

Poetry (Continued)

Additionally, in an appearance that has gone generally unheralded but counts significantly in her body of work, Cate Blanchett plays all of the characters performing the recitations, male and female, and provides the voiceovers, as well. The film would have been bewitching in any case, but the casting is brilliant and, rather than coming across as a stunt, turns the work into a marathon of virtuosity, giving the disparate essays, written across the span of two centuries, a coherence and immediacy that bonds the entire film together and justifies its otherwise peripatetic explorations. Spellbinding and rapturous, the 95-minute film is not just designed to be watched, it is designed to be played continuously, as the viewer absorbs and reabsorbs its ideas and savors its artistry.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The transfer is gorgeous and the image is sharp and glossy, with finely detailed colors, adding to the movie's intensity of presence. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a terrific dimensionality and smooth tones. And if you really want the movie to feel like Godard, you can activate the optional English subtitles.

An evocation of the life and times of an Eighteenth Century Armenian poet, Sergei Parajanov's striking **The Color of Pomegranates**, has been released on a wonderfully annotated Blu-ray by the Criterion Collection (UPC#715515213615, \$40). The 1969 film was originally titled after the name of the poet, *Sayat Nova*, but was renamed for foreign release by the Soviet Union because the film was considered too esoteric to be represented as biographical. It does vaguely follow the birth-to-death template of the poet's life, which is presented in what can best be described as a series of live action collages. It is these transfixing, often surreal tableaux that make the 78-minute feature so stimulating. The film has something of a static quality—the camera doesn't move much—but the tableaux are suitably integrated with close-ups and less cluttered single shots to give the release of visual information a steady and dependable rhythm. Characters hanging on wires, standing behind objects, interacting with animals or otherwise strikingly dressed and choreographically positioned can be seen as representing the poet's maturation and enlightenment, or recalling the themes of his poetry. There is not much in the way of dialog, but there is recitation, and virtually every moment of the film is overflowing with religious iconography, so that the film is as much about culture and heritage as it is about an individual. Breathtakingly abstract, and embracing an obscure—but compelling and consistent—logic, every moment of the film is captivating.

The movie is so colorful that even the speckled, somewhat faded and wrongly timed (using an incorrect frame pull-down, it ran several minutes longer than Criterion's version) Kino presentation we reviewed in Apr 01 was highly satisfying, although Criterion's spotless and vivid presentation is a vast improvement. Presented in full screen format, the images sometimes seem to leap from the screen, and the hues and fleshtones are gorgeous. The monophonic sound is also substantially improved, bringing out crisply the meticulously detailed sound mix and the exceptional Tigran Mansurian musical score, an invigorating blend of experimental composition and traditional folk and religious music from the region. The film has a mix of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian languages, with optional English subtitles.

The film is a fascinating work of art, but the comprehensive Blu-ray is a great deal more, providing complete backgrounds on both Nova and Parajanov, as well as a history of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and a thorough deconstruction of the film's imagery and meanings. We would not recommend following the order of exploration suggested by the supplement menu, however. It is best to begin with the second choice first, a concise 18-minute summary of the film's production history, which includes a full career profile Parajanov, an introduction to Nova and an overview of Armenian culture and the various cultures that have intruded upon it. The piece is so good, and contains so many tantalizing clips from the movie, that it can also serve as an introduction, to be seen before watching the film even for the first time. Then you should turn next to a terrific 1977 episode from a marvelous sounding French television series, *Faith and Traditions of the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, which presents a more complete 26-minute biographical portrait of Nova, including a few clips from **Pomegranates**, performances of his songs and discussions of his primary themes (he was a "troubadour" who participated in gatherings similar to today's rap contests, and was drawn out of retirement when he learned of someone who was challenging his legacy). You can follow that with a 2003 52-minute profile of Parajanov, also featured on the Kino disc, which includes interviews and some terrific behind-the-scenes footage where he can be seen staging his designs. The more of this you have under your belt the better, because the references will be clearer then when you turn to the excellent 42-minute decoding of the film's images and components. The concepts and references whiz by so quickly you dare not breathe or blink in fear of missing something, but the segment ties everything together beautifully and even sort of works as a miniature, alternate English-language version of the movie.

The ultimate decoding of the film, however, is Tony Rayns' commentary track, which explains practically every shot in the film while also providing decent backgrounds on some of the cast members, going over the

movie's production and distribution history, and giving a concise appreciation of the film's artistry. "Now, the symbols here, the long necked instrument, the white hen, all of which are already fitting into patterns of images that have begun to recur throughout the film. The book ever present in the background, this helmeted skull, which is going to appear crucially towards the end of the film again, the hennaed hand, all of these things, the lit candle, the white rose of poetry, are images that Parajanov is using for their symbolic value, but also because they fit into larger patterns that stretch right through the film, and he is assuming that you will note their appearance here and you'll note their reappearance in later moments, and make connections. This is the essence of his kind of poetry, I think. It's a matter of recurrent images in different contexts, where an image takes on a different resonance in a new context, but is intended by Parajanov to be seen as part of a continuum of poetic images."

Also featured in the supplement is the opening piece, a faded 17-minute 1969 short film by Michail Vartanov that combines behind-the-scenes footage of Parajanov shooting **Pomegranates** with a montage of Armenian landscape images, and the 3-minute closing piece, an interesting 2015 interview with Taguhi Vardanyan, who appeared in the film when she was a child.

Man from Earth lives on

We reviewed the stageplay-like **Jerome Bixby's Man from Earth**, a thoughtful 2007 film about a man who may be immortal, in Jan 18. Although the creators disparaged the possibility of a sequel in the supplement, they eventually relented and found a way to accommodate not only the premise but the inevitable aging of the lead actor, David Lee Smith, in the 2017 feature, **Man from Earth: Holocene**, an MVDvisual Blu-ray release (UPC#760137075367, \$30). It is not structured like a play—there is more crosscutting and running around—and it is a reasonably good extrapolation of the first film for fans who cannot get enough of the premise and its milieu. Set in a small California college, the hero is a professor whose past tweaks the curiosity of a quartet of students. The information age is closing in on him anyway, and everything comes to a crisis point when one of the students makes a key discovery. Again, the film is thoughtful and engaging. While it might seem a little abstract to viewers who have not seen the first feature, it will still be fully coherent, if not as persuasive. There is some suspense, and an ambiguous ending (there is a teaser after an initial credit scroll) that sets up the possibility of more sequels or, according to the supplement, perhaps a TV series. Our one complaint is the same one we had with the first feature—the hero might be a normal human, and readily have forgotten as much about history as any of us can remember from our lives a decade before, but what he would know, and what would consistently be reinforced throughout his existence, along with a feel for the weather, is human psychology. He would know almost everything people are thinking from their expressions and body language, and would be able to anticipate almost any reaction that followed the norms of human behavior. Since none of us has that experience, the writers can't really anticipate what it would be like, but the hero tends to miss easy clues about how the characters around him are going to act or react—clues that the viewer can readily see leading to expected actions—and that seems unlikely. But it is a minor quibble, since on the whole, the 98-minute feature is an inspired fantasy that challenges accepted ideas and beliefs while never discouraging greater truths, incorporated into a viable suspense template with a number of admirable performances. Directed by Richard Schenkman, William Katt returns from the first film for a good sized supporting part, and John Billingsly has a briefer appearance, with fresh appearances by Vanessa Williams and Michael Dorn. Along with Smith, however, the film really belongs to the four actors playing the students, Brittany Curran, Carlos Knight, Sterling Knight and Akemi Look, and each is terrific, which adds significantly to the respect a viewer accords the fantasy.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. Unlike the first film, which struggled at times with its budgetary limitations, the image is slick and glossy throughout. The DTS sound gives Mark Hinton Stewart's satisfying musical score a viable dimensionality, although otherwise the mix is generally centered. There are seven subtitling options, including English. Along with two trailers there are extensive copies of promotional and production photos in still frame, a cute still frame collection of book covers created for the film, a minute-long kickboxing video that a character in the film is watching at one point, 3 minutes of sensibly deleted scenes, a good 18-minute interview with Stewart about his music, 28 minutes of footage from a festival screening that includes fairly basic questions about the movie's creation and an very good 39-minute production documentary covering the film's creation and its artists in more detail.

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