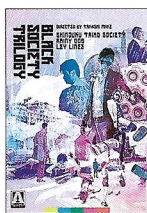


to a beatnik actor (Frank Gorshin spoofing Marlon Brando) and a dentist songwriter, and becomes the straight-talking muse to Martin's playwright under an alter-ego. More complications ensue when the answering service becomes the unwitting go-between for a gambling syndicate and the police put the business under surveillance, convinced that it is up to no good. This is old school musical comedy, lightweight and silly with harmless criminals and bumbling cops and a slate of entertaining but disposable songs with comic lyrics. Vincente Minnelli directs the colorful Arthur Freed production like an elaborate stage show, with fabulously designed studio sets that are far more like the older 1950s musicals than the changing styles of 1960s musicals to come. André Previn composed the Oscar-nominated score, Jean Stapleton plays the owner of the answering service, and jazz saxophone great Gerry Mulligan appears as Ella's clumsy blind date. It's the final film by the great Holliday and she carries the film with her energy and talent: singing, dancing, and playing multiple characters for her answering service clients. Likely to appeal to fans of classic musicals, *Bells Are Ringing* bows on Blu-ray with extras including a behind-the-scenes featurette, musical outtakes, and an alternate version of "The Midas Touch." Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

### Black Society Trilogy

★★★1/2

Arrow, 2 discs, 302 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$49.95

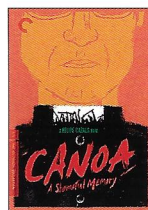


Japanese filmmaker Takashi Miike broke out of the low-budget direct-to-video industry with his first theatrical feature *Shinjuku Triad Society* (1995), a violent and energetic gangster thriller about a merciless Tokyo cop who stalks a brutal Taiwanese gang leader (Tomorrow Taguchi) dealing in black market human organs, only to discover that his own younger brother is working for his quarry. The brothers, Japanese orphans raised by Chinese parents, are outcasts in both societies, and that alienation defines the crime drama as much as the sadistic violence and predatory sex. *Rainy Dog* (1997) moves to Taiwan for the story of a Japanese yakuza foot soldier in exile in Taipei, where he survives as a freelance hitman for a local mobster, living only for himself until he's presented with a son he never knew and hooks up with a young prostitute. When the gangster betrays him and a price is put on his head, he becomes protective of his instant family. And in *Ley Lines* (1999), three mixed-race boys (Chinese father, Japanese mother) become involved with a sadistic Tokyo crime boss. While no characters cross over in the trilogy, all three films are set on the outskirts of society and feature outcast characters and themes of alienation and

abandonment, as well as perverse sexuality, brutal violence, and vicious characters. Extras include audio commentaries on all three films by Miike biographer Tom Mes and new video interviews with Miike and actor Show Aikawa. Likely to appeal to fans of Japanese cult films, this is a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

### Canoa ★★★1/2

Criterion, 115 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95



Although not well known to American audiences, this 1976 film is a landmark of Mexican cinema. Set during the political unrest of 1968 and based on real life events, the film opens with a news report: four young men killed and another critically injured in San Miguel Canoa, a small, impoverished village located a few miles from the city of Puebla. Director Felipe Cazals uses documentary techniques to illustrate the town's culture and highlight the power wielded by the priest, and more conventional dramatic scenes to introduce the aforementioned young men (all apolitical employees of a university). The measured, sober reportage style and easygoing comic quality of the boisterous boys collide when the townsfolk brutally attack the strangers after being stirred into hysteria by the priest. The setting may not resonate with American viewers but the portrait of a community leader manipulating the ignorant and illiterate through fear, xenophobia, and religion is perennially relevant. *Canoa* is historical drama and political commentary presented as horror film, with bloody scenes of brutal violence as the innocent students are massacred with machetes and rifles. This remarkable drama combines unreliable narrators, documentary style, and primal drama into a powerful portrait of despotism, manipulation, and mob violence in a thoughtful, provocative, and ultimately emotionally affecting manner. Extras include a video introduction by filmmaker Guillermo del Toro and a conversation between filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón and Cazals. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

### Deluge ★★★

Kino Lorber, 70 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



This original end-of-the-world disaster movie is a curious and often fascinating artifact. Produced in 1933 (pre-Production Code) on a relatively modest budget, the film parses out the special effects spectacle carefully, opening with scientists in a panic as they predict dire storms—alarming news that is communicated over radio reports. Intercut with these voices of authority is the story of Martin (Sidney Blackmer) and Helen (Lois Wilson),

a married couple with two kids whose rural manor is destroyed in the storms, and professional swimmer Claire (Peggy Shannon), who escapes a brutish thug and is rescued by Martin, separated by the havoc from his family and surviving in a remote cabin. The spectacle is all presented during the first act, with primitive, almost surreal miniature effects showing New York City being leveled in an earthquake and swamped in tidal waves, while the remainder of the film is a tale of survival after the end of civilization as we know it. A marauding gang preys upon survivors, raping and murdering women (not shown on-screen but the implications are clear), while a community of survivors tries to rebuild from the rubble of a ruined town. Based on the titular 1928 novel by Sydney Fowler Wright, *Deluge* can lay claim to the title of first disaster movie. For decades the film was only available in an Italian-dubbed print, but is presented here in a fine restoration of the original English language version, with extras including audio commentary by film historian Richard Harland Smith, and the 1934 B-movie *Back Page* (a newspaper drama starring Shannon). Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

### Film ★★★

Milestone, 22 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.95, Blu-ray: \$39.99



### Notfilm ★★★

Milestone, 2 discs, 129 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Playwright Samuel Beckett participated in bringing many of his works to TV but only once engaged in filmmaking, writing the original screenplay for the experimental short *Film* and completely overseeing the direction (attributed to longtime stage collaborator Alan Schneider). *Film* stars Buster Keaton as an unnamed man who keeps his face hidden from people, windows, mirrors, animals, and the roving camera that follows him through a city. It plays like you might expect from a playwright with a minimalist aesthetic, more conceptual than cinematic, and (apart from one absurd sight gag) largely fails to make use of the talents and experience of great silent movie comedian and filmmaker Keaton. But given the meeting of legends in their respective fields, it remains a landmark of sorts. And it inspired film restorer Ross Lipman to make the 2015 documentary *Notfilm*, which Lipman describes as a kino-essay. It's a fitting description for a two-hours-plus production that mixes interviews and historical documents together with observations and philosophical musings on *Film*, as well as the art and inspiration of Beckett. Available in separate editions, extras on *Film* include outtakes and the home video debut of a 1961 TV production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* starring Zero Mostel and Burgess Meredith, while extras on *Notfilm*