

canon and passenger capsule, travel to their destination, and then have a frightful run-in with the local natives before making a harrowing escape. It contains indelible images, such as the capsule lodged in the moon's eye, that, at the time, only Méliès could have conceived and executed, and it tackles an imagination-grabbing subject no one before had ever thought suitable for film, with the strength of an enduringly popular novel behind it. The presentation, incidentally, is 'narrated,' identifying the characters and enhancing some of the story's subtler details. Other highlights on the second platter include perhaps the first 'walking up a wall' gag, the 2-minute *The Human Fly* from 1902, *Gulliver's Travels among the Lilliputians and the Giants* running 4 minutes from 1902, an effective 4-minute comedy from 1903 entitled *The Enchanted Well* in which a man insults an old lady and she takes her revenge by making monsters come out of his well, a very good 17-minute adaptation of *Sleeping Beauty* from 1903 entitled *The Kingdom of Fairies* that features a journey across and beneath the ocean and is essentially animated in parts, a wonderfully grotesque 2-minute piece from 1904 identified as *The Terrible Turkish Executioner* in which he cuts off heads and cuts people in half, more exploitation and torture in the 2-minute 1904 *A Miracle under the Inquisition*, and two installments made in 1903 and 1904 adapting different parts of *Faust*.

Running 165 minutes, the third platter covers 1904 to 1906 and opens with a 20-minute extravaganza from 1904 entitled *The Impossible Voyage*, which attempts to reiterate the success of *Trip to the Moon* with a depiction of a trip around the world using different Jules Verne-like modes of transportation, but lacks the charm and wit of the former. More successful is the 10-minute out-and-out slapstick adventure, *An Adventurous Automobile Trip* from 1905, about a speedy car ride from Paris to Monte Carlo. The car seems to knock down everything it passes along the way. There is a 14-minute adaptation of *Rip Van Winkle* from 1905 entitled *Rip's Dream*, but it doesn't really grasp the American aspects of the story and is basically one of Méliès' expanded dream films. *The Palace of Arabian Nights*, from 1905, is an ambitious 21-minute piece that makes good use of Méliès' magician tricks. Méliès skills at slapstick comedy get stronger and stronger with the 2-minute piece from 1906, *A Mix-Up in the Gallery*, about pandemonium in a photographer's studio, and the marvelous 4-minute one-gag piece from 1906, *The Tramp and the Mattress Makers*, about a bum who accidentally gets sewn up in a mattress. The well-made 1906 *A Desperate Crime* survives only as a 7-minute fragment but presents a good chase drama with some excellent stunts and then concludes effectively with the bandit in jail, having remorseful dreams. The 17-minute *The Merry Frolics of Satan*, from 1906, is basically a reiteration of many Méliès' shorter films where the Devil is up to no good.

The fourth platter runs 163 minutes and covers films made in 1907 and 1908. There is a fairly good 1907 film running 15 minutes entitled *Tunnelling The English Channel* that depicts the planning, execution and consequences of such an engineering feat. Normally, performances in Méliès' movies amount to little more than people jumping around and waving their arms a lot, but there is a good collection of ensemble acting in the 1907 short running 4 minutes, *The Skipping Cheese*, in which a woman brings some very smelly cheeses aboard a bus and the other passengers react accordingly. The slapstick is again very effective in the 1907 *Good Glue Sticks*, running 5 minutes, about a man who develops an especially effective glue and then plays pranks with it, until the tables are turned. Getting a jump on Chaplin, Méliès' 1908 short, *The Woes of Roller Skates*, running 7 minutes, explores the comedic possibilities created by the instability of the skates. It's not all fun and games, however, as Méliès' turns to exploitation again with some fairly good effects as the Romans burn the Christians in the 3-minute 1908 *Justinian's Human Torches 548 A.D.*. An interesting 1908 political fable, *The New Lord of the Village*, running 9 minutes, is about an authoritarian who turns a new leaf after he is frightened by spirits in a cave.

Many of the films are longer on the 138-minute fifth platter, which covers 1908 to 1913. *Pharmaceutical Hallucinations*, from 1908, runs 13 minutes and is basically an expanded dream film, although the effects are increasingly sophisticated. The 1908 *The Good Shepherdess and the Evil Princess*, which runs 14 minutes, intercuts images of a poor good girl getting sent to a nice enchanted place, while a spoiled bad girl gets sent to a scary place. A man unpacks and repacks a roomful of furniture into a single bag in the 7-minute 1909 gag piece, *The Diabolic Tenant*. The progression of fantasies is very interesting in what is perhaps Méliès' ultimate dream film, *Baron Munchausen's Dream*, from 1911. The longest movie in the collection, running 30 minutes, *The Conquest of the Pole*, from 1912, is yet another attempt to rework the success of *Trip to the Moon*. There is an amusing subplot involving suffragettes who want to get in on the journey, but generally, it is a bland, gimmicky production. In 1912, Méliès' also took another stab at *Cinderella*, this one running 24 minutes. Obviously, it is more elaborate than his 1899 piece, but it is nowhere near as charming. The 1912 *The Knight of the Snow* is about a knight who gets help from good spirits and problems from bad spirits as he undertakes an elaborate and impressively staged journey to rescue a princess. Finally, the collection concludes with a 15-minute comedy from 1913 entitled *The Voyage of the Bourrichon Family*, about a hapless clan who are trying unsuccessfully to elude their creditors.

It's animated cats and dogs

Two Walt Disney pets-on-the-loose animated features have been given the collector's treatment, *The Aristocats* having been issued as a

single-platter *Special Edition Walt Disney Jazzy Classic* by Walt Disney Home Entertainment (UPC#786936723229, \$30) and *101 Dalmatians* appearing as a *2-Disc Platinum Edition* from Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (UPC#786936735413, \$30). Both presentations have 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound, alternate French and Spanish tracks in 5.1 Dolby and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. *The Aristocats* is presented in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.75:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and *101 Dalmatians* is in its original full screen format.

Disney is promoting the "All New Digital Restoration" of the picture on *101 Dalmatians*, but anyone want to bet that sometime in the next ten years, they'll be saying they've improved it again? It happens far too often to be associated with true film scholarship and archiving. In fact, the previous *Dalmatians* release (Jan 00) has a much better picture transfer than the new one. While some hues on the new release are brighter, in general, colors have a stronger yellow tint, and whites and flesh tones are much purer on the older version. Because the tweaking is digital there is no consistency to it, either, so where one scene might have nicer colors than the previous release, another scene will be blander. For anybody just sitting down and watching the cartoon, it makes no difference whatsoever. The new version is just as enjoyable as the older version. But for those who are looking for a quality collectible, it would be best to hold onto every iteration the organization comes up with.

The older DVD's standard stereo mix has also been upgraded to a full 5.1-channel Dolby Digital mix, with rich dimensional detail. Along with the film's original mono track, there are two optional subtitling trivia tracks (one for kids and one for grownups, sort of), and a Selena Gomez music video. The 1961 production, about puppies kidnapped by an evil couturesse, runs 79 minutes.

The second platter contains a very good 41-minute retrospective documentary that goes over the complete history of the film's production, explores the animation innovations that were employed (the mechanized transferring of artists' drawings to animation cels), and goes over how various artists contributed to various characters. There is a terrific 10-minute segment of deleted song numbers, a 25-minute segment of demo recordings and alternate audio takes, five theatrical trailers (including one in Cinemascope!), seven TV commercials, twelve radio commercials, a good 'virtual puppy' activity, a cute personality test, a simple vocabulary game, and an excellent, comprehensive still frame collection of developmental artwork and photos, and promotional materials.

Not to be confused, too much, with *Oliver & Company*, the 1970 *Aristocats* was pretty much the first Disney film in which domesticated felines were not the embodiment of evil. Kind of a remake of *101 Dalmatians*, though without as distinctive a villain, the 79-minute program is set in Paris, where the abandoned heroes fall in with a group of jazz-loving strays who help them return to their rightful laps of luxury.

We reviewed the original DVD in Jul 00. That version was presented in full screen format, and the letterboxing masks picture information off the top and bottom of the screen, while adding information to the sides. While one wishes that a windowboxed version that masks nothing off might someday be available, the framing on the letterboxed version works fine. The color transfer is clearly improved, with brighter, better-detailed hues. The sound also seems to have a little more detail, although the differences are much less pronounced. The older version had no special features of note, while the supplementary section on the new release has several rewarding items, including an 8-minute deleted song (and info on its background) presented by composer Richard Sherman, a clever 'virtual kitten' game, a decent identify-the-musical-instrument and language game, a rewarding 13-minute animated piece from a 1956 episode of Disney's TV series about domesticated cats that had nothing to do with promoting the film, a 4-minute segment about the songs, a good still gallery of conceptual artwork, and a 7-minute color *Figaro* cartoon from 1946, *Bath Day*, in which Minnie Mouse (about four times her pet's size, of course) gives the cat a bath, causing the cat to leave and have a run-in with some filthier alley cats.

Mining the early days

Although the story would seem to have been thoroughly covered already, both in documentaries and in drama, there nevertheless seems to be room to go over it once again on the Wienerworld MVD Visual release, *The Beatles Destination Hamburg* (UPC#022891469391, \$20). The 44-minute program pads out its running time with a summary of the band's success afterwards, but its core half hour contains fresh (but blurry) home movie footage of them playing in Germany, as well as snapshots from even earlier, when the band members first got to know one another as teenagers. The story of their visits to Germany and their experiences before and after also contain new angles and insights—nothing earth shattering, but just enough to make the 2007 show worthwhile if you have a passing interest in the topic.

The full screen picture is primarily in black-and-white and is transferred crisply, although the documentary's own source materials vary in quality. The monophonic sound is adequate and there are some music passages in the program from when the band worked with Tony Sheridan. There is no captioning. Also featured is a 35-minute audio-only section containing more Sheridan cuts and a terrific 1968 radio interview with John Lennon, Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr.