanders' character is based upon, and he breaks down the actions and details within a scene to explain how they contribute to the film's themes. "She's out of focus and she steps into focus and takes the scene over from him, and as he walks away, she literally has taken the scene away from George Sanders."

We reviewed a Kino DVD release of the 1947 **Lured** in Sep 00, but it is the sort of film that one could watch many times over without remorse, as is the case with pretty much all of Sirk's features. Lucille Ball is an American showgirl down on her luck who agrees to act as bait in London for a serial

killer preying on single women. Then she meets Sanders, a wealthy nightclub owner, and the situation becomes very complicated. The film has more red herrings than Ball has red hairs, but it is exquisitely composed and superbly acted from start to finish. Charles Coburn, for example, played in dozens of movies and always played Charles Coburn, with the director barely paying attention to him after handing him the script and showing him his marks. Coburn, who plays the chief of police, does pretty much the same thing here, except that Sirk does pay attention to him, and tweaks his various bits of business just enough so that, miraculously, you really do believe that the character is a hard-working and conscientious policeman with the weight of his city's safety on his shoulders. Boris Karloff, Cedric Hardwicke, Alan Mowbray, Joseph Calleia, George Zucco and Alan Napier are also featured in the 103-minute thriller. They're all fantastic.

Again, the picture is substantially improved over Kino's effort. It is sharp and spotless, with finely detailed contrasts that accentuate the care with which Sirk and cinematographer William Daniels designed every shot. The monophonic sound is also in good shape, and Sirk pays serious attention to the film's sound design, particularly during a sequence in an echoey morgue. There is another trailer, and another good commentary, this time by film expert Jeremy Arnold, who shares biographical details about many members of the cast and crew, supplies a viable history of United Artists, and discusses the specific strengths of the film's design and construction.

As good as it is, however, **Lured** isn't even Sirk's best thriller. Paramount and Olive Films have released Sirk's 1948 United Artists feature, **Sleep, My Love**, on Blu-ray (UPC#887090076609, \$30) and on DVD (UPC#887090076500, \$25), with a bizarrely modern jacket design that suggests the film is a contemporary erotic drama and not an older black-and-white romantic noir. We don't want to say anything about the plot except that it begins with Colbert awakening in a train compartment and screaming. Within those first couple of minutes, the plot hooks start coming and they never stop.

The full screen picture has some speckling, but truth be told we forgot to pay close attention to it once the story got underway. The monophonic sound is okay (among other things, there is a sequence at a Chinese wedding reception that takes wonderful advantage of traditional Chinese music instruments to blend Eastern and Western music motifs) and there is no captioning. The BD presentation has a better image crispness and a more solid audio playback than the DVD, and is preferable. Also featured in the wonderful cast are Robert Cummings and Don Ameche, with Raymond Burr, George Coulouris and Keye Luke, among others, as well as Hazel Brooks fulfilling the very definition of sultry, traipsing about in her underwear as if she were cast in the film the jacket art is promoting. Joseph Valentine's cinematography is outstanding, augmented by Sirk's vigorous blocking, which accentuates every threatening detail. The performances are excellent—and we would place Brooks at the top of the list—and the plot contains moments we have never seen duplicated elsewhere. Running 98 minutes, the film is not only irresistible, it offers further proof in every scene and every shot that Sirk belongs in a prominent position in the pantheon of the world's greatest filmmakers.

Picturesque ugliness

It seems that every year there is great critical ballyhoo over a movie that turns out to perhaps have a wee bit of artistic integrity but is nevertheless terrible entertainment, and for 2022 that film is **The Banshees of Inisherin**, a 20th Century Searchlight Buena Vista Home Entertainment release (UPC#786-936895346, \$20). Set on an island off the coast of Ireland in 1923, the film is about the disruption of the platonic bond between two men because one becomes bored with the other, and the other doesn't understand why things have changed. Directed by Martin McDonagh, the appeal the film has generated is baffling. The landscape is picturesque, and while the humanity of the island's inhabitants is ugly, that didn't prevent one of our favorite murder mystery series, **Single-Handed** (Sep 11), from being transcendently spellbinding. Running 114 minutes, however, **Banshees** has no murder (well, it might, but none that anyone pays attention to, at least when it comes to people) and insufficient counterpoints to balance the darker hearts of some of the inhabitants with the good will of others. The film just wants to rub your face in the frustrations the characters feel, hoping that the gorgeous landscapes and a few quirky character idiosyncrasies will be sufficient to sustain an interest. It is not even that well directed. Twice, when a character enters a house, another character is either sleeping or not in the house at all (up on a rise, instead, walking with a dog). In both instances, a record is playing on a phonograph, as if it had been left on by the owner of the house. In 1923, however, such a record could only have played for less than 5 minutes, hardly enough time for the owner to fall asleep, let alone walk up the hill with his dog. Brendan Gleeson delivers a lovely performance as the man who has become bored, while Colin Farrell straddles an unrealistic requirement to be an attractive movie star while fulfilling the role of the character who doesn't understand what has happened. The more his character tries, the more of a turn off the film becomes.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image transfer has a deliberate softness and is otherwise finely detailed, with accurate hues. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a workable dimensionality. There is an audio track that describes the action ("He gently touches the pony's head as he walks over to Jenny, who lies motionless on her side in the grass, a finger lying in a patch of vomit near her mouth."), and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Populated action comedy

We guarantee you will cringe during the first 5 minutes of Sammo Hung's 1986 Golden Harvest production, **Millionaires' Express**, and that is regardless of which of the four versions of the film you choose to watch on the two-platter Arrow Video Blu-ray (UPC#760137118343, \$40). Hung's character is stripped to his underwear and running around in real snow. Yes, at one point he and the character he is fighting form a huge snowball as they roll down a hill and the snowball is fake, sure, but the snow around it clearly isn't and every time Hung goes face first into that snow, the chills invade a viewer's psyche. The rest of the movie has a more temperature-friendly, Wild West setting (western China, that is, during the Twenties, give or take a decade), but the cringes continue, as characters fall flat on the ground from high places and otherwise get bashed and bruised in a steady, frantic display of don't-try-this-at-home stunts.

Yuen Biao, Richard Norton and Rosamund Kwan co-star, and Cynthia Rothrock also has a few scenes, with many more Hong Kong stars showing up here and there. The story is an unbridled mess. Hung's character attempts to attract commerce in a new frontier town by forcing a train to stop there so the passengers have to go to the local hotel while the tracks are repaired. An abundance of intrigue and romantic duplicities on the train are then carried over to the hotel, which is further complicated when scores of bandits on horses show up. But all of that is unimportant. The film has several laugh aloud slapstick moments, and a continuing stream of try-anything humor and dare-anybody stunts, with everybody who's anybody in Hong Kong pitching in. Some of the gags make you wince, but others have you laughing heartily or opening your eyes in awe.

The original 97-minute *Hong Kong Theatrical Cut* and a 102-minute *Extended Cut* appear on the first platter. Both are in Cantonese. The second platter has a 93-minute *English Export Cut* (a gag about urinating on a Gatling gun to keep it cooled down and working has been removed, among other things) in English and a 109-minute *Hybrid Cut* in Cantonese that appears to include everything that was deemed as acceptable or unacceptable to the cultures the other versions were intended for. On all four, the picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, and the color transfer is excellent, shifting from looking basically terrific to looking brightly colored and exceptionally crisp. On all four, the monophonic sound is reasonably strong. The three Cantonese versions have optional English subtitles but the *English Export Cut* is not captioned. The second platter has no additional special features.

The first platter includes three trailers, a 4-minute presentation of the opening and closing credits in English, a nice 21-minute interview with Biao ("I remember the kissing part with Rosamund Kwan the most. I seldom have kissing scenes in my movies. Never tried it. But in this movie, I did it with Rosamund Kwan."—It is a very passionate kiss, or a lampoon of a very passionate kiss, and was most unusual moment for a Hong Kong feature from that era.), and an enjoyable 30-minute interview with actress Yukari Oshima, who talks about getting her start on the film and about the differences between doing fight scenes in Hong Kong and doing fight scenes in Japan. "If you get hurt, they don't make a big fuss in the Hong Kong film industry. I think there's that difference in the way of thinking. In Japan they're concerned about whose responsibility it is if you get injured." Needless to say, she likes the *laissez faire* of Hong Kong much better.

The *Hong Kong Cut* has a breathless and rewarding commentary featuring Asian film expert Frank Djeng, who speaks quickly because he has so much to say about the film's many cameo appearances, its production details (he identifies every location), the verbal humor that might get lost in the translation, the skills involved in the stunts, the film's references to other movies and different cultures, the footage that appears or doesn't appear in each version of the film, and why the movie was such a huge domestic hit. "Comedy in this film is generally pretty broad, to the point where it is even cartoonish at times, playing in a silly and infectious kind of way."

The *Extended Cut* has a commentary featuring Hong Kong movie experts and participants Mike Leeder and Arne Venema, who also speak quickly as they react to everybody appearing on the screen and share anecdotes about Hung, the production, and related experiences on other films. Where Djeng's track is definitive, Leeder and Venema then add color and background, but it is worthwhile if you are a Hong Kong film enthusiast.

A third segment, running 17 minutes, features a conversation between Djeng and Rothrock as they react to different scenes from the film and Rothrock talks specifically about her memories doing the shoot, including who actually got hurt when. Also featured are another 55 minutes of interviews with Rothrock, talking about her career and the film. Although some of it is repetitive, she does share some more cute anecdotes, reveals that Hung had a serious gambling problem that often put him in a bad mood, and offers her insights about working in Hong Kong on action films.

Hung also speaks for 26 minutes in a pair of interviews, explaining how much he loves westerns, which the film was patterned after, and sharing his praise for some of the stars he worked with in the film ("About 75% of the actors in Hong Kong were in that movie."), along with describing some of his stunts, which is enough to make you cringe again when you hear what actually happened to him as he performed them.

Perfection

If the definition of perfection is, 'something that cannot be improved upon,' then the 1973 Universal production starring Fred Williamson, **That Man Bolt**, released on Blu-ray by Universal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC#738329261672, \$25), is sheer perfection. Ostensibly a Blaxploitation feature, the film is actually closer in spirit to **Enter the Dragon**. Williamson plays a professional courier who is hired to transport a briefcase full of cash from Hong Kong to North America. Because he does something unexpected to secure the cash, however, he is targeted in Los Angeles by the people who hired him, and after someone close to him is killed, he returns to Hong Kong to find out why and take revenge. The cash is always with him, and he dips into it from time to time when he needs something. Whether it is the stunt fighters in Hong Kong or the stunt drivers in Los Angeles (the film had two directors, Henry Levin and David Lowell Rich—one apparently working in Asia and the other in America), the action scenes are terrific and Williamson, who did many of his own stunts in his career, holds his own in the center of it so the cameras don't have to cut away for his leaps or his falls. Teresa Graves sings *She's a Lady* in a wonderful nightclub scene before bedding down the hero, and Byron Webster does a suitable poor man's Robert Morley bit as a British intelligence official. Running 104 minutes, the plot is decent enough to keep things moving while sustaining its logic. The action is constant but never monotonous, the climax is full of explosions, and the film has 1973 style not just in its costumes (Williamson picked up his outfits from inner city establishments) and décor, but with its marvelously typical, funky musical score, which sets the pace and the tone for the show as a whole. You really can't ask for anything more, since the film delivers everything you could hope for from the moment it begins.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer is fresh and the image is sharp. Once in a while a speckle pops up, but that is the extent of the wear. The monophonic sound is solid and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer and a fantastic 16-minute retrospective interview with Williamson. Holding an unlit cigar (he says he never smokes them, he just uses them as a sort of pacifier), he talks about his career, his experiences making the film and his disappointment that Universal did not follow up with a franchise. "It was a great experience playing this character. It was a strange relationship I had with Universal. They signed me to a three-picture deal. **That Man Bolt** was the first one, and the film did well. But then, they became, I think, intimidated by all this Blaxploitation stuff, and having their film called a Blaxploitation film even though it wasn't and they had gone out of their way to make a different kind of film and yet still they had programmed into this category. And what they did was pay me off. They said, 'Look, we're just going to relax for a while and see if we want to make any more films with a black star. We'll pay you off.' And they did, they paid me off for two films I never made."

Our dancing ancestors

Replacing poetry and before the Internet, the movies offered young people a chance to compare notes about how to conduct romance. The romances they saw on the screen were often among rich youngsters, but that was an easy way to sustain the dreamlike escapism that was selling the romance, and also eliminate any side issues or difficulties that would stand in the way of the characters achieving their goals or frustrating their rivals.

The ending cleans up the conflict a little too conveniently, but up to that point, MGM's 1928 **Our Dancing Daughters**, released on Blu-ray by Warner Bros. as a *WB Archive Collection* title (UPC#810103686861, \$22), is a sophisticated exploration of flapper romances. The film has music, sound effects, and a moment when you hear the heroine's name called out, but otherwise it is a silent film with intertitles ("I love you — Then I hate you — Then I love you again."), depicting wealthy teenagers and college kids having parties and navigating the complex shoals of sex and love. At times looking lovely and youthful, and at times looking like Jack Lemmon in **Some Like It Hot**, Joan Crawford stars as a self-assured and well-to-do party girl who falls for a wealthy but serious young football star, played by Johnny Mack Brown. She is open, carefree and earnest with him, but a less moneyed and more manipulative predator, played by Anita Page, puts on an innocent act and steals him away. In a significant subplot, Dorothy Sebastian plays a friend of Crawford's character who tells her own fiancé that she is not a virgin. They still marry, but the situation starts to gnaw at him when she is untruthful about other things. Nevertheless, the film's moral lesson, that honesty trumps promiscuity, is sold in a mature and uncondescending manner, much, in all likelihood, to the delight of the kids who flocked to the film, and to the horror of their parents. In any case, that maturity has enabled the 84-minute feature to withstand the passage of nearly a century, as subsequent generations confront the same delights and horrors.

The full screen black-and-white picture looks very nice. Other than some disguised splices, the image is free of wear. There is some mild, natural grain and a slight softness to the cinematography, but the picture looks about as fresh as a silent film is capable of looking. The sound is reasonably clear and strong. Brown, incidentally, was shunted into cowboy roles for most of his career, but in the late Twenties and very early Thirties he was an effective romantic lead in contemporary dramas. His performance, directed by Harry Beaumont, is not only terrific, but helps to sell the joy and anguish the female characters feel over knowing Brown's character and losing him.

Jungle passions

A pre-Code jungle romance, the 1933 Paramount production, **White Woman**, has been released by Universal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329261788, \$25). Charles Laughton is a slovenly rubber baron living upstream in Malaysia and, constantly falling out of her chemise, Carole Lombard is the down-on-her-luck shanty singer with a disgraced past who is being pressured to get out of town. She agrees to marry Laughton's character because she has no other choice, even though she's unlikely to find any more bleach for her hair by doing so. When she gets to the plantation, she meets a much less slovenly overseer played by Kent Taylor and immediately takes up with him. Laughton's character acts like he doesn't care, but he makes life miserable for the two of them and then, although why they haven't done it much earlier is never explained, the natives go on the warpath. Charles Bickford and Percy Kilbride co-star.

Running a simple 68 minutes, the film is too brisk and too bland to get very steamy, but it doesn't wear out its welcome, either. Relying on the flair of the movie stars and their performances, and aided by impressively dense production designs, the film attempts to convey the ideas of lust, passion and horror, and does so adequately enough that audiences at the time readily filled in the blanks, while viewers today, with the bemusement of how quaint movies were back then, can do so, as well.

The full screen black-and-white picture is in very good shape for its age. The image is a little soft around the edges and a bit grainy, but contrasts are crisp and the source material is free of overt damage. The monophonic sound is coherent and there are optional English subtitles. In an excellent commentary track, two film experts, Allan Arkush and Daniel Kermer, absolutely rake the film and the director, Scott Walker, over the coals, talking about the careers of the cast and the crew, but pointing out, in scene after scene (in effect, offering a comprehensive filmmaking lesson), exactly why the movie lacks the fire it ought to have. "The director is not aware of what effect his shots will have on the viewer. He doesn't understand the basic grammar. **The Letter** is the mountaintop, and this is the bottom of the hill."

"If she was dumber, she would have been happier."

Shelley Winters, who knew her quite well, proffered the quote we have used in the headline, speaking about Marilyn Monroe. Monroe may not have met the qualifications to join Mensa, but she was intelligent, literate and capable of understanding the world around her. As Winters implies, she saw and understood the fierceness underlying the world's desire for her attention, and this understanding caused a head-on crash with her desire for attention from the world, a desire confounded by an emotionally fragmented and developmentally troubled childhood that stemmed a little bit from being born out of wedlock, a little bit from being shuffled through foster homes, and a great deal more from remaining bonded to an emotionally unstable mother who periodically disappeared into asylums. We cannot say that the motion picture industry will never generate another movie star like her again, but that industry is not constant. It alters greatly from one generation to the next, and even from one decade to the next. There is now too much sex readily available in media to enable one person to become such an overwhelming embodiment of sexual attraction. For Marilyn Monroe (nee Norma Jean Baker, nee Norma Jean Mortenson), when it came to the world, her timing was perfect, but when it came to her own self, the world's timing was a disaster.

Three significant films and a couple of documentaries have been put together by Film Chest Media Group in a three-platter set entitled **Blonde: The Marilyn Stories** (UPC#874757065694, \$25). None are even remotely definitive, but together they present a viable portrait of Monroe's private life and public career, creating a decent starting point for further exploration. The shows have passable monophonic audio tracks and there is no captioning.

The strongest program, *Blonde*, comes from the most interesting source, a two-part 2001 telefilm based upon an historical novel by Joyce Carol Oates, directed by Joyce Chopra. The characters are mostly drawn from history, but then passed through Oates' processing to create a distinctive interpretation of Monroe's skills, vulnerabilities and victimization. Oates lurks as a presence within the Monroe character, played quite effectively by Poppy Montgomery, perking up whenever the topic turns to screenplays or other matters involving writing, and setting her marriage to Arthur Miller as the story's climactic passage. Although she had several inconsequential marriages, her two most publicized nuptials, with Miller and with Joe DiMaggio (identified only as 'The Baseball Player' in the film) were symbolically diametric in their representation of the soul of America's men (a symbolism made triangular by the intimations of her relationship with 'the president'). Symbolism aside, however, the 173-minute program explores the actress's childhood lengthily, to the point where it is not so much remarkable that she became a famous movie star, but that she managed to become a functioning adult at all. In every instance, every opportunity and every challenge, she has to face a wall of men she barely knows who are either judging her or salivating over her, or both, simultaneously, and it would be enough to drive anyone crazy.

Skye McCole Bartusiak plays Monroe as a child, and Ann-Margret is both excellent and unsettling as her mother. Wallace Shawn, Eric Bogosian, Kirstie Alley, Griffin Dunne and Patrick Dempsey are also featured (the characters often speak directly to the screen to embellish the drama with

emotional insights). The full screen picture transfer looks very nice, with fresh and stable hues.

The 1991 telefilm, *Marilyn and Me*, is about a brief marital relationship Monroe had with a reporter who later became a screenwriter, Jesse Dobson, told from his perspective. While some of the narrative overlaps the story in *Blonde*, the 94-minute program goes into more detail about a period skimmed over in the longer show, when Monroe was trying to get started at Columbia Pictures. While it is not as tuned into feminist dynamics (which Monroe's presence accentuated) as *Blonde* is—how can it, since it is presented from a man's perspective?—it adds to a more balanced portrait of Monroe's emotional fragility, while verifying some of the first film's historical points and filling in the details on others. Although she is not given an opportunity to reach as deeply or convincingly into herself as Montgomery was, Susan Griffiths is fine as Monroe. Jesse Dabson, the far too little seen Joel Grey, and Terry Moore co-star.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color picture is a little softer than the image on *Blonde*, and hues are occasionally paler, but overall it is in passable condition.

A somewhat startling feature film from 1976, *Goodbye, Norma Jean*, is focused solely on Monroe's earliest years, ending just as she makes her Hollywood breakthrough. The only problem with the 97-minute movie is that you don't know how that happens, because every casting call, every social meeting and every opportunity she is given results in some sort of assault or other indignity. She gives out loads of quid and never gets any quid in return. The film is rated 'R,' but it can't really be considered soft porn, since, although there are dabs of nudity, the erotic sequences are minimal. It is what is implied, constantly, that starts to wear on you after a while, although the frankness that is involved is probably closer to the truth than what the other two films are willing to admit.

Although it represents a deterioration in dramatic quality, the film is rescued, if it is rescued at all, by the compelling presence of Misty Rowe in the leading role. Montgomery and Griffiths readily convey suitable imitations of Monroe's public persona and the manner of her appeal, but only Rowe has that kind of appeal herself. Hence, it is the complexity with which she presents herself as what Monroe was like when she was learning what worked and what didn't work in front of the camera that enables an understanding of Monroe's exceptional screen presence. In effect, the film would be dismissible if presented by itself, but in combination with the other two, it creates a compelling portrait of Monroe's angels and demons, and the battle that raged between them.

The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The colors are reasonably bright and fresh, but the source material has extensive speckling.

As a special treat, the real Monroe appears in a 1953 episode of *The Jack Benny Show* (hosted by Lucky Strike cigarettes—the imbedded commercials are amazing, including a lei made of cigarettes) for an extended skit in which she is a dream character Benny meets while sailing back from Hawaii on a luxury liner. Running 27 minutes, the show and the skit are typical Benny material, where for every eleven gags that are utterly lame and humorless, there is one so inspired and well timed that it can't fail to generate an impulsive laugh, as you then suffer through another eleven, waiting for the next one. Rochester Anderson is also featured, which for 1953 is impressive. As for Monroe, she is wonderful, especially after one sits through close to 6 hours of drama emphasizing how unhinged she was, and her mere presence can encourage a welcoming smile, which turns into a grin as she lands her punchlines and pretends to be oblivious to Benny's hamming while so obviously biting her cheek to maintain a straight face.

Finally, there are two black-and-white documentaries, a 1986 program running 24 minutes and narrated by Mike Wallace entitled *Marilyn Monroe*, and a 1966 program running 52 minutes and narrated by John Huston entitled *The Legend of Marilyn Monroe*. Despite the later production date of the Wallace piece (technically, bits of its musical score are stereophonic), it is the Huston program that is the valuable one, having been produced when individuals such as grade school teachers and foster parents were still alive and able to share their stories. Also, although he is an actor himself, there is a genuine connection between Huston having worked with Monroe as a director and talking about her that Wallace cannot duplicate. It is still worthwhile to watch the two documentaries together, even though there is a lot of shared material (so why hasn't Sony ever released *Ladies of the Chorus*?—her footage in it looks terrific). They bring a perspective to the dramatic programs, but also strengthen the basic truths of their dramatizations (the ambiguous grins on some of the men being interviewed take on new meaning after you become aware of how much they pawed her in their offices). The Huston program also has a longer and more fascinating clip of the JFK birthday celebration, and the nervous delay that occurred before she finally came out on the stage.

Finally, as both programs point out, while Monroe was on her honeymoon in Japan with DiMaggio, she left him for several days to appear in a few USO-type shows in Korea. The shows were an enormous deal, absolutely, enhancing her already soaring credibility as an entertainer and a star, but they obviously put a sudden strain, as well, on a marriage that would not last the year. While sharing the iconic footage, neither documentary says how it was pulled off or who arranged it (and why didn't DiMaggio go with her?—the troops would have been excited to see him, especially during the hospital visits). Now that would make a terrific drama.

Anderson's life

A touching 2022 documentary about the man who created his own unique genre—the science-fiction puppet TV series—**Gerry Anderson: A Life Uncharted**, has been released by MPI Home Video (UPC#03-0306746395, \$25). Although there are plenty of snippets, the film does not go into too many details about the actual productions of his programs, and sadly the DVD has no special features where such material could have made a terrific supplement, but the film itself is still highly worthwhile. Despite all of his accomplishments, Anderson had a somewhat messed up life that makes for a fascinating 92-minute program. His parents were at constant odds, his only brother died during World War II, his first marriage was a mistake of youth, and his second marriage, to the woman who shared his spotlight, Sylvia Anderson, was an even more spectacular disaster. The film progresses steadily through his life, his career and his relationships (his final marriage was a saving grace), and then concludes with a passage that is guaranteed to generate tears, about his descent into dementia.

Directed by Benjamin Field, the film makes extensive use of recorded conversations with Anderson himself, who has been animated seamlessly with modern computer effects so that it looks as if he is sitting for an interview. His youngest son, from that last marriage, Jamie Anderson, was also heavily involved in the feature, and the final part of the film is sort of presented from his perspective. Other former collaborators also reminisce about working on the various shows with Anderson and there is even interview footage with Sylvia recalling her experiences on the shows and working with Gerry.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image quality is fine, and the stereo sound gives the music a pleasing dimensionality. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

Sex continues, only it isn't the same

In the days when they were young, they were the trendsetters, although they still looked upon life with puzzlement, unsure of how they fit into the world. What was once **Sex and the City** (Aug 00) was topped off with a pair of feature films (Jan 20) that essentially certified the end of the remaining shards of youth of the characters, showing them settled into—if not normal, then—steady adult lives. But now, the HBO series has been given a true sequel, **And Just Like That... The Complete First Season**, a Warner Bros. Home Box Office Studio Distribution Services release (UPC#8839-29795758, \$25), with the characters on the other side of the age divide, as they try to understand the social and fashion trends that have superseded theirs, and they discover that they are still looking at life with puzzlement, from the other direction.

One actress, Kim Cattrall, dropped out, but the other three, Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon and Kristin Davis, reprise and carry forward their characters into their silver years. It will not be spoiling things—since everybody who cares, knows—to report that Chris Noth's character dies in the first episode of the 2022 program, and the primary arc of the season is how Parker's character deals with that death, reconfiguring her life, once again, as an urban single. Nixon's character essentially discards the stability of her life in search of greater rewards, while Davis' character is forced to cope with her children reaching adolescence and the conflict between what she sees for them and what they see for themselves. Occasionally hysterical and consistently amusing, the season is also very rich in genuine emotional exploration, as it not only tackles this stage of life with the same gusto and frankness that **Sex and the City** tackled the initial stages of adulthood, but looks at what was learned previously, from a new perspective. In many ways, the series seems better, as if Cattrall's overly libidinous character had always been a distraction. The show is richer, warmer and truer without her.

Ten episodes are presented on two platters running a total of 397 minutes. Each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is slick, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound brings a passable dimensionality to the musical score and periodic pop hits. There are optional English and Chinese subtitles.

Action series

An Amazon action crime thriller series that is utterly captivating because of its purity, **Reacher Season One**, has been released in a three-platter set by Paramount (UPC#191329235492, \$26). Alan Ritchson stars as the eponymous hero of the series, which is based upon a novel by Lee Child with a recurring character that Tom Cruise played in a couple of feature films. Ritchson is more like Christopher Reeve than like Cruise, and part of the show's appeal is the way that he is presented, somewhat nonchalantly, as a towering angelic superhero. He's stronger, faster and smarter than everyone around him, but his character, despite having been in both war and law enforcement before becoming a drifter, acts as if he is oblivious to the world's evils or the darker hearts of men. He's an innocent, whose well deserved idyll is forever being interrupted. Spread across eight episodes and running 384 minutes, the hero strolls into a small town in Georgia and is immediately picked up as a vagrant and charged with a murder. He befriends a couple of the police officers, however, and demonstrates not only his physical prowess, but his Sherlockian crime solving skills. As more murders accumulate, he ends up helping the cops stem a moral rot that has spread through the town.

Everything about the show, from its pacing and staging to the performances, is precise and clear, so that as it moves through the standard tropes of an action film—betrayal, surprises, sneering henchmen, car chases,

fist fights, gun fights, explosions and so on—it does so in an almost definitive manner, as if it were demonstrating what a perfectly crafted action crime thriller is as much as it is being one. Because of the systematic plot turns, rousing action, cute cultural references (with an array of fantastic blues tunes on the soundtrack), distinctive characters and episode cliffhangers, it is very easy to start watching the show and then to not want to turn it off until the whole thing is over.

Each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is solid, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has an energetic dimensionality (the music also sounds terrific). There is an audio track that describes the action ("Oscar's eyes widen and he ducks under a bench. Reacher drives a pickup truck into the station, pinning Baker to the holding cell bars. Blood pours from Baker's ears, nose and mouth. Oscar stands. Smoke rises from the truck as Reacher steps out. Oscar walks out of the cell."), optional English subtitles and 30 minutes of passable promotional featurettes.

The French as seen by the British

Perry Mason, Burke's Law—the popular murder mystery TV shows from the early Sixties had the same template, crafting personalities and minor dramas that are gradually peeled away or revealed as the hero gets closer to the truth of the crime. The murder is the 'MacGuffin,' and the point is the cat-and-mouse game being played between the hero and the guest stars, more often than not leading to a 'Least Likely Suspect.' Gaumont and Kino Classics have uncovered a murder mystery series originally broadcast by the BBC in 1960 and 1961, based upon the popular French mysteries by Georges Simenon, **Maigret**, which has a different template. Yes, sometimes there is a Least Likely Suspect, or other trappings one associates with the norm, but other times the identity of the murderer is almost irrelevant, and in almost all of the stories, the characters are there to service the concept of murder and its complications, not the other way around. As was the norm with early British TV, the show's interiors were shot on videotape while the exteriors were shot mostly without sound, on film. In this case, a crew took the primary cast members—Rupert Davies plays the pipe smoking police detective hero the show is named after—to Paris and staged lots of shots of them walking about on the streets with familiar landmarks or, at least, storefronts with a Parisian flair, in the background. But while the setting is Paris, the characters are usually recognizable British stereotypes even though they ostensibly aren't supposed to be, which gives the show an amusing undercurrent, especially when the dialog, as it does once in a while, drifts to specifically French topics or the characters are given superficial French accoutrements. It feels quaintly schizophrenic, in a good way.

Thirteen 55-minute episodes are presented on three Blu-ray platters identified as *The Classic BBC Series, Maigret Season 1* (UPC#73832926-0958, \$50). Each platter has a 'Play All' option, and there are optional English subtitles. The monophonic sound is okay. The full screen black-and-white picture is best viewed on a smaller screen, as it is subject to repeated smearing and displacement. In that the series has long been out of circulation and the effort that went into its restoration, as is demonstrated on a 2-minute featurette, was extensive, it is best to be thankful for what has been achieved, and the program is viewable if one makes allowances for the basic shortcomings that will be encountered. The emotions of the characters are clear, and that is what is important.

The first episode broadcast, *Murder in Montmartre*, was in all likelihood chosen for the strength of its Parisian location footage and not for its narrative. A striptease girl tells the police that she has overheard plans for a murder. Soon, she herself is dead, and shortly thereafter, the murder she described takes place. The remainder of the episode is exposition, as the Inspector and his squad follow suspects around Montmartre, while poking and prodding to find out more information. The actual identity of the murderer is almost irrelevant, as the focus of the show is on the threat of murders occurring and how the characters react to those threats. Although there is less location shooting, the next episode, *Unscheduled Departure*, is much better. An electric train enthusiast comes into the hero's office claiming that his wife is going to poison him. Then the wife comes in separately and tells the Inspector that her husband thinks she wants to poison him. Somebody eventually dies, but even though most of the action takes place within the confines of the office, the twists and tensions are great fun. More importantly, it is the conversations the characters have about being poisoned that becomes the core of the drama. In *The Burglar's Wife*, the title character tells the Inspector that the burglar saw a body the night he was robbing a house. The Inspector goes to the house and gradually pieces together who was killed, why the person was killed, and how. The Inspector's gun is stolen from his apartment in *The Revolver*, and while tracking it down, he has to travel to London. The plot, about a plan to murder a blackmailer, is generally uninteresting, but the point of the episode is to put the hero in London and play with the differences between the French and the English. Nevertheless, it is not one of the stronger episodes.

A more enjoyable whodunit, *The Old Lady*, is set in Brittany. An elderly woman decides not to have her sleeping medicine one night, but her maid drinks it instead and dies of poison. The Inspector travels to the small town and interviews the various suspects to put together why and how the murder was committed. Two older women are seen frantically running out of a house with a suitcase full of valuables at the beginning of *Liberty Bar*. They are stopped, however, and a search turns up a freshly buried body in the garden. This time there is location work done in Antibes, as the Inspector has to once again piece together not just who committed the crime, but who the victim was and why he was murdered. It seems that there were two more

women in town to whom he was attentive, as well as other characters with connections to him. It is not one of the better episodes, but some of the performances aren't bad (one nice thing about the series is that, unlike American television at the time, a prostitute can be a prostitute without pretense). A much better episode, however, *A Man of Quality* also takes place in the countryside, where a man in a hotel room is found to have been both shot and stabbed. His wife, back in Paris, is surprised to learn that he hasn't been a traveling salesman for more than a decade, but the Inspector discovers that the man's son was seen talking to him the day before, as was a local aristocrat. Once again, the point of the story is not who committed the killing, but how the event unravels the past and the present for a number of characters. A drunk in a seaside tavern brags about knowing Inspector Maigret and is found dead the following morning in *My Friend the Inspector*. The story is reasonably entertaining, but a special note should be made that it involves the prices of paintings from the Impressionist era, which were decent at the time, but not astronomical the way they are now, putting an interesting perspective on the narrative.

The opening episode on the final platter, *The Mistake*, is excellent. The story is pretty straightforward—the pregnant mistress of a prominent surgeon is murdered—but the performances are terrific and the pacing of the drama and the suspense is highly involving. What's more, supporting actor Ewen Solon, who plays the Inspector's assistant, does a fantastic stunt, falling over backwards from a barstool as a suspect brushes past him to escape. The subsequent chase through a market and across a railroad yard is also impressively staged. The second episode, *On Holiday*, is equally satisfying. The Inspector is on vacation, but his wife comes down with appendicitis and is confined to a local hospital. There, he learns of another patient, whose plight leads to the discovery of more than one murder. Another doctor is involved. Again, the performances are terrific, while the pace and staging is sharper than it is in the early episodes. Additionally, in these two episodes particularly, the characters are closer to being French, or at least French as interpreted by British actors, than they are just British archetypes dropped into French locales. When the lover of a fish store owner drops in for a noontime tryst, it gets hot and heavy in a playful way that is, well, not what one associates with British romance. A policeman following a suspect steps into a nest of American gangsters in *The Experts*. The episode has a lot of action and some cringe-inducing American accents, but it isn't one of the stronger pieces, playing more to pizzazz than to intellect. Another policeman is shot outside of a boarding house in *The Cactus*, and so the Inspector takes a room and gets to know his neighbors as he determines what happened and why. While better than the previous episode, it is not up to the level of the first two on the platter. The show ends with a particularly interesting episode that involves a murder, but is more about the weight of guilt, *The Children's Game*. It begins with a man committing suicide on a train in front of the Inspector, and it is by seeking to discover who the man was that he pieces together what had happened to the man and his companions in the past.

All's Welles

At least a half-dozen dramatic films have been made (and more are on the way) about the artistic achievements of Orson Welles. The USC Originals Lightyear release, *Voodoo Macbeth* (UPC#810069450629, \$20), about his 1935 Harlem production of the William Shakespeare play, is not one of the strongest entries in this small but growing genre, yet it is still appealing for the basic matters of curiosity that it fulfills. At the time, Welles was doing radio and stage productions in New York City, and John Houseman landed a good-sized New Deal arts grant, which he hoped to use to invigorate African-American theater productions. Rather than being cautious, he and actress Rose McClendon decided to open with a splash that would generate publicity for the project and earn some returns to justify the government's investment. According to the 2021 film, Welles' idea (or, rather, is wife Virginia's), relocating the story to Haiti to justify an all-black cast, was just the thing, except that the actual stage talent available in Harlem was barely up to the task. McClendon, played by Inger Tudor, assisted in the production and initially intended to play Lady Macbeth, while suffering from a terminal ailment. A couple of the other performers had never acted on the stage before. Running 108 minutes, the film was produced in part by USC, with a committee of ten listed under the director credits (along with eight writers and eleven producers). Few had any previous professional experience in filmmaking. The lives and problems of the individual characters are interesting and the film is certainly depicting history, but it doesn't always ring true and not just because it is unlikely that the black characters would be smoking filtered cigarettes in that era. The staging of the play seems ridiculously inept at first, and then magically coalesces in the finale, with the changes from the one state of affairs to the other having occurred off screen. Ultimately, the film conveys an atmosphere and fills in some background information about the event and its era (How unusual was it at the time to relocate a Shakespeare setting?), but fails to resurrect the impact it achieved or explain beyond the most basic details how the show's success was realized.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image transfer is fine. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound brings an occasional dimensionality to the proceedings and is reasonably clear. There are optional English subtitles. A newsreel clip from the actual production, which was also featured on the Olive Signature Blu-ray release of Welles' *Macbeth* (Jan 17), not only plays over the end credits of *Voodoo Macbeth*, but is included as a separate 4-minute segment in the special features. A group of the directors, writers and cast members provide a commentary track, sharing anecdotes about their experiences putting the film together and what they hoped to accomplish.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: The Criterion Collection is issuing Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* in 4K format with an introduction from 2003 by Bergman; a commentary and video afterward by Bergman expert Peter Cowie; *Bergman Island* (2006), a feature-length documentary on Bergman by Marie Nyreröd (not to be confused with Mia Hansen-Løve's 2021 drama—see page 2); an audio interview from 1998 with Max von Sydow; a tribute to Bergman from 1989 by Woody Allen; and *Bergman 101*, a selected video filmography tracing Bergman's career, narrated by Cowie. Ruben Östlund's *Triangle of Sadness*, a Neon production, will also be in 4K format and will feature an interview with Östlund and filmmaker and actor Johan Jonason; and two featurettes about the film's special effects and about a challenging day on set. Other Neon titles slated for release by Criterion in the future include *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, *Saint Omar*, *Moonage Daydream* and *Petite Maman*. Appearing in 4K format as well, Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King* will come with a commentary featuring Gilliam; interviews with Gilliam, producer Lynda Obst, screenwriter Richard LaGravenese, and Jeff Bridges, Amanda Plummer, and Mercedes Ruelh; interviews with artists Keith Greco and Vincent Jefferds on the creation of the film's Red Knight; an interview from 2006 with Robin Williams; a video essay featuring Bridges' on-set photographs; footage from 1991 of Bridges training as a radio personality with acting coach Stephen W. Bridgewater; deleted scenes, with commentary by Gilliam; and costume tests. Steve McQueen's amalgam of short-ish (one runs over 2 hours) films, *Small Axe*, will include a conversation between McQueen and writer and professor Paul Gilroy; behind-the-scenes featurettes including interviews with McQueen, executive producer Tracey Scoffield, writing consultant Alex Wheatle, and members of the *Small Axe* cast; *Uprising* (2021), a three-part documentary co-directed by McQueen and James Rogan about the tragic 1981 New Cross house fire; and an audio conversation among McQueen, music producer Dennis Bovell, and Beastie Boys member Mike D.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray—Karate Ghost, Raven Van Slender Saves Christmas, Slice (Acid Bath); Bat Kitten, The Black Crystal (AGFA); Bad Detectives, Below the Fold, Chateau Vato, Cloudy Mountain, Diamond Soles, Office, Pasture, War of the Youth Love Reload (Bayview); The Menu (Buena Vista); Drop the Beat (Burning Bulb); Dressed in Blue, Evil Laugh, A Haunted Turkish Bathhouse, Home Grown Horrors V.1, House of Terrors, In the Folds of the Flesh, Playing with Fire (CAV); The Jackie Chan Collection V.1 1976-1982 (Cinedigm); Shellfish (Cre8ive); The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, Bergman Island, Imitation of Life, Lars von Trier's Europe Trilogy, This Is Not a Burial It Is a Resurrection (Criterion); Death Magic (Culture Shock); Blood Dynasty, Casino 45, Diary of a Secretary, The Erotic Days of Donna Matilde, The Vice of Mr. Scott (Dark Side); Solomon King (Deaf Crocodile); Crimes of the Future (Decal); The Ambassador, Bullhead, The World of Kanako (Drafthouse); Lieutenant Jangles (ETR); Uncle Kent 2 (Factory 25); The Justice of Bunny King (Filmrise); The Scorpion with Two Tails (Full Moon); Totally Vegetarian The Essential Collection V.1, Totally Vegetarian The Essential Collection V.2 (Gemini); Elisabeth Windsor (Giant); Pirates (Gunpowder & Sky); The Friendship Game, Taurus (Image); Surrogate (Indie Rights); The Asphyx, Brainwashed Sex-Camera-Power, The Gang of Four, Ghost Warrior, The Italian Job, The Lady from Shanghai, Maigret Season 2, Memories of My Father, Missing in Action Trilogy, No Mercy, Plan A, Programmed to Kill, Sergeant Ryker, Utama, A Violent Life, Warning Shot (Kino); Amber Road (Koa Aloha); Belly, The Dentist Collection, Detective Knight Redemption, Fear the Walking Dead Season 7, Rock Dog 3 Battle of the Beat (Lionsgate); The Killer Robots! Crash and Burn (Lushy Lemming); Piggy (Magnolia); London, Peter Falk 4-Film Comedy Collection, Requiem for a Heavyweight (Mill Creek); The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (Miramax); Spin Me Round, Vesper (MPI); Sylvio (Music Box); After She Died, Big Time Gambling Boss, Blood for Dracula, Burning Paradise, Can't Be Stopped, Castle of the Living Dead, Crypt of the Vampire, Dragons Forever, The Dunwich Horror, The Ghosts of Monday, Invitation Only, Lady Whirlwind/Hapkido, The Last American Virgin, La Sombra del Caudillo, Legacy of Blood, The Lukas Moodysson Collection, Men at Work, Voodoo Macbeth (MVD); The Velvet Queen (Oscilloscope); Big Night, City on a Hill Complete Series, Gallipoli, The Great Season 1, The Great Season 2, The Man Who Fell to Earth Season 1, Sliver, Star Trek Prodigy Season 1 Episodes 1-10, Young Sherlock Holmes (Paramount); Pandora's Mirror (Peekarama); Enter Santos The First Adventures of the Silver-Masked Man, Magic Myth & Mutilation The Micro-Budget Cinema of Michael J. Murphy 1967-2015 (Powerhouse); Nightmare Man (Ronin); Damselvis: Daughter of Helvis (Saturn's Core); The Pretend One (Shoreline); The Return of Tanya Tucker (Sony); Stuck on You! (Troma); Armageddon, Good Girls Complete Series, Poker Face, She Said, Tiger 24, Violent Night (Universal); Freakscene (Utopia); The System (Vertical); Satan's Menagerie (VHShitfest); American Cannibals, A Night of the Undead, The Pyramid (Vipco); Black Adam, Bones and All, Goodbye Mr. Chips, The Long Long Trailer, Our Dancing Daughters, Rancho Notorious, Till, Wife vs. Secretary (Warner); Death Knot, The Grandmaster of Kung Fu (Well Go).

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently issued in 4K format—Freeway, Invisible Maniac, Road House (CAV); Dawn of the Dead, Freaky, Ouija, They Live, Wrath of Man (Cinedigm); The Adventures of Baron Munchausen (Criterion); Crimes of the Future (Decal); Death Wish, The Italian Job (Kino); Belly, Prey for the Devil (Lionsgate); Blood for Dracula, Dragons Forever (MVD); Cloverfield, Event Horizon (Paramount); The Young Like It Hot/Sweet Young Foxes (Peekarama); Groundhog Day (Sony); Black Adam (Warner)

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Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time:
Abdul the Damned (Sinister)*
After She Died (MVD)
Alex's War (CAV)
Alien Outer Space UFOs on the Moon and Beyond (Alchemy)*
Aliens at Loch Ness (Alchemy)*
Amazing Grace Country Stars Sing Songs of Faith and Hope (TimeLife)
The Ambassador (Drafthouse)
Amber Road (Koa Aloha)
American Ocelot (Paramount)
Andy Richter Controls the Universe Complete Series (Paramount)
Angry Neighbors (Lionsgate) Another Love Story (Freestyle)*
Area 51 Incident (Uncork'd)
Armageddon Time (Universal)
Baby (Sinister)*
BabyLearningTV: Name That Fish (Wownow)
BabyLearningTV: Spelling with Objects (Wownow)
Backström Season 2 (AMD)
Battle for Saipan (Paramount)
Being Thunder (Film Movement)
Bergman Island (Criterion)
Bezoz The Beginning (Vision)*
Biography WWE Legends V.3 (Lionsgate)
Black Adam (Warner)
Blue Jeans (Sinister)*
Brainwashed Sex-Camera-Power (Kino)
Bullet Train Down (Greenfield)
Bullhead (Drafthouse)
Business and Money Dogecoin (Wownow)
Business and Money Ethereum (Wownow)
A Call to Arts An Artistic Journey in Ireland 1935-1975 (Green Planet)*
Can Psychedelics Cure? (Paramount)
Can't Be Stopped (MVD)
Canada Surviving the Wild North (Paramount)
Carriers (Paramount)*
The Celluloid Bordello (Kino)
The Checkered Flag (Alpha)
Chesapeake Shores Complete Series (Cinedigm)
The Church with an Overshot Wheel (Green Planet)*
City on a Hill Complete Series (Paramount)*
Clash of the Wolves (Alpha)
Closseum (Lionsgate)
Come Find Me (Burning Bulb)*
Crimes of the Future (Decal)*
The Crimson Circle (Sinister)*
Crossword Mysteries 2-Movie Collection (Cinedigm)
Crypto Decoded (Paramount)
Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood Top 10 Tiger Tales! (Paramount)
Daria's Book Club Black Beauty (Wownow)
Day of the Nightmarer (Sinister)*
The Dead Don't Talk (Sinister)*
Dead Man's Switch A Crypto Mystery (Dreamscape)
Death Knot (Well Go)
Deep Woods (1091)*
Demonic Aliens UFOs from Inner Space (Alchemy)*
Detective Knight Redemption (Lionsgate)
Dog Geniuses Season 1 (Wownow)
Don't Look at the Demon (Strand)

Dracula Contra Frankenstein (Sinister)*
Dressed in Blue (CAV)*
Drop the Beat (Burning Bulb)
Dynasty The Final Season (Paramount)
Echo of Diana (Sinister)*
El Pistolero Invisible (Sinister)*
Elizabeth Windsor (Giant)
Ending HIV in America (Paramount)
Erocle I'Invincible (Sinister)*
The Estate (Universal)
Eyes behind the Stars (Alpha)
The Fabulous World of Jules Verne (Sinister)*
Facing Monsters (Level 33)
The Fast and the Furious (Cheezy Flicks)
Fear the Walking Dead Season 7 (Lionsgate)
Feed Me (Decal)
Felix the Cat Early Cartoon Classics 1924-1930 V.3 (Alpha)
Figh de Maam (Leomark)
The 5 (Green Apple)
Friends & Strangers (Grasshopper)
The Friendship Game (Image)
Frozen Alive (Cheezy Flicks)
Frozen Alive (Sinister)*
The Gang of Four (Kino)
Gerry Anderson A Life Uncharted (MPI)
The Ghost of Yatsuya (Sinister)*
The Gits of Monday (MVD)
Ghosts and the Afterlife A Scientific Investigation (Vision)
The Grandmaster of Kung Fu (Well Go)*
The Great Season 2 (Paramount)*
Groucho & Cavett (Paramount)
Grrr! Beauty Is the Beast (Leomark)
Gunlight at Rio Bravo (Cinedigm)
The Guy from Harlem (Cheezy Flicks)
Highlights The Wonderful Animal Kingdom (Dreamscape)
Hope Street Holiday (Freestyle)*
Human Resources (Bridgestone)
I'm Totally Fine (Decal)
Imitation of Life (Criterion)
Impulse (Sinister)*
Inn of the Damned (Sinister)*
Inside the Black Box (Universal)
It Happened at the Inn (Sinister)*
J.R.R. Tolkien and the Hobbit Series (Wownow)
Jack & Jill The Hills of Hell (ITN)
John Wayne Early Movies (Alpha)
Journey to the Lost City (Sinister)*
The Justice of Bunny King (Fimrise)
Karate Ghost (Acid Bath)*
Kashchei The Immortal (Sinister)*
Kentridge and Dumas in Conversation (Film Movement)
Kid Brainiac Constellations (Wownow)
Kids Beach Club Season 2 (Bridgestone)*
The Killer Robots! Crash and Burn (Lushy Lemming)*
La Nuti du Carrefour (Sinister)*
La Sambra del Caudillo (MVD)
LAMBDA.1 (Sinister)*
Las Vegas Lady (DigicomTV)*
The Laughing Woman (Sinister)
Le Monocle Noir (Sinister)*
Losing to Win (Burning Bulb)*
Loudmouth (Kino)

Love in the Limelight (Cinedigm)
Lowndes County and the Road to Black Power (Kino)
Magic Myth & Mutilation The Micro-Budget Cinema of Michael J. Murphy 1967-2015 (Powerhouse)
The Magical World of Andrew Bennett (Dreamscape)*
Mamlugi (Sinister)*
The Man in My Head (Sinister)*
The Man Who Fell to Earth Season 1 (Paramount)
Marian Anderson The Whole World in Her Hands (Paramount)
Mayberry Man (Bridgestone)
Memories of My Father (Kino)
The Menu (Buena Vista)
Mindcape (Lionsgate)
Monkey Brains Learning Math with Cubes (Wownow)*
Monster Class Werewolf vs. the Loch Ness Monster (Wownow)*
Murder on the Campus (Sinister)*
My Imaginary Country (Film Movement)
My Life Is Murder Season 3 (AMD)
The Naked Road (Sinister)*
Nazca Desert Mystery (Paramount)
Next Exit (Magnolia)
The Nine Lives of Christmas (Cinedigm)*
No Survivors Please (Sinister)*
Not for Sale (Burning Bulb)*
Occult Secret of the Universe (Alchemy)*
On the Line (Paramount)
Peony Lantern (Sinister)*
Pelti Mai (MPI)*
Piggy (Magnolia)
Plan A (Kino)
Playing with Fire (CAV)
Poker Face (Universal)
Poppy (Indiegig)
Prey for the Devil (Lionsgate)
Programmed to Kill (Kino)
Psycho-Circus (Sinister)*
Pterodactyl (ITN)
Quiet Woman (Sinister)*
Raven Van Slender Saves Christmas (Acid Bath)*
The Return of Tanya Tucker (Sony)
The Ringer/Der Hexer (Sinister)*
The Rise of the Beast (Uncork'd)
Rock Dog 3 Battle of the Beat (Lionsgate)
Rome Express (Sinister)*
Rotten Fruit (SGL)
Sampo (Sinister)*
Santa and the Fairy Snow Queen (Wownow)
The Scorpion with Two Tails (Full Moon)
Season of Love Double Feature (Cinedigm)
The Secrets She Keeps Season 2 (AMD)
Sesame Street Elmo and Tango Furry Friends Forever (Cinedigm)*
7 Golden Men (Sinister)*
Seven Sinners (Sinister)*
7th Commandment (Sinister)*
Shark School Presents Orcas (Wownow)*
She Said (Universal)*
Slice (Acid Bath)*
Snuugglers of Death (Sinister)*
Solitaire & Torticiola vs. Franksenberg (Sinister)*
Speak No Evil (AMD)
Spider Webb Untangled (MVD)
Spin Me Round (MPI)
Star Trek Prodigy Season 1 Episodes 1-10 (Paramount)
The Starlost The Invasion (Sinister)*
Starman V.1 (Sinister)*
Starman V.2 (Sinister)*
The Strongest Man in the World (Sinister)*
Subway in the Sky (Sinister)*
The System (Vertical)
The Tale of King Crab (Paramount)
Taurus (Image)
Tex Rider with the Boy Scouts (Sinister)*
Texas Wildcats (Sinister)*
They Don't Cast Shadows (Bridgestone)*
The Thirsty Dead (Sinister)*
This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection (Criterion)
Till (Warner)
TNT Jackson (Alpha)
To Lay a Ghost (Sinister)*
Too Much Beer (Sinister)*
Top 25 Alien Encounters UFO Case Files Exposed (Alchemy)*
Totally Vegetarian The Essential Collection V.1 (Gemini)*
Totally Vegetarian The Essential Collection V.2 (Gemini)*
Townhouse Confidential (Vision)*
Tracking Notes The Secret World of Mountain Lions (Green Planet)*
Train School Toolskoot Teaches Addition (Wownow)*
Train School Toolskoot Teaches Animal Sounds (Wownow)*
Train School What Animals Do (Wownow)*
Tunnel under the World (Sinister)*
Tutankham's Allies and Enemies (Paramount)
Two Dash One (Freestyle)
200 Meters (Film Movement)
UFO Paranormal Overlords (Alchemy)*
Ultraman Max Complete Series (Mill Creek)
Under the Mountain (Sinister)*
Ulama (Kino)
The Velvet Queen (Oscilloscope)
Vengeance Is Mine (Sinister)*
Vesper (MPI)
Violent Night (Universal)*
Virtually Heroes (Universal)
Voodoo Macbeth (MVD)
Waterfront (Sinister)*
We Don't Dance for Nothing (Leomark)
Welcome to Mama's/Playing Cupid (Cinedigm)
Wendy O. Williams Live and Loud from London (MVD)
The Werewolf Reunion (Sinister)*
Wet Asphalt (Sinister)*
White Legion (Sinister)*
Why? (MVD)
Witchhammer (Sinister)*
Woodpeckers The Hole Story (Paramount)
The World of Kanako (Drafthouse)
World's Greatest Engineering Icons (Paramount)
WWE The Best of Attitude Era Royal Rumble (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 All Channel:
→ The Paradise Motel
From Amcomri:
→ Left Behind Rise of the Antichrist
From AMD:
The Fight Machine
→ Dark Glasses
→ The Fight Machine
→ Whitestable Pearl Season 2
→ Mandrake
→ Christmas Bloody Christmas
→ Glorious
→ Aftertaste 2
→ Doc Martin Season 10
→ Sissy
From Bayview:
→ FredHeads The Documentary
→ Rapture Director's Cut
From Breaking Glass:
→ Nana's Boys
From Buena Vista:
→ The Struggle World
→ Black Panther Wakanda Forever
→ Empire of Light
From Burning Bulb:
→ Suburban Rebels
→ So-Called Leaders
From CAV:
Julia
→ Brother's Keeper
From Cheezy Flicks:
The Girl from Starship Venus
→ The Haunted Palace
From Cinedigm:
Big Sky River
→ Unthinkably Good Things Don't Forget I Love You/Marry Me in Yosemite
Shepherd The Story of a Hero Dog
When Calls the Heart Springtime in Hope Valley
Sweet Revenge A Hannah Swenson Mystery
→ A Gingerbread Romance
→ Sweet Carolina
→ WWE Royal Rumble 2023
→ WWE Elimination Chamber 2023
→ Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver/Jim Button and the Wild 13
→ Merry Go Round/Wedding of a Lifetime
→ Romance in Style/Road Trip Romance
From ClassiFlix:
The O'Henry Playhouse V.3
→ The Night Has Eyes
→ Obsessed
→ The Human Monster
→ Trade Winds
→ Vogue of 1938
→ The Long Wait
From Criterion:
Romeo and Juliet (Zeffirelli)
Two Films by Marguerite Duras (India Song, Baxter Vera Baxter)
→ Triangle of Sadness
From Dark Star:
Petit Mal
→ The First Fallen
→ Lonesome
From Decal:
The Offering
From Devilworks:
Medusa's Venom
From Dreamscape:
→ Latin Lover
→ The Love Destination Courses Breathe
→ The Love Destination Courses Self-Compassion Meditations
→ The Love Destination Courses Sleep Meditations
→ The Love Destination Courses Understanding Attachment Styles
→ The Love Destination Courses Relaxation for Sleep
→ Stealing Chaplin
→ Saving Lincoln

→ The Things We've Seen
→ Symphony for a Broken Orchestra
→ A Land of Books
→ The Adventures of Jurassic Pet 2 The Lost Secret
From Eternal Flame:
→ The Residents Triple Trouble
From Eyes Wide Open:
→ Psychopaths Killing Snee Couples
From Film Movement:
Belle & Sebastian The Adventure Continues
The King of Laughter Children of the Mist Adieu Paris
→ A Family for 1640 Days
→ Goliah
→ All Eyes Off Me
→ A Bag of Marbles
From First Line:
→ The Seven from Texas
From 4Digital:
→ The Beast Below
From Freestyle:
→ Two Dash One
→ This Is Jessica
From Full Moon:
Giants Battle Attack Baby Oopsie 2 Murder Dolls
→ Giantess Attack vs. Mecha Fembot
→ Puppet Master Doktor Death
→ Femalien Starlight Saga
From Fun City:
→ Party Girl
From Grasshopper:
Keane
→ The Apology
From Indican:
→ Highway One
→ Are You Proud?
→ Life & Life
From Indie Rights:
→ Love in Country
From Indiegig:
ruth weiss One Step West Is the Sea
→ Sadness and Joy in the Life of Giraffes
From ITN:
The Cult of Humpty Dumpty
Andromeda
→ Easter Bunny Massacre
The Bloody Trail
→ Bloody Mary Returns
From KDMG:
→ Find Her
From Kino:
In the Blood Cranked Up Marco Polo Love on the Ground (Rivette)
Framing Agnes The Crimson Rivers Calendar Girls A Life's Work
→ Secret of the Incas
→ The Bliss of Mrs. Blossom
→ The Man in the Basement
→ High Expectations
→ The Super 8 Years
→ Let It Be Morning
→ Dear Mr. Brody
→ I Got a Monster
→ Burlesque Heart of the Glitter Tribe
→ Secret Defense (Rivette)
→ On the Line The Richard Williams Story
→ Filmmakers for the Prosecution/Nuremberg It's Lesson for Today
From Lionsgate:
Hex
Nutcracker and the Magic Flute
→ The Inspection

→ The Price We Pay
→ The Old Way
→ Detective Knight Independence
→ The Adventures of Jurassic Pet 2 The Lost Secret
→ The Walking Dead Season 11
From Magnolia:
There There
→ Hunt
→ Joyride
From MHz:
→ Paris Police 1900 Season 1
→ The Hunters Seasons 1 & 2
→ The Mill Creek: Running the Bases Battle Kaiju V.1 Ultraman vs. Red King
→ An Unlikely Angel
→ Dawson's Creek Complete Collection (20 platters)
→ Mike Birbiglia Stand-Up Comedy Collection
→ Jim Gaffigan Stand-Up Comedy Collection
From Movie Time:
Basic Lessons for Babies & Toddlers V.5 Colors & Shapes
From MPI:
Rogue Agent
The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet Season 9
The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet Season 10
→ God's Country
→ Arthur Malédiction
From Mubi:
Decision to Leave
From Music Box:
→ Leonor Will Never
From MVD:
Crazylegs
The Long Dark Trail Sappy Holiday MVP
→ Anything Goes
→ Tonight or Never
→ The Grand Tour
→ John & Jen
→ The Snowball Effect
From Nathan Hill:
→ The NHP Diaries
From Oscilloscope:
The Tale of King Crab
From Paramount:
Zero to Infinity
→ Joe Pickett Season 1
→ On the Come Up
→ American Gigolo Season Beauty
→ Miss Scarlet and the Duke Season 3
→ Little Dixie
→ The Musicians' Green Book An Enduring Legacy
→ Rebuilding Notre Dame
→ PBS Kids Just a Little Bit Spooky!
→ All Creatures Great and Small Season 3
→ The Letter A Message For Our Earth
→ The Good Fight Final Season
→ Vienna Blood Season 3
→ Star Trek Strange New Worlds Season 1
→ The Amazing Race Season 34
→ Survivor Season 43
→ Ruthless Monopoly's Secret History
From Reality:
→ Supernatural Egypt
→ Pyramind World Aliens
→ The Origins
From Real Vault:
→ High Lonesome
From Samuel Goldwyn:
→ Accident Man Hitman's Holiday
From Sony:
→ Nothing Is Impossible
→ Salvatore Shoemaker of Dreams
→ Screamers The Hunting
→ Whitney Houston I Wanna Dance with Somebody
→ Father Stu Reborn
From SRS:
Little Corey Gorey