

Godard gets even more radical

As excited as we were to finally obtain the five films featured in the Arrow Academy DVD & Blu-ray release, **Jean-Luc Godard + Jean-Pierre Gorin: Five Films, 1968-1971** (UPC#760137044888, \$100), *Un film comme les autres* (A Film Like Any Other), *British Sounds* aka *See You at Mao*, *Vent d'est* (Wind from the East), *Lotte in Italia / Luttés en Italie* (Struggle in Italy) and *Vladimir et Rosa* (Vladimir and Rosa), we were even more excited to discover that as a special feature, there is a sit-down interview with Godard from 2010, *Conversation with JLG*, which runs a whopping 128 minutes. Popped in an easy chair and working a couple of cigars over the course of the talk, which is interspersed with quick snippets from some of his films (the stereo clips have a wonderful dimensionality), he speaks about everything from theories of language to what books he and his fellow New Wave directors liked to read. We gorged ourselves on every word he had to say and wanted very much to run the interview again as soon as it concluded. Impish and sharp-witted, he reminded us very much of the elderly Billy Wilder, badmouthing popular entertainment (he does not have nice things to say about *Avatar*) and championing those who go against the grain, fully acknowledging the irony that he once championed the films of Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock, essentially because although they did play to popular entertainment, they went against the grain of critical approval. He can be wily. When the interviewer asks him about the jump cuts in *Breathless*, he pivots into a story about how **All the King's Men** was trimmed to a workable running time when the editors decided to focus on the most important aspects of the narrative. He may indeed have had to cut down the running time of *Breathless*, but he also knew darn well that the way he was doing it ran contrary to every established filmmaking rule. But that is why we love him. His intellect soars, and the talk, in French with optional English subtitles, is as dazzling as any movie he's made.

The set contains three Blu-ray platters and three DVD platters, all of which contain the same programming. The interview appears on the first platter with two films. All of the films are in full screen format and have very fresh transfers, although the original budget limitations can compromise the quality of the image at times. The monophonic sound is strong and finely detailed. Godard was deeply involved with the creation of all five movies, and is usually credited as the director although he worked closely with other collaborators, including Gorin, during this phase of his career, calling themselves the Dziga Vertov Group. The films generally lack credits or title cards.

The five films all address the conflict between workers and owners, particularly as it was reflected in the widespread strikes that occurred in France and elsewhere around the world in 1968. The film that opens the first platter, *A Film Like Any Other*, from 1968, has three components. Six students—five men and a woman—sit in an overgrown field (their faces are usually but not always obscured by the grass and brush) enjoying the sun and talking about the strikes and political agitation that is occurring across the land, as well as what specific actions they should be taking. This color footage is intercut with extensive silent black-and-white documentary footage of the strikes and widespread civil unrest. The third component is audio only, a separate conversation, apparently between one male and one female speaker, that provides a more formalized description of the strikes that were occurring and the economic and social theories behind them.

The film is in French with optional English subtitles. Running 107 minutes, it may seem a bit esoteric to some viewers today, but it is a worthy historical record not only of what was happening at the time, but of the mindset that led many influential people to support the strikes and protests. The camera work and editing in the outdoor conversation sequences have a haphazard tone, but are more carefully composed than it first appears, particularly in how the faces of the students, or simply the presence of the female student, are revealed. Provided the viewer is open to pondering the matters being discussed, which include some basic Marxist theory and similar concepts, the film has a surprising amount of momentum and value for all of its apparent limitations.

In *Conversation*, Godard himself states, "For a long time, I was brought up to believe that the original version was the version in the original language, with subtitles. Now I realize that subtitles remove the little that remains of the images. So I still prefer films to be dubbed. It's more honest." We've said this a number of times before about Godard's movies, but it may be more true of Godard's 1970 *Wind from the East* than any one of his other films—the presence of subtitles completely alters the nature and artistic dynamics of the film. Visually, *East* seems almost amateurish. There are none of the elegant camera moves or the intensely considered editing that grace many of his other films or even a movie such as *A Film Like Any Other*. Visually, the film is intentionally sloppy. The cast, a gathering of young actors walking through a woody area, is lackadaisical. The film begins on just a couple, lying in the grass, who may or may not have chains on their wrists, but no matter, since they seem to be resting peacefully in each other's company. After a while, the image shifts to more characters, applying makeup, walking back and forth, or trudging across the landscape. They don't seem particularly professional or accomplished. In voiceover on the soundtrack, however, is a highly complex oral essay about anarchy, capitalism, labor unrest, socialism and how these topics are reflected in culture, especially film. So if you speak French, then you have sophomoric

visuals in a marked counterpoint to a very sophisticated dialog track. If you don't, then you have a dense visual stimulation, with a steady audio drone that you barely pay attention to. Either way, however, the 93-minute film is transfixing. Suggesting, as did the documentary on anarchy we reviewed in Jan 18, **No Gods, No Masters**, that communist societies have become as class-oppressive as democratic societies, the narrative of the film even turns upon itself, to suggest that movie directors such as Godard are too privileged to be anything but clueless themselves when it comes to class oppression. Made in the aftermath of the strikes in Paris and around the world, the movie puts these events in a perspective that has grown more and more relevant over the ensuing decades.

And even though the cinematography is cheap-looking, the picture transfer is marvelously fresh, with bright hues and accurate flesh tones, so that whatever ulterior or subtle sense of design Godard is actually slipping into, the movie reaches a viewer's subconscious without impediments.

The actor characters in *Wind from the East* appear to be dressed in American Civil War or cavalry outfits (Godard was originally supposed to make a Spaghetti-style western—and Gian Maria Volontè is one of *East's* stars). Some of them, however, read manifestos in Italian that go untranslated unless the voiceover paraphrases what they have said. In the 1971 *Struggle in Italy*, which is on the same platter and feels very much like a sister film, the characters speak Italian throughout the 60-minute movie, which is again summarized with translations and paraphrasing in French on voiceover. The English subtitles only translate the French. The film is a little simpler in its dogma, with the characters—primarily a female student and, to a lesser extent, her activist boyfriend—repeating socialist precepts, quotes from Mao's *Little Red Book* and so on. The heroine indulges in some elaborate self-criticism. She also goes shopping (a piece in which she tries on a 'peasant dress' from a clothing rack captures the spirit of the film at its best), and there are numerous shots of workers (she also seems to be a garment worker) and factories, as well. Despite the film being shot in a little more stately manner, it is not as captivating as *Wind from the East*, primarily because its presentations and counter-presentations of ideas and theories are not as vertiginous. But that said, it still works as an appetizer, either priming the viewer for the other film, or enabling a more extended withdrawal.

Also featured on the platter—and maybe also worth the price of the whole set—is a minute-long TV commercial Godard made for Schick shaving lotion. Sexy and memorable, it is profoundly, deviously designed sloppiness; there has never been anything like it on television; and it works brilliantly, although apparently, it was never used.

The other film on the first platter, the 1970 *British Sounds*, works as sort of a Rosetta Stone for English-speaking viewers. Although composed with more elegance (there is a lovely and lengthy tracking shot across an automobile assembly line in the film's opening, and similar shots throughout), it has the same structure as the other movies, with voiceover discussions and dialectic declarations (including some with a child's voice) exploring many aspects of the conflicts between workers and owners. There are text ideas flashing on the screen at times, and other segments in which students discuss the politics of capitalism and so on (in our favorite sequence, the students practice singing Beatles songs with revised lyrics—"You say U.S, I say Mao..."). There is also more female nudity than in any of the other films, accompanied, in Godard's usual rascally manner, by feminist manifestos. The entire film, including the flashing text, is in English, so you don't have to be distracted by reading subtitles to absorb the artistry of Godard's dynamic, multi-informational bombardment. Running 52 minutes, this is the film to sample if you are unsure whether or not you will like the others, since it is relatively brisk, highly stimulating and, like almost all of Godard's films, a very unique and rewarding entertainment.

On the last platter, the 96-minute *Vladimir and Rosa* from 1971 has more of a playful, comedic tone, and while there are the same decorations of economic and political theory that grace the other films (although it leans more towards politics), most of the movie is Godard's restaging of the Chicago 7 trial, where American radicals were charged with inciting the Chicago riots. He changes names and is not looking to create a docudrama, but a lot of the dialog is taken directly from the transcripts of the trial, albeit translated into French. If the film exaggerates the mean spirited totalitarianism of the authorities and the flighty frustrations of the defendants, it does not do so by as much as it first seems, even if it is restaging it as a music hall farce. To some extent, all of these movies are satirical, simply because they veer so far from the norms of motion picture standards, but *Vladimir and Rosa* is more pointedly satirical, exploring the use of humor as another weapon to wield against the forces of economic and political advantage.

Finally, the last platter also contains an outstanding 90-minute overview of the films and Godard's mindset at the time, pretty much explaining everything except the parts of the movies that are purposely ambiguous. With inserted clips and photos, film historian Michael Witt talks the viewer through Godard's biography on an almost month-by-month basis from late 1967 to 1972, as he explains how the collaboration with Gorin and the Dziga Vertov Group came about, what the impulse was for creating each movie, what occurred during the shooting, and what each film intended to accomplish, including good deconstructions of many key sequences. He also talks about the projects that did not come to fruition and every other relevant

occurrence and influence. For any viewer mystified by the seeming opaqueness of the films or the erratic nature of the filmmaking techniques on display, the segment may not turn one into a devotee, but it will certainly clear up much of the mystery, and will justify possession of the set to any incredulous friends or family members.

Protests

Three documentary shorts made by a female African-American in the Sixties—not an easy task when it came to securing funding—have been brought together on an admirable Icarus Films release, **I Am Somebody: Three Films by Madeline Anderson** (UPC#854565002258, \$30). The source material for each piece is in as good of a condition as is possible, with modest scratches and other wear. The monophonic sound is reasonably clear, and there is no captioning.

Although she'd had a job as a production coordinator, Anderson was primarily an editor, and the earliest film in the collection, *Integration Report 1* from 1960, is essentially—and somewhat cleverly reflecting its title—a melding of footage from different race-related protests in America in the late Fifties and 1960, protests not just against segregation, but police brutality and a general march on Washington D.C. that included a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. The black-and-white film makes use of some live sound segments, capturing talks and speeches, and has music playing over other sequences, with Maya Angelou as one of the vocalists. Running 20 minutes, it creates a strong historical snapshot not just of how the Civil Rights movement began to crest, but of the significance film and cameras played in crystallizing its impact.

Anderson worked for what is now PBS, mostly as an editor, but she was given the opportunity to do her own segment for the network's *Black Journal* in 1967, shooting a color interview with the widow of Malcolm X, Betty Shabazz, and combining it with well chosen black-and-white footage of X's interviews and speeches to create a fair and straightforward profile, *A Tribute to Malcolm X*. Running 14 minutes, the piece also contains a lead-in segment (about a Black History library) and, at the end, the beginning of what would have been the following segment. In any case, the film provides a deft and succinct idea of why X remains a voice that should be heard first hand and not through the misguided paraphrasing of others, both friends or foes.

Everything came together for Anderson in 1970, when she was given the opportunity to film a strike by hospital workers in Charlotte, South Carolina, as it was in progress, **I Am Somebody**. Using her own color footage and news reports, the film includes scenes of police violence and supportive speeches by Ralph Abernathy, a very youthful Andrew Young, and Coretta Scott King, along with profiles of the workers and a general sense of the arc that the strike took, moving from smaller picket lines to larger protests and politicians scrambling to bring a deal together. Running 30 minutes, it is a fine piece of comprehensive reporting, but it is also an intriguing reinforcement of the lessons learned in the previous two films, about the power of publicity.

It was one of the union's officials, Moe Foner, who appears in **I Am Somebody** and backed the production of the film, because he learned fairly early on that publicity is one of the few all-purpose tools that a union has. In the special features, there is a nice 2002 interview with Foner, running 13 minutes, in which he talks about his career, how he became involved in the union, and the lessons he learned along the way.

The other special feature is another 13-minute interview, with Anderson, shot in 2017. Charming and pixyish, she talks about her career, how she somehow managed to work her way into the all-male New York editors union, and how she wanted to be a filmmaker for most of her life. Additional material from the same interview is included in a booklet that comes with the disc.

No doesn't mean yes

Ripped from today's headlines, the 1933 First National production, **She Had to Say Yes**, a Warner Home Video *Archive Collection* title (UPC# 888574541989, \$22), is a remarkably frank examination of sexual harassment in the workplace. Loretta Young is an innocent secretary, in love with her boss, working for a fashion company that employs party girls to show visiting buyers a good time. As a cost cutting move, and because the buyers are bored with the stable, the company attempts to enlist the secretarial pool in volunteering for after hours entertainment duty. Young's character gets roped in when her boss starts two-timing her and encourages her to date a buyer to get her out of the way for the evening. It is an unpleasant experience. Lyle Talbot and Regis Toomey co-star. Both characters are very creepy (Toomey is a disturbingly younger version of, well, Regis Toomey, and that is inherently creepy before he even goes into character), but a triangle develops anyway, in which each one of them eventually tries to rape her. Running 66 minutes, the film is an amazingly accurate portrait of everything that is being described today, save for the bath towels, and you suspect, despite the rampant publicity and shaming that has occurred, that it will continue well into the future, just as it has gone on for so long in the past. The film's ending, however, also bears noting, since Young's character finally accommodates the lesser of the two rapists. She whispers in his ear and they go off to have some pre-marital sex as 'The End' appears on the screen. Had the Production Code not been imposed, to hide this sort of behavior, maybe

things would have changed a lot sooner.

The full screen black-and-white picture is unusually dark, as if there is an extra filter on it or something. The amount of outright wear, however, is tolerable, as is the aged monophonic sound. There is no captioning. There are no major dance numbers in the film, incidentally, but Busby Berkeley co-directed with George Amy.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: The Criterion Collection will be releasing Frank Borzage's haunting **Moonrise**, which will be accompanied by a conversation between author Hervé Dumont (*Frank Borzage: The Life and Films of a Hollywood Romantic*) and film historian Peter Cowie. Aki Kaurismäki's **The Other Side of Hope** will come with music videos; an interview with actor Sherwan Haji; footage from the 2017 Berlin Film Festival press conference for the film, featuring Kaurismäki and the film's actors; and *Aki and Peter*, a video essay by Daniel Raim about the friendship between Kaurismäki and film critic Peter von Bagh, to whom the film is dedicated. Cristian Mungiu's **Graduation** will have an interview with Mungiu; a press conference from the 2016 Cannes Film Festival, featuring Mungiu and actors Adrian Titieni, Maria Drăguș, Mălina Manovici, and Rareș Andrici; and deleted scenes. Mungiu's **Beyond the Hills** will have another interview with Mungiu; *The Making of Beyond the Hills*, a documentary from 2013, produced by Mungiu; a press conference from the 2012 Cannes Film Festival, featuring Mungiu and actors Cosmina Stratan, Cristina Flutur, Valeriu Andriucă, and Dana Tapalagă; and deleted scenes. John Schlesinger's **Midnight Cowboy** will include a commentary from 1991 featuring Schlesinger and producer Jerome Hellman; a selected-scene commentary by cinematographer Adam Holender; *The Crowd Around the Cowboy*, a 1969 short film made on location for **Midnight Cowboy**; *Waldo Salt: A Screenwriter's Journey*, an Academy Award-nominated documentary from 1990 by Eugene Corr and Robert Hillmann; two short 2004 documentaries on the making and release of **Midnight Cowboy**; an interview with Jon Voight on *The David Frost Show* from 1970; an interview from 2000 with Schlesinger for BAFTA Los Angeles; and excerpts from the 2002 BAFTA LA Tribute to Schlesinger, featuring Voight and Dustin Hoffman. Paul Schrader's **Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters** will feature two optional English narrations, including one by Roy Scheider; a commentary from 2008 featuring Schrader and producer Alan Poul; interviews from 2007 and 2008 with Bailey, producers Tom Luddy and Mata Yamamoto, composer Philip Glass, and production designer Eiko Ishioka; interviews from 2008 with Mishima biographer John Nathan and friend Donald Richie; an audio interview from 2008 with co-screenwriter Chieko Schrader; an interview excerpt from 1966 featuring Mishima talking about writing; *The Strange Case of Yukio Mishima*, a 55-minute documentary from 1985 about the author. Robert Bresson's **Au hasard Balthazar** will have an interview from 2005 with film scholar Donald Richie and *Un metteur en ordre: Robert Bresson*, a 1966-French television program about the film, featuring Bresson, filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard and Louis Malle, and members of **Balthazar's** cast and crew.

LATEST SILENTS: The latest silent film releases from Grapevine Video include **Ducks and Drakes** and **Uncle Tom's Cabin**, both of which are available as both DVDs and Blu-rays. Sound releases include **The Admiral Broadway Revue** on DVD, **The Whispering Shadow** on DVD and Blu-ray, and **Explorers of the World** on DVD and Blu-ray.

ARCHIVE UPDATE: The following titles have recently been release as part of the Warner Home Video *Archive Collection*—**Animal Kingdom Season 2** (Blu-ray), **The Biskitts Complete Series**, **The Chastity Belt**, **The Drowning Pool** (Blu-ray), **A Girl A Guy and a Gob**, **Harper** (Blu-ray), **The Lazarus Man Complete Series**, **Leatherface The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III** (Blu-ray), **Love and Learn**, and **The Story of Louis Pasteur**.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray—**Giant** (Altered Innocence); **Coco**, **Lady and the Tramp** (Buena Vista); **An Actor's Revenge**, **Claude Autant-Lara: Four Romantic Escapes** from Occupied France, **Elevator to the Gallows** (reviewed last month), **The Hero**, **Kameradschaft**, **Night of the Living Dead**, **Silence of the Lambs**, **Tom Jones**, **Waterfront 1918** (Criterion); **The Deuce** (HBO); **Angie**, **At the Earth's Core**, **The Aviator**, **Baby Secret of the Lost Legend**, **Blame It on Rio**, **Call Her Applebrook**, **Chaos/Don't Look in the Basement**, **The Covered Wagon**, **Crossing the Bridge/Indian Summer**, **Daddy and the Muscle Academy: The Life, Art and Times of Tom of Finland**, **The Diabolical Dr. Z**, **The Last Hunter**, **The Master Complete Series**, **The Oldest Profession**, **The Outlaw**, **Sinbad of the Seven Seas**, **The Thomas Crown Affair**, **Tom of Finland**, **Underground**, **The Way West**, **V.I. Warshawski**, **The Wilby Conspiracy** (Kino); **Blade of the Immortal**, **Permanent** (Magnolia); **Legend of the American Sniper** (Mill Creek); **The Aftermath**, **The Bird with the Crystal Plumage**, **The Cat O'Nine Tails**, **The Man from Earth Holocene**, **Re-Animator** (MVD); **Daddy's Home 2**, **Suburbicon** (Paramount); **LBJ**, **The Star** (Sony); **Murder on the Orient Express**, **Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri** (Fox); **All I See Is You**, **A Bad Mom's Christmas** (Universal)

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently issued in 4K format—**Coco** (Buena Vista); **Murder on the Orient Express**, **Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri** (Fox)