

delivered, and like most of his movies, the Italian dialog is post-synchronized, with optional English subtitles. Along with a montage of promotional materials that runs about 8 minutes, there is a 58-minute production featurette that contains lots of behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with everyone except the maestro himself. (About halfway through it, the screen goes black, and then leader appears for the second reel.) The program follows a make-believe female reporter who is trying to do a story about the film, but this contrivance gives the piece an impish feel that makes it an ideal aperitif to the feature.

Laughing with Wanda

The marvelous, cartoony romantic crime comedy, A Fish Called Wanda, has been released on Blu-ray by Arrow Video (UPC#760137044086, \$40). The picture transfer is not that much different from the old MGM transfer (May 99). Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, hues are a touch light at times and there is a slight grain in some darker sequences, but the image is still fully acceptable. The monophonic sound is crisp, and there is a remastered 5.1-channel DTS track that brings a basic dimensionality to the music. There are optional English subtitles and a subtitle track that contains trivia about the film and the cast.

Often forgotten amid the 1988 film's funniest moments, it is a sweet romance on top of everything else. Kevin Kline, Michael Palin, Jamie Lee Curtis and Tom Georgeson pull off a smooth diamond heist, but through their own betrayals, they lose access to the diamonds, and must target an unsuspecting lawyer, played by John Cleese, to get the diamonds back. Kline's over-the-top performance suits the film perfectly and is riotously funny. Some viewers may find Palin's performance disconcerting, as it hinges on a very bad stutter, but the movie is so unrelenting about it, your defenses eventually wear down, and it is very necessary to keep the plot complications bubbling over. Curtis and Cleese provide the heart of the picture. The legendary British director Charles Crichton managed the film's pacing superbly, with Cleese's input going well beyond simply writing the script, but along with everything else, the film is a collaborative joy, and it is that spirit that takes the pain out of the slapstick while leaving the humor fully appreciable.

The greatest advantage of the new Blu-ray, however, is its multitude of special features, particularly the 30 minutes of deleted and alternate scenes, although the funniest deleted scene of all appears in a very good 2003 retrospective featurette. Running 31 minutes, the featurette goes into detail about the challenges the cast and crew faced, and how they worked through those challenges to find solutions that benefited the film. It also contains a very amusing sequence with Palin and Kline, in which the two ransack a room in vain for writing instruments, in order to communicate a vital piece of information.

A good 48-minute production featurette, framed as a profile of Cleese, has lots of behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with the cast and crew. Cleese even opens up about his private life. There is a nice 8-minute interview with production designer Roger Murray-Leach, who explains how various aspects of the film were conceived and staged; an interesting 17-minute piece that presents a more objective view of how the film was gestated and why it came together as it did; a 17-minute visit to the film's locations; a jokey 5-minute Cleese introduction ("Hi, my name is Meryl Streep..."); and a trailer.

Finally, Cleese supplies a very rewarding commentary track, going over details on every aspect of the production, and also talking about filmmaking strategies ("The great thing about romantic comedy is that at least until consummation there's a kind of tension between the characters, the audience wondering, 'Will they? Won't they?'" and it enables you to stop the jokes for a bit, take the pace down without losing a little bit of tension on the screen, without the audience losing interest. And I think that's why romantic comedy is such an attractive genre, because you can have very, very funny sequences, but you can also have these low key sequences that enable the pace to come down, which somehow make the comedy funnier once you get back to it.") and how comedy works ("Sometimes when you get a funny idea, you can make a mistake and try to get too many laughs out of it. Every funny idea has only so many laughs in it, and that's the number you should go for.")

He also goes into great detail about his collaboration with his three primary co-stars:

"One of the things I was able to do with Kevin was to stop for 10 days before we actually got anywhere near shooting the movie and just go through the movie with him with all of the scenes, and just see what he came up with. And he came up with some wonderful lines, and also there's some wonderful physical stuff, like sniffing under the armpit, and all that came because we were very loose, very relaxed. We had lots of time. We were just able to play.

"One of the things that I started with when I was trying to work up Michael's character is I simply had the idea of the scene at the end of the

movie. In fact, I think it was the very first idea I had for the whole movie, of someone with a stutter trying to get information out, and not being able to, although they're really trying to. And the reason I knew that would be beautifully played by Michael is that his father had quite a stutter, and he was able throughout his childhood to observe it. There's a very obvious way of doing a stutter, which I guess, frankly, most actors would do, which wouldn't be right and wouldn't be funny. And it's the little sort of subterfuges, the little tactics that people with a stutter or a stammer use to try and hide it that Michael knew about and was able to incorporate in his performance.

"Jamie was terribly, terribly helpful. What she said was we mustn't rehearse these scenes too much. In comedy, I believe in endless, endless rehearsals, doing it again and again and again and again, because each time a little smoothness creeps in, you discover something else, you find a new rhythm. Well Jamie said to me, 'It isn't like that with the romantic scenes. We don't want to rehearse this,' and she'd catch me sitting in the corner, running the lines, and she'd wave a finger at me and say, 'No!' So for the first time in my life, I suddenly found that acting was not about this strict rhythm that comedy demands. And, it was rather fun, because when you play in comedy normally, the demands of the timing are so great that it sometimes seems to me as though there's some sort of huge metronome at the back of my head just clicking, and I've got to do everything on the click. You know, I've got to do the line, then two clicks, another line, one click, another line, three clicks, turn head on second click. And I get it very, very, very grooved. And I can reproduce almost the exact same performance again and again and again. Surprises people, but I'm a very technical performer. So I found that, going into these scenes with Jamie, not quite knowing how we were going to play them was intensely liberating. I was suddenly released from the metronome and just able to play in the moment. And I suddenly thought this kind of acting is rather fun because, rather like Kevin's performance, I didn't know what I was going to do during the scene. It was like being in a little rowboat, pushing off from the shore, and then throwing the oar away."

Like all movie productions, there were instances of tension, and he acknowledges them, but for the most part, the shoot went smoothly. "It was a very happy production. We did it in 52 days and Charlie was so efficient we used to finish it by six every night. Nobody got too tired and we really all had a rather good time, and I think that that contributes to the good spirit that you see up on the screen."

A ghost

Kristen Stewart and director Oliver Assayas had a terrific hit with the 2014 The Clouds of Sils Maria (Jul 16), in which Stewart delivered a wonderful, captivating performance as the personal assistant to a famous actress. So the two teamed up again with a rather obvious marketing ploy, the 2016 Personal Shopper, a Criterion Blu-ray (UPC#715515205214, \$40), in which Stewart portrays the title character, picking out and picking up clothing and accessories for a wealthy socialite who has no time to do her own shopping. The film is a surprise, however, because it is also a ghost story, as Stewart's character may or may not be haunted by the specter of her deceased twin brother. To give the 105-minute feature more structure, there is also a murder. The film does not have the strong inter-character dynamic that made Clouds of Sils Maria so captivating, but it is an eerie and intriguing tale, combining the marvelous down-to-earth fantasy of life amid the haute couture with more ethereal intrigues that may or may not be real.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer is smooth and glossy, enhancing the appeal of the European locations. The DTS sound has a lovely dimensionality, and lots of scary bumps and thumps. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, a satisfying, analytical 17-minute talk about the film by Assayas, who explains how he developed the idea for the story, talks about working with Stewart and provides an interesting perspective on horror movies ("When you start dealing with genre filmmaking, you are in an area where I'm not so comfortable, which is like the stereotype of American genre filmmaking. There's this notion that you have 'good' and you have 'evil.' What is visible is good and what is out of view is evil, or the embodiment of evil, which, of course, is very different from my vision of the supernatural. I think that the supernatural is what happens outside the sphere of our senses, but it's pretty real, and eventually it could be a good thing connecting with it."), and a typical 46-minute Cannes press conference where the reporters ask Stewart about acting in the nude and that sort of thing, although it does give Assayas an opportunity to share more insights about the history of spiritualism, as he explains where his inspirations for the film came from. "I went back to a very specific period at the end of the Nineteenth Century when all of a sudden they discovered photography, they discovered X-rays, they discovered the Morse Code—all of a sudden, things that were unthinkable were thinkable, so why [would] communicating with the dead be impossible? It was as weird, as shocking, as transformative as any of those inventions. So there was a very short period in time in the mid-Nineteenth Century to the end of the century where it was something that was real. It was tangible."