

Silver) as he creates a kind of true horror story when Silkwood discovers that she has become contaminated. *Silkwood* was nominated for five Academy Awards, including direction, acting (Streep, Cher), editing, and original screenplay (by Nora Ephron and Alice Arlen), and Cher won a Golden Globe for her supporting performance. Extras include an interview with producer Michael Hausman. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Son of Paleface ★★★

Kino Lorber, 144 min., not rated, DVD: \$14.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

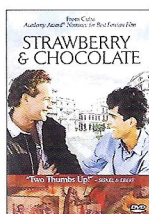
Bob Hope and Jane Russell reunite for this 1952 sequel to their hit 1948 comedy *The Paleface*, with Hope playing his own son, arrogant Harvard graduate Junior Potter, and Russell as a notorious outlaw known only as "The Torch." Roy Rogers costars (with Trigger, Smartest Horse in the Movies, who gets fourth billing in the credits) as a singing federal marshal called in to catch The Torch, and he uses Junior, an Easterner come West to collect his inheritance, as bait. Hope's comedies were among the most self-referential of the era and this one features a jokey reference to Bing Crosby (his *Road* movie costar) and a comic reprise of the Oscar-winning song "Buttons and Bows" from *The Paleface*. Director Frank Tashlin, a former animator and comedy screenwriter, brings a cartoonish imagination to the visual gags (in one scene he throws banana peels for rampaging horses to slip on)—a style that found a perfect match in Tashlin's later collaborations with Jerry Lewis. This is among the silliest and most whimsical of Hope's comedies, spotty but often very funny and helmed with a comic energy that keeps the film moving at a rapid pace. Extras include audio commentary by animation film historian Greg Ford, and the bonus animated short "The Lady Said No" (1946)—a reconstructed previously lost film written and directed by Tashlin. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Strawberry & Chocolate

★★★
 Hen's Tooth, 111 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.95

Featuring a charismatic performance from Cuban star Jorge Perugorria, this 1993 drama about relative notions of personal and political liberation comes across as a bit dated now, but still remains a touching and intriguing two-person drama. Co-written and co-directed (with Juan Carlos Tabío) by Cuba's once most famous filmmaker, the late Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Strawberry & Chocolate* stars Perugorria as Diego, a gay writer and activist who is under official scrutiny in Havana. Targeted by a group of young Communists

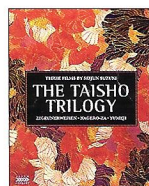


intent on ideological purity and plain old homophobia, Diego's culturally expansive, highly literate world is invaded by David (Vladimir Cruz), who is sent undercover to befriend Diego and gather evidence that can convict him. Instead, David finds himself opening up to the world under Diego's influence and passion, although the latter sees right through David's initial ruse. The trusting personal relationship that follows—within the island nation's pervasive fear and betrayal—becomes the warm center of the film. Alea understandably plays things a bit safe given the political atmosphere in which he shot his Oscar-nominated film. Diego is not drawn as a truly three-dimensional gay man, but the same could be said of Tom Hanks's character in the mainstream AIDS drama *Philadelphia* (also from 1993). And that limitation doesn't stand in the way of Alea's smart critique of revolutionary blindness. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

The Taisho Trilogy

★★★
 Arrow, 6 discs, 412 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$99.99

Filmmaker Seijun Suzuki was essentially blackballed from the Japanese film industry after making some of the most outrageous crime films of the 1960s. *The Taisho Trilogy*—set in Japan's Taisho era (1912-1926)—marked the director's comeback. The set kicks off with *Zigeunerweisen* (1980)—an historical drama melded with a ghost story—about a German language professor (Toshiya Fujita) and a vagabond former classmate/possible serial killer (Yoshio Harada) who both fall for a beautiful geisha (Naoko Otani), becoming obsessed to the point where one of them marries a lookalike. The story is marked by paranoia, treachery, and perhaps a supernatural haunting, taking a macabre turn in the final act. *Kagero-za* (1981), also a tale of erotic obsession, concerns a playwright (Yusaka Matsuda) attracted to a lovely woman (Michiyo Okusu), following a trail of messages that lead him across the country and into surreal situations. The final film, *Yumeji* (1991), is another ghost story in which rock star Kenji Sawada plays real-life painter and poet Takehisa Yumeji in a romantic fantasy about a man in love with a widow (Tomoko Mariya) who is haunted by her dead husband. Suzuki directs here with a far more introspective style than the wild anything-goes cinematic insanity of his earlier cult films, but his storytelling is just as demanding and he delivers intense imagery, vivid colors, and dynamic compositions. Presenting all three films in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, extras include video introductions to each film by film critic Tony Rayns, a "making-of" featurette, and a vintage inter-

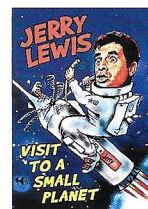


view with Suzuki. Foreign film aficionados with a taste for the challenging will likely appreciate. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Visit to a Small Planet

★★
 Kino Lorber, 85 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Gore Vidal's original *Visit to a Small Planet* was a satire of post-World War II American culture under the sway of television while in the shadow of the Cold War and Communist paranoia. The Broadway play, which Vidal adapted from his original teleplay, ran for almost a year and earned multiple Tony nominations. The story was rewritten by Hollywood for the big screen when Jerry Lewis was cast in the lead. The Cold War politics and atomic era culture were jettisoned for UFO mania in this 1960 comedy focusing on the antics of Kreton (Lewis), an ageless yet juvenile student from another planet who cuts class, flies across the universe, and becomes the guest of an American TV commentator (Fred Clark) and his family. A hundred years too late to observe the Civil War, he decides to study modern human culture, in particular the romantic rituals between the family daughter (Joan Blackman) and her boyfriend (Earl Holliman). Little of Vidal's wit and satirical observations survived the translation, which plays up Lewis's man-boy persona and puts goofy gags in the foreground as Kreton shows off his alien powers (he pulls his ear and flares his nostrils and, like magic, objects levitate)—at least until his disapproving teacher takes away his powers and watches him flounder. It was shot quickly in black-and-white by director Norman Taurog on a relatively small budget and that shows, especially next to Lewis's energetic color films. While it does feature some amusing cultural parody (including a jazz club full of beatnik clichés), this is second-rate Lewis and third-rate Vidal. Extras include audio commentary by film historian James L. Neibaur. Optional, at best. (S. Axmaker)



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