

great satisfaction, the drama just churns and churns, drawing upon history (there is an outstanding sequence that recalls the original broadcast of **The Day After** and the affect it had on America's social zeitgeist, for about 24 hours) and the natural impulses and flaws of the specific characters. This is one of those shows that just gets better and better. But after the first season, when some bugs were being ironed out, it isn't so much because the writing and filmmaking are improving, it is just that as the story advances, it accumulates its own riches, without evaporation.

Twelve episodes are spread across four platters running a total of 595 minutes, and each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 with an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is good and the show's cinematography often has some nice touches. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is not as flamboyant as it has been in previous seasons, but there is a viable dimensionality. There are optional English, French and Spanish subtitles and 3 minutes of worthwhile deleted scenes that were removed for sharing more information than the viewer needed.

### Attack of the slime molds!

A delightful documentary, **The Creeping Garden**, about a very mysterious lifeform, the slime mold, and the wonderfully geeky amateur and professional scientists who have been captivated by its quirks, has been released on DVD & Blu-ray, with an accompanying CD, by Arrow Video (UPC#760137977186, \$30). Slime molds look a bit like exotic mushrooms, but act very differently. Without a heart, they nevertheless pulsate with a circulation system, and with time-lapse photography, they can be seen to move and explore their environment—usually rotting wood of some sort—in search of food (not the decaying wood, but the bacteria and so on that is causing the decay), and grow aggressively when they find nourishment. They're basically like the blob in **The Blob** (it's like an inside-out crawling stomach, one scientist explains), although much smaller and usually prettier, often colored a bright yellow or orange. The 2014 film has everything you could want to know about slime molds. There is a history of the research that has been conducted upon them, which is tied most fascinatingly to the history of motion pictures, since some advancements in time-lapse photography were developed specifically in order to study them. As the scientists attempt to articulate why they are so fascinated by the relatively obscure and generally misunderstood something-or-rather that is neither a plant nor an animal, their enthusiasm is infectious and joyful. And, in the dawn of the Twenty-first Century, modern-day electronics are being applied to track the movements of the mold, creating everything from artistic patterns and bizarre music, to practical design applications—if the mold is placed on a map of a country and food is placed on the major population centers, the networks that the mold generates to move from one piece of food to the next imitate quite eerily and exactly the country's networks of roads and highways. There is also a very amusing 'reverse mold' experiment, where groups of humans are bound to one another and must navigate a landscape from one food source to the next without communication. Running 81 minutes, the film's variety of exploration and its fascinating topic are consistently enjoyable and enlightening.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, and the transfer is crisp. The PCM sound is just two-channel stereo, but has an engaging dimensionality. The electronic musical score, supplemented, in places, by music created from wiring up the molds themselves, adds to the playful and involving nature of the entertainment. The CD contains two specific pieces generated by slime mold movement. It runs 35 minutes (it has just two pretty much equal length tracks) and is a pleasing and ethereal experience.

There are optional English subtitles, a collection of promotional photos, a trailer, 14 minutes of short pieces that feel like deleted or extended scenes, but add to the knowledge and world that the film is exploring, two pieces of time-lapse footage running a total of 2 minutes that show milk splashing and something decaying, and a good 10-minute segment on the technology used not only so the slime molds can create music, but adapted for paraplegic humans to compose and perform.

The two filmmakers, Tim Grabham and Jasper Sharp, also supply a very enjoyable commentary, talking about the amateur and professional scientists that they worked with, about slime molds, of course, and about the way in which the film was conceived and gradually constructed.

"It's always nice to have your subject as the map, or the kind of blueprint of the way you're going to approach the film. Here, it was the way the slime mold grows out. It explores over here, it explores over there. There's not an obvious sense of direction, it's kind of going out in all directions, finding things, and putting them together, and that's sort of how we made the film, which is nice because it feels like the film process and our making of it is very slime mold informed, and therefore you kind of get a bit of vibe of it just built into the very architecture of the edit. It just all helps to get you sort of immersed into it, hopefully."

"This became sort of the structural backbone of a large part of the film, this idea of how do you communicate abstract scientific ideas through the medium of art, and what is the difference between art and science?"

"I think that's the thing that really hit me, was how close the needs are of the scientists to be imaginative and creative in the same way as an artist,

because if they can't have the imagination to make all of the experiments, they're not going to get the results."

"Art is process driven not product driven. Scientists are really about hypothesis testing, where art isn't, it's more freeform exploration. They're both asking questions, and hopefully discovering things in the process."

"You also need raw materials at the beginning part of it. You need your imagination as to how to set those up to get what result you want."

### If you like dogs...

Although it includes ruminations upon illness and death, Laurie Anderson's **Heart of a Dog**, a Criterion Collection Blu-ray (UPC#71551519-0411, \$40), is a very enjoyable and lighthearted 2015 pastiche of impressions about existence, and more specifically about how one's own awareness of life and emotion are amplified through a relationship with a pet. Naturally, since Anderson is a musician, the dog became a musician as well, and one of the highpoints of the film is the dog's prompted but enthusiastic keyboard playing that Anderson enfolded with her own performances. But the film also covers topics that all dog owners are familiar with, and includes inspired, ground-level camera angles depicting the world from the dog's point of view. Running 75 minutes, the second half of the film veers into reflections of Buddhist philosophy, but that really does raise the film's intellectual and spiritual scope, entertaining the viewer with specific ideas while drawing greater lessons from the everyday life experiences that were depicted earlier. Infused with Anderson's music, which is especially captivating and pure in 5.1-channel DTS sound, and a broader biographical narrative told by Anderson herself (she once caused, and then saved, her younger twin brothers from drowning in an ice pond) with the help of a trove of home movies, the film is not just worth experiencing, but is highly appealing as a repetitive motion picture entertainment. There is an impression, mostly unfounded but still widespread, that avant-garde artists such as Anderson function in their own isolated and discerning world, which casual viewers or listeners cannot really relate to. But, just as one of the functions they perform in real life, pets in general and dogs specifically are a great equalizer, a way to give people from different backgrounds or orientations a common anchor of interest, and that is the function that Anderson's dog provides not only for the film, but for her music as well.

In fact, one of the supplements included with the film is a 7-minute depiction of a very brief 2016 concert Anderson staged in Times Square one cold January evening as a benefit for New York City's 'first responder' dogs, in which audience members, who had brought their humans, were encouraged to bark along.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and the transfer is solid. There is a trailer, 3 minutes of fun deleted scenes that were just a little too esoteric and ribald for the film, and a somewhat painful 5-minute segment of the dog sort of playing Christmas music on the keyboard.

Finally, there is an excellent 41-minute interview with Anderson that begins by discussing many of her stage productions, as well as her other films, and then concludes with insights on the making of **Heart of a Dog**, and the different things she wanted to accomplish. "Much of the film is about how stories fracture, and what happens when you forget a story, and what happens when you tell a story too many times, and what happens when a story is only 'bits,' and what happens when somebody else, like the NSA [there is a segment about the massive NSA data collection complex in the film], tells your story."

### Loving documentary

Clearly a labor of love, the creator of **Brother Can You Spare a Dime?**, Philippe Mora, took films, newsreels, audio recordings, and archival materials to create a chronological flow of impressions from the Thirties, capturing the essence of the decade in a delightful 111-minute (not the 106 minutes listed on the jacket) montage of images and memories. The 1975 feature has been released by Sprocket Vault (UPC#688474357150, \$15) with a lovely transfer that removes any impediments to savoring the joys that the film imparts. Centered on the United States, the film drifts from politics, social conflicts, crime and the economic crisis to culture, sports, stunts and other distractions embraced by the day. Thanks mostly to the Warner Home Video *Archive Collection*, the formerly obscure films that find their way into the movie, such as **Black Legion** and **Wild Boys of the Road**, are better known now than they were at the time of the film's release, but there is such a vast selection of sources that each clip is a new treasure. Most of the film is in black and white, but there are color clips, as well, particularly footage of Franklin Roosevelt. The music is equally precious, with numbers from Billie Holiday, Al Jolson, a few choice Busby Berkeley musicals and many others. Yet the film is not an attic collection of random treasures, it is a carefully modulated journey through history, imparting to the viewer the feelings that people of the era had as they were bombarded by the media of the day, capturing the essence of how people perceived and felt the world.

The picture is presented in full screen format and the monophonic sound is fine. There are optional English subtitles. Also included on the disc are 51 minutes of additional Pathé newsreels from the era, focusing on entertainment topics and featuring many, many stars, from Irving Berlin and George M. Cohan to Lucille Ball, Jimmy Stewart and Gary Cooper, as well as a lot of material about NBC, Rockefeller Center and the Rockettes.