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Hit the Heights in 4K

People on the street who suddenly move to catchy music in a coordinated manner is always a thrilling moment in the movies, and is especially so on home video in 4K format, which transfuses the subconscious and sends it in perfect step with the conscious excitements of the film's melodic spectacle. And yet, the folks that went gaga over **La La Land** were curiously subdued about the more joyful and life affirming New York-set musical, **In the Heights**. Coastal jealousy, perhaps? Released as a 4K UltraHD Blu-ray by Studio Distribution Services (UPC#883929701834, \$45), Jon Cho directed the 2021 Warner singing and dancing extravaganza, which features songs by producer Lin-Manuel Miranda and choreography by Christopher Scott. Set in a mixed Hispanic neighborhood in Manhattan, the story follows several young characters who are pondering their future and making decisions about their lives. During a hot summer replete with a blackout, there are romances and tragedies, and almost a dozen characters to keep track of over the film's 143-minute running time, but it is a full-fledged musical celebrating Hispanic Americans, with an effective narrative to bridge the numbers and a happy ending to top things off (with a final gag involving Miranda—he has a small part in the film—after the end credits are done scrolling). The film has and expresses a political consciousness about immigration and assimilation, but unlike **La La Land**, there is nothing sour in its narrative arc to spoil the exhilaration of its celebratory optimism.

Anthony Ramos and Melissa Barrera star with Leslie Grace, Corey Hawkins and Jimmy Smits. Did we mention people breaking into dance on the streets? Well, there's also a scene set at a crowded public swimming pool, where the same thing happens. It's Esther Williams in the real world. And probably impossible to have been staged before 2021, there is a dance number set on the side of a building that would leave Fred Astaire scratching his head in amazement. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The two-platter set also contains a standard Blu-ray presentation of the film, which is available separately, as well (UPC#883929701377, \$35). Yes, the standard BD looks and sounds great, and the film is still exhilarating, but in a direct comparison, the picture on the HD presentation is sharper and the Dolby Atmos sound is stronger, enhancing the impact of every musical number and sharpening one's response to the emotional journeys the characters take. If the film has imperfections—there are so many characters, although we couldn't imagine eliminating any of them, that Cho cannot always keep the viewer abreast of what each one is up to, even during important transitions, leading to emotional inconsistencies—they are diminished by the excitements of music and movement that the 4K enhances. Musicals don't have to be perfect, anyway, because it is the music, not the drama, that elevates a viewer's spirit, and in 4K format, a viewer's spirit hits the heights.

Both platters have an audio track that describes the action (“People all turn to look at her, and the wig stands face front.”), another one that describes the action for British people (“Everyone gapes at her, including the wig heads”), alternate French, Italian and two Spanish audio tracks, twelve subtitled options including English, and an option to play through the film's seventeen musical numbers without the non-musical sequences. The alternate audio tracks present the songs in English—the alternate language subtitles kick in during the songs—with one important exception. Although the Castilian Spanish track has English songs, the Latin Spanish track has Spanish songs (with bits of English mixed in), and yes, it is worth watching the whole movie over again to hear the numbers blend English and Spanish from the other direction, as it were.

The standard BD also has alternate Portuguese and German audio tracks, a German descriptive track, karaoke presentations of the movie's two biggest numbers, and an excellent 45 minutes of production featurettes that go over how the show originated with Miranda in his youth and eventually found

its way to Broadway, how Cho became involved, how Scott and his extensive team tackled the monumental choreography (including the traditions of salsa that were incorporated in the dances), how they staged the dance on the side of the building, how the various members of the cast channeled their characters through their own experiences, and many other terrific insights and behind-the-scenes material. And besides, you get to sample the songs and the dances all over again, which makes it worthwhile regardless of how interested you are in how the film was made.

Dune belongs in 4K

The analog speedometer in our new car has an odd design. For low speeds, every two-and-a-half miles-an-hour is delineated with a hashmark, but for higher speeds, while maintaining the same arc, the numbers are compressed so that the lines only delineate every five miles-an-hour. David Lynch's 1984 science-fiction epic produced by Dino De Laurentiis, **Dune**, is structured in much the same way. The film takes its time at first, leisurely introducing the setting, the characters and the narrative—all of which are mind-bendingly bizarre for those unfamiliar with Frank Herbert's novel—and then it accelerates as story points and wild imagery flash by in lines-on-the-road-just-look-like-dots fashion to complete the tale in its 137-minute running time. Still, for all of the movie's flaws and relatively primitive pre-computer graphic special effects, and even though Lynch has pretty much disowned it, it is a dazzling accomplishment, and all the more so now that Arrow Video has released the Universal feature as a 4K UHD Blu-ray (UPC#760137414384, \$60).

We reviewed a very satisfying Universal DVD release in Mar 06 that not only included some worthwhile special features, but added the lengthened TV miniseries version of the film that incorporated a lot more material, which had to be dropped to reach the feature's time constraints. For fans, the DVD was a treat, because you still had Lynch's original film (he had his name taken off the longer version), but if you were desperate to have some of the story's accelerated plot points embellished, you could get that, as well.

The Arrow release has only the theatrical version, but it offers a solid, finely and exactly colored image—the DVD looked decent, but this presentation, with its extensive, minutely replicated detail, is captivating—and a more glorious 5.1-channel DTS audio track that not only brings out the deep bass, an intricate part of the film's mesmerism, but sharpens and improves the musical score by the rock group, Toto, too. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the film was ahead of its time and truly belongs in 4K format, where the vastness and complexity of its imagery and narrative display can be delivered without reservation or impediment. The format doesn't solve the movie's problems, it just invalidates them by magnifying what succeeds.

Along with optional English subtitles, the disc carries over the special features that appeared on the DVD, including 17 minutes of intriguing deleted scenes and 29 minutes of good retrospective documentaries about the production designs and special effects. There are two trailers, three TV commercials, a home video promo, an excellent collection of production and promotional images in still frame, a terrific 6-minute promotional teaser that smartly focuses on the breadth and creativity of the film's imagery, and a great 40-minute retrospective documentary from 2003 that not only looks at how the project came together but addresses its critical and boxoffice failure, suggesting that the time has arrived for a reassessment.

A standard Blu-ray platter of additional supplements is also included in the set, which contains a marvelous 23-minute look at the toys that were marketed as a tie-in to the film, presented with the obvious circumspect consideration that **Dune** is not a film that ought to inspire toys. Also featured is a very good 25-minute retrospective look at the rock group, Toto, how they came to do the film's musical score and the details of their approach to the project; a decent 17-minute interview with make-up man Giannetto de Rossi;

Dune (Continued)

an additional 3-minute interview with Christopher Tucker, who did a couple of special make-up effects; a cute 26-minute interview (“You’re making me think of things that I haven’t thought about in the last 20 years. I wanted to forget.”) from 2007 with the late production coordinator Golda Offenheim, who explains what her responsibilities were (things like getting everyone hotel rooms, chasing after leased equipment, getting stunt people to the hospital and so on); and a nice 9-minute interview clip with co-star Paul Smith, who had a great time even though the shooting conditions were hellish.

The film is also accompanied on the 4K platter by two commentary tracks. Internet film expert Mike White provides an excellent talk about the film and its artistry, comparing both to Herbert’s novel and to the earlier drafts of the screenplay in order to weigh the propriety and impropriety of what was left in the film and what was taken out. Along with including all sorts of informative trivia (he is reasonably thorough at pointing out the instances where Lynch has been true to Herbert’s Arabic sources), he does a very good job of explaining why the film remains a compelling experience, as well as why it was a disappointment to a wide array of film viewers. And once he mentions how much the original story was inspired by **Lawrence of Arabia**, you start seeing all sorts of shots that Lynch lifted and adapted to the exotic setting, from an attack on an enemy stronghold to the final shot of Alicia Roanne Witt (and boy, are there some interesting stories about her).

The other commentary is by Paul M. Sammon, who worked as a publicist on the film (he shot the excellent 6-minute promotional teaser) and was essentially on the set for most of the production, providing an unblemished history of what happened as the problems with the production began to grow. His talk is not coordinated with what is happening on the screen, but it is an excellent insider’s view of the cutthroat Hollywood working environment (even the publicity people were stabbing each other in the back) and has nice, personal portraits of many of the individuals who worked on the film. He summarizes the movie’s problems succinctly. “**Dune**, as released in 1984, is really a hybrid beast. It is in my opinion a fascinating failure. There are moments of great beauty. Indeed, it is a gorgeous looking motion picture, with excellent acting, as well as over-the-top, let’s face it, bad acting. There are surreal, beautiful scenes, followed by a jumbled narrative that completely seems to disintegrate in its last hour. And yet, for all of that, for someone who approaches **Dune** for the first time, and knows nothing of the book and nothing of the film’s tortured history, they will find a film with fascinating characters, extremely hallucinogenic and hypnotic imagery, and a certain solemnity, grace and epic sweep that still remains quite individual for its time period and, indeed, has caused the growth of a **Dune** cult even though it was initially derided as a complete artistic and commercial failure.”

In search of lost time

Grab a journal and a pen before putting on The Criterion Collection’s Blu-ray release of the witty 1998 Hirokazu Kore-eda metaphysical feature, **After Life** (UPC#715515262910, \$40). Ostensibly, the film is a depiction of the bureaucrats processing the souls of people who have died, but what the movie is really about, and what makes it so lucidly interactive, is memories. The dead are instructed to choose ‘the happiest memory’ from their lives, as this will be the only memory they will carry with them through eternity.

It takes a ‘week’ to process a group of departed individuals, and the film, which runs 119 minutes, follows the functionaries who conduct the interviews on a day-to-day basis for one of those weeks. The story is as much about them, and their relationships with their co-workers, as it is about their subjects. In an inspired angle that makes a great deal of sense, since the film is about the deaths of characters within a film, the goal of the week for the workers is to make an individual film of each subject’s memory, as it is the screening of each film that then enables the subject to transition to the final phase in his or her existence.

All of this is intriguing, and there are some clever little story twists to justify the greater narrative arc, but it is also secondary to the movie’s true pleasure. Because the conversations are all about memories, and more specifically about happy memories, there are many discussions of what constitutes a happy memory. Naturally, each time a memory is described—a moment with a loved one, a moment of solitude, a moment of exceptional experience, a moment in the security of childhood—it triggers not just a single memory, but a flood of memories within the viewer. And since the discussions change, it is not just one type of nice memory that is triggered, it is a torrent of nice memories. Hence, if you have a journal in your lap and you just jot down as quickly as possible each memory that pops into your head as you watch the film, then by the end you will have a document of the happiest moments in your own life, one that you can add to at any time, and one that you can ponder to shore up your own spirit when darker forces try to batter it.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Most of the film is set in some sort of dilapidated school or hospital building and grounds (it was actually shot in an abandoned laboratory). The setting does not look so much dreary as it does frayed and worn down. The documentary-style cinematography does not try to work against this atmosphere. Often, interiors will be darkish, as the light coming from the windows, while not overbearing, is dominant even at the expense of the activities within the room. It is clear from the clarity of detail that the transfer

of the source material is accurate, but the imagery is deliberately drab and the visual presentation is, in that sense, unremarkable, although a few scattered moments are captivating. The same is true of the monophonic sound.

The film is in Japanese and comes with optional English subtitles, and a trailer. There are 17 minutes of deleted scenes that would have taken the film in different directions. Although the bulk of the footage clearly matches the movie’s opening and closing scenes, it would have sent the film too far down the wrong path and was sensibly trimmed.

In a good 19-minute interview, Kore-eda reflects upon his own memories of making the film, and wonders if they will change in his later years. “A memory is not like a fossil fixed deep in the earth. In terms of the timing of a recollection, as a person’s remembering changes, the memory changes, as well. Memory is ever changing.” He also provides the basics of how the project was conceived and how it was altered by both the cast, which was a mix of actors and non-professional interviewees, and the cinematographer, who captured images and ideas Kore-eda was not expecting.

The film had two cinematographers, one for the movie itself and one, who is seen on camera, for the movies shot of the restaged memories. The primary cinematographer, Yutaka Yamazaki, talks for 20 minutes about working with Kore-eda in television and how their backgrounds in documentaries guided their approach to the feature. In a 16-minute interview, Masayoshi Sukita, who had originally made a name for himself as a still photographer shooting rock stars, speaks about his career, how it intersected with Kore-eda, and how he approached the assignment.

The film comes with a basic commentary track from Kore-eda expert Linda C. Ehrlich, although it has a number of gaps that she attempts to disguise by suggesting that the viewer listen to the dialog in the scene, a dubious suggestion for English speaking viewers who could just as easily read the subtitles while she is talking. In any case, along with supplying the backgrounds of the film’s players and going over Kore-eda’s career, she provides a detailed overview of the film’s conception—Kore-eda began by interviewing people about their memories and ended up casting a number of them to repeat their stories on film—and suggests that the movie’s straddling of life and after-life is similar to the way it straddles documentary and fiction.

French crime thrillers

Two French crime films directed by Jacques Deray and starring Alain Delon have been released on a single-platter Blu-ray by Cohen Media Group as a *Classics of French Cinema* title, **The Gang / Three Men to Kill** (UPC#738329255138, \$30). The films are in French with optional English subtitles and have restored monophonic audio tracks that are reasonably crisp.

Understandably, the French police were somewhat disorganized at the end of World War II until ranks and loyalties could be sorted out. A coterie of 1946 criminals takes advantage of this in the 1977 *The Gang*, staging robberies and getting away before the cops can get to the scene. Delon, who has one of the world’s most awful hairdos in the movie (think of the young Al Franken, or Eric Bogosian in *Under Siege 2*—actually, it’s worse than Bogosian’s hair in *Under Siege 2*), is the central character, and his romance with a coat check girl, played by Nicole Calfan, forms the spine of the film, which jumps around in time a bit to keep things interesting. Keyed by Delon’s hair, the film at first seems like it will be awkward and unkempt, but it turns out to have two supremely entertaining sequences—one in which Delon’s character must escape from a train station after a robbery, and another where the whole gang are surrounded by police at a woodsy inn like John Dillinger and escape without a scratch—and the goodwill generated by the excitements of these two scenes, combined with the generally pleasant atmosphere of crime and romance that the 104-minute film conveys, makes it fully entertaining and worth one’s while.

Our Thirty-seventh Anniversary!

Welcome to our *Thirty-seventh Anniversary Issue* and the beginning of our thirty-eighth year of publication! Our deepest thanks to all of our readers for their continued support and favor. Additionally, thank you to the many people in the home video industry who have gone out of their way to support our efforts. Your faith in us is greatly appreciated. Thank you also to everyone at GMPC for always printing the Newsletter in a timely and efficient fashion.

As you maybe aware, we compile all of our DVD reviews into a single source book, which is now up to its hundred-thirtieth iteration and is available on CD-ROM or as a .pdf file that can be downloaded from the Internet. Feel free to contact us for more details. You can also find it in Kindle format on www.amazon.com, though not with the same freshly updated content—more than 16,000 reviews—that we offer directly.

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The picture, which has also been restored, is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is grainy now and then, and contrasts are a little weak in darker sequences, but colors are bright and fleshtones are accurate. Overall, the film looks reasonably nice. There is a rather repetitive musical score from Carlo Rustichelli that tries to evoke Claude Boling's nostalgic music in Deray's **Borsalino** films, but it is mostly irritating, although its presence subsides in the movie's second half.

The second film, *Three Men to Kill*, from 1980, is a terrific suspense thriller with a deflating ending that robs the film of the euphoria it established up to the final frames. Delon (with his hair back to normal, thank goodness) is an innocent bystander who assists the victim of a car accident, which turns out to have been an attempted murder. He is then targeted by the assassins, but fortunately, he has enough of a skill set to avoid their attacks, working his way through the hierarchy to find the boss that originally ordered the hit. Having a normal life, he has a beautiful girlfriend, played with great flair by Dalila Di Lazzaro, that he is starting to get serious with, and contacts he can call upon when he gets into trouble. Running 93 minutes, the film has a harrowing car chase and quite a few moments of exquisite excitement, but that is the movie's problem. If it was a brooding, existential drama with alienated characters, then the ending would be much easier to accept, but up to the end, Deray has staged everything so expertly, and the heroes are so appealing, that it becomes a slick, Hollywood-style suspense film with a classy, French sense of composition and sophisticated wit. Rather than extend those sensibilities to the conclusion, however, coming up with a twist that the hero, a resourceful poker player, would readily have prepared and executed, it falls back upon a dreary, okay-we're-done-now cliché that undermines everything it had accomplished. Sometimes filmmakers seem like they really don't want to succeed.

Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the color transfer looks lovely, with bright, slick hues and finely detailed fleshtones. The Boling musical score, while not exceptional, is competently composed and in keeping with the film's tone, effectively heightening its excitements.

The nature of cool

One of our favorite motion picture soundtracks is Lalo Schifrin's jazz score for the 1968 crime thriller, **Bullitt**. Draped over the shoulders of the film's ultra-cool star, Steve McQueen, the music was cool when the movie came out and it is, if anything, even cooler today. It simultaneously captured the spirit of the city where the film was set, San Francisco, evoking its cosmopolitan jazz clubs that would readily survive the onslaught of rock and roll, while at the same time delivering lyrically subliminal enforcements to the movie's suspense sequences. Schifrin also did the music in 1968 for "**Coogan's Bluff**" (see page 5), which has some nice jazz riffs as well, but is marred, or some might say glorified, by the inclusion of what is meant to be a psychedelic song number, *The Pigeon-Toed Orange Peel* (played by a group that calls itself 'The Pigeon-Toed Orange Peels'), which has the abstract lyrics down to satirical perfection but is completely lacking when it comes to any sort of hard rock architecture that would sell the number as a believable counter-culture ditty. Filmmaker/fan Alex Cox on his **Coogan's** commentary sums it up this way: "And now, in this moral tale of the honest, straightlaced cop, embroiled in societal decadence, we enter the depths of Hippie Hell. Playing electronic organ music and dancing in the streets, The Pigeon-Toed Orange Peels. Oh, God. And the song inspired by this sign will live forever in the Hollywood museum of studio lameness. How totally uncool these studio people were. In the year that they made **Easy Rider**, Universal gave us *The Pigeon-Toed Orange Peel*."

Film studios were as desperate in the Sixties to sell movies to teenagers as they were dismissive of what teenagers might be interested in buying, and nowhere is this more true than the 1967 Warner Bros. musical that makes **Bye Bye Birdie** seem utterly hip, **The Cool Ones**. Released by WB Home Entertainment Co. as an *Archive Collection* title (UPC#88331661-5904, \$13), the film desperately attempts to cash in on the contemporary music scene while, at the same time, it is packed with not so subtle suggestions that pop music is infantile. Set in Los Angeles and Palm Springs, Debbie Watson stars as a background dancer on a **Hullabaloo**-like TV music program who tries to steal the limelight during a number and inadvertently invents a dance fad that sweeps the nation entitled, 'The Tantrum.' She meets up with a washed out rock star played by Gil Peterson and revitalizes his career, as well as solidifying hers, by performing duets with him that are eerily similar to the duets Lee Hazelwood, who was involved with the film's music, would soon be singing with Nancy Sinatra in a TV special that came out that same year. Phil Harris is the greasy TV producer who doesn't recognize the heroine's talent and Roddy McDowall—whose character has to be pacified with a bottle of warmed milk—is the spaced out record producer who plots the publicity manipulations that will make the heroine a star. Glen Campbell shows up as a popular singer, there is a performance by The Leaves, and the film's climax features rock anti-icon Mrs. Miller, who saves the day, at least in the eyes of the establishment. Directed by Gene Nelson, the 95-minute film has several catchy songs, including Hazelwood's *This Town* and Cole Porter's *Just One of Those Things*, but nothing that even remotely suggests rock and roll (except, perhaps, the convolutions that Porter himself was performing in his grave because of it).

The filmmakers were so petrified of the zeitgeist that they bombarded it with every limp weapon they could throw, but the result is a motion picture kitsch classic, a masterpiece of camp and boxoffice cluelessness. When McDowall appears, the film's comedic intentions are clarified, but by that time its cultural presumptions are already so laughable that you barely notice the shift. The film also presents itself as a romance, and the only time the movie comes anywhere close to what the audience is actually thinking is when Watson tells Peterson, "I never thought I'd fall in love with a creep like you."

The final ingredient that will put the DVD onto the centerpiece of one's mantle of irreverence is the movie's Sixties pop colors. The film's color coordination is as inept as its R&B credentials, but a lack of chromatic harmony is irrelevant to the fabulousness of the color intensity and the mad clutter of the conflicting hues. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, a stray speckle whizzes by here and there, but otherwise the DVD's picture is absolutely gorgeous (the monophonic sound is solid and there is no captioning), and it is because of the captivating quality of the film's presentation on DVD that the movie's unbelievably misguided content sheds its uncool manifestations and becomes completely endearing, and hip.

Weber silents

Female silent film directors were in surprising abundance before the industry organized itself enough to eliminate them after sound came in, an unofficial suppression that lingered until the Seventies. The most prominent of these early women directors, having initially made a name for herself when shorter films were the norm, was Lois Weber, who not only became a successful feature director but was considered Universal's best director, period. Two of Weber's Universal features have been released on Blu-ray by Universal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* double bill, **Sensation Seekers and A Chapter in Her Life** (UPC#738329252908, \$30).

In the 1927 *Sensation Seekers*, Billie Dove is a spoiled playgirl who meets the deacon at her mother's church, played by Raymond Bloomer. She recognizes that he is the opposite of the superficial crowd she parties with and begins to fall for him, while he, being a healthy young man, falls for her. This not only leads to ridicule from her social set, but condemnation from his church's benefactors. Feeling guilty over the trouble she is causing him, she runs off to marry a man that owns a huge yacht, but it is a very stormy night and yachts weren't built for such inclement weather. Running 74 minutes, the film is expertly directed. Bloomer, in particular, is handed an extremely difficult role, having to appear masculine and level headed, but still supportive of his church's moral underpinnings, and Weber guides his performance beautifully. Dove is terrific, as well, although it is much easier to sell her transition with Bloomer being the person she has fixated upon. The narrative may sound clichéd, but the film, which contains party sequences, too, and other energetic activities, has a clear, straightforward plot, well developed characters, and effective expositions of emotion, so that it presents itself more as a basis to be imitated than a movie that is copying predecessors.

The full screen black-and-white picture is in pretty good shape. There is some stray wear running across the image from time to time, but lines are crisp and contrasts are well defined. The mildly orchestral stereophonic musical score is adeptly designed and accompanies the film effectively.

The second film, *Chapter in Her Life* from 1923, has, if anything, an even more common narrative, although again it is expertly if inexpensively staged. A young girl is sent to stay with her wealthy and very grumpy grandfather, and not only melts his heart, but the hearts of everyone else in the household, creating a détente in the backbiting, scheming and booing that had gone on before she got there. Like the first film, the movie, which runs 65 minutes, is about redemption, and combines its frivolity with specific lessons about how to be more outgoing and forgiving. The actress playing the little girl, Jane Mercer, is rather primitive in her performance skills, but using basically the one location, Weber manages to work around Mercer's most pronounced weaknesses and culls a reasonably effective emotional entertainment from the mix of characters. Despite dead ends and incongruities, the story is a slam-dunk and Weber doesn't miss.

The full screen black-and-white picture has quite a few scratches and speckles at times, but always looks reasonably crisp. There is one exceptionally impressive shot in which the heroine can be viewed through a window in the mansion walking into the stables, even though it is highly unlikely that there actually was a mansion and a stables being used for the shoot. Again, the musical score is effective, something that isn't always the case with silent film presentations on video, underscoring and enhancing the movie's drama without getting in the way.

Weber biographer Shelley Stamp provides a commentary on *Sensation Seekers*, analyzing the film itself (the 'sensation' seekers are not just the flappers, but the church gossips, as well) and speaking extensively about Weber's entire career. For the content offered, it is a very good talk, and Stamp also speaks about Dove and Weber's other films (including *Chapter in Her Life*), but she drops out for an extended period of time in the middle of the film, and cuts it short before the finale, not even offering a take on how the elaborate climax was shot. Additionally, other than the few words about Dove, she says nothing substantial about the other members of the cast or the crew.

Pop up Zeman

The Criterion Collection has outdone themselves with the wonderful jacket they designed for their three-platter Blu-ray collection of films by the Czech animator Karel Zeman, **Three Fantastic Journeys by Karel Zeman** (UPC#715515241311, \$100). Each platter has its own sleeve in the jacket, and to reach the sleeve, you have to open a divider that unveils a pop-up adaptation of Zeman's artwork in the film featured on the platter. Zeman's movies are filled with different methods of animation to enhance their fantasies, and can be celebrated for their artistry as much as for their entertainment. In other words, the movies themselves are a joy, with the jacket making the collection all the more delightful. All three films are in full screen format, in Czech with optional English subtitles, and come with trailers.

Journey into the cloudy recesses of your own childhood memories and you may recall an educational film in which four boys visit New York's Museum of Natural History and then go for a rowboat ride in Central Park. On the rowboat, they spot a hidden cave (we once rented a rowboat to search for it, but never found it ourselves), and rowing into the cave, they discover a world that represents the various past ages of Earth's plant and animal life. The more they travel through it, the further back in 'time' they go. The boys are informed enough from their visit to the museum to talk about what they see, and teach the viewer about the past. The 1960 film was called *Journey to the Beginning of Time*. Produced by William Clayton, it was actually constructed from footage in Zeman's 1955 *Journey to the Beginning of Time*. In the latter, the boys (who are only seen obscured or from the back in the beginning of the American film) also take a rowboat on a local waterway and discover a hidden cave, where they also go exploring, with a book in hand that they can reference to share with one another what they are seeing.

Both versions of the film are presented on the platter. The Czech version runs 84 minutes. The American version in the supplement, which actually contains a bit more detailed information in the dialog about what is on view, also runs 84 minutes, despite the alternate footage. The animation of the enormous mammals, birds and dinosaurs ranges from puppets, miniatures and men in rubber suits to deft drawings and stop-motion animation. To keep things interesting, the boys sometimes run into threats or challenges, and sometimes get separated from one another. Before **Jurassic Park** or **Walking with Dinosaurs**, this was pretty much the only way to go, and Zeman's resourcefulness and sense of pacing (he deliberately mixes the styles of the animation up so that no one method of presentation wears out its welcome) are so accomplished that jaded viewers of the modern world will find the movie, in either of its manifestations, timeless entertainment.

The Czech version looks terrific. While the cinematography flattens the colors slightly so that reality will better blend with the animation, the transfer is clearly fresh and accurate, and the image is sharp. The specially shot footage in the American version is slightly more aged, but still looks reasonably decent, and when the film shifts to the original Czech footage, it appears that Criterion has inserted the fresher Czech transfer. On both versions, the monophonic sound is adequate, and the noises that the animals make are clearly defined.

Although you should wait until you see all three films before watching it, there is a succinct 12-minute overview of Zeman's life and films, and an appreciation of his art, which also includes a few tantalizing glimpses of some of the ways the movies were staged. The chance to revisit clips from the movies is also a treat. Included as well are 17 minutes of Czech retrospective shorts specifically about the making of *Journey to the Beginning of Time*, including visits to some of the locations, another detailed breakdown of some effects shots, and a look at what the source material had to go through for the film's restoration.

A wonderful amalgam of Jules Verne concepts, Zeman's 1958 *Invention for Destruction* is in black-and-white, which reminded us immediately of **Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow**. The blend of drawings and live action is truly amazing and intricate for a film that did not have the technology the makers of **Sky Captain** could take advantage of. The artwork, inspired by the illustrations in Jules Verne's novels, is delightful, and while the drama is not intense, it is sufficient to support the movie's fanciful presentation. A scientist and his assistant are abducted by a megalomaniac who has his own island fortress and advanced submarine. He tricks the scientist into developing an exceptionally powerful bomb, while the assistant attempts an underwater escape and also has time to romance a young woman who had been abducted previously by the villain. Running 81 minutes, Zeman makes use of many different types of effect formats to sustain a stimulating environment, but in the movie's best moments, it is impossible to determine what on the screen is real and what is not. The film is in Czech, but there is a completely workable English language track, because one is rarely looking at the actors speaking the dialog when so much else is going on. For the movie's 1961 American release, titled *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, a 3-minute introduction featuring TV announcer Hugh Downs, was created to supplant the Czech introduction on the original film, and that segment has been included as one of the extras.

Four short film are also on the platter. The most stunning, and most deserving to be entered in a pantheon of animated shorts, is a 12-minute color piece from 1949 utilizing animated glass figurines, entitled *Inspiration*. How much of it was done in stop motion and how much utilizes other

methods is impossible to determine. About a clown who falls in love with a ballerina, everything in the film appears to have been constructed from glass. The film would be beautiful even if somebody's hands were there, moving the lovely figures around, but the fact that the figures move and morph all by themselves is beyond remarkable and utterly transfixing. On one level, it is an utterly gorgeous manipulation of light and color, while on another, it is a thrilling utilization of a unique artistry to express the beauty of emotion.

The 1950 *King Lavra*, running 30 minutes, is a straightforward tale that is highly reminiscent of George Pal's *Puppetoon* concoctions. A blend of stop-motion animation and puppetry in color, it is about a barber who becomes fearful when he is called to cut the king's hair, because every other barber who has done so has been executed. It seems that the king's hair hides some very oddly shaped ears. Told without dialog, the story is clearly delineated and engaging, and the animation is staged with expertise and wit. Also closely reminiscent of the *Puppetoons* is the 5-minute black-and-white 1946 public service piece, *A Horseshoe for Luck*, about a man who has one terrible thing after another happen to him after he finds a 'lucky' horseshoe, until he realizes he should contribute the shoe to a government metal recycling drive. An effective blend of stop motion, puppetry and live action in black-and-white, the 1945 *A Christmas Dream*, running 11 minutes, is about a young girl's old stuffed doll that comes alive on Christmas Day after he appears to have been supplanted by a number of new dolls. Any similarity to **Toy Story** is purely speculative.

Two contemporary special effects experts, Phil Tippett and Jim Aupperle, give a 23-minute presentation of Zeman's artistry, again examining all three films and talking about the different methods that were being used, with some good deconstructions of a number of key sequences. Another 14 minutes of Czech retrospective shorts, specifically about *Invention for Destruction*, are also gathered, including another piece on the movie's restoration that, among other things, goes over how the archivists have to differentiate between flaws that have occurred in the source material due to age and original mistakes, smudges and so on that the animators left in as they were making the film.

The 1962 *The Fabulous Baron Munchausen* touches on the basics of the Munchausen story—activities on the moon, helping a captive escape from a seraglio, traveling around the world in the belly of a whale, riding a cannonball, and so on—but messes with the order, as the Baron and an astronaut leave the moon and visit earth to have these various adventures. They also rescue a princess and this creates a romantic triangle that links the imaginative episodes together and gives the 83-minute movie needed cohesion. The people are real (most of the time), but their surrounding are fanciful and they interact not just with real objects and animals, but also with animated things and creatures. The combination of live action and gorgeous illustrations (from the days before computers) are so inventive that any frozen frame contains designs and details that can be pondered with pleasure for hours on end. To best describe the designs would be to compare them to the animated Monty Python pieces that separated the skits in the **Flying Circus** TV series, except there is less reliance on cutouts and more on intricate combinations of live action, animation and detailed sketches. The artwork is always captivating and the crisp quality of the presentation makes each scene seem vividly real despite its obvious artificiality. The film often uses different colored tints, but will then slip in fully colored objects and sequences. With accurate colors, the image transfer is exquisite and precisely detailed, which adds immensely to the overall impact of the film's artistry and pleasure. Like everything else, the manner of color is constantly shifting to keep the viewer intrigued and bedazzled.

Another 19 minutes of Czech shorts about *Munchausen* and Zeman are included, along with a minute-long piece about an entertainment museum dedicated to Zeman's work, where a lot of the featurettes are included in the displays. Finally, there is a full-fledged 102-minute documentary, *Film Adventurer: Karel Zeman*, from 2015 (many of the featurettes used footage and clips that are also in the documentary), which goes over his entire life and career (including details about the career significance of each of the four short films), intercut with appreciations of his artistry and a terrific segment that is also spread throughout the film, in which a group of students re-create a key effects sequence from each of the three movies, even roping in three of the now elderly actors who originally appeared in *Journey to the Beginning of Time* to wave at a woolly mammoth from a rowboat. The documentary is indeed best viewed at the end, because by then you are more familiar with the intricacies of Zeman's accomplishments, although there are also tantalizing clips from movies and short that have yet to appear on video.

The youngish Clint Eastwood

Everyone knows that after some minor roles in movies and a hot co-starring spot in a hit TV series, Clint Eastwood rocketed to fame with the three westerns he made with Italian film crews in Spain under Sergio Leone. Hoping that the rocket was firmly in orbit, he followed up those films in 1968 with an American-made western released by the distributor of the Italian westerns, United Artists, **Hang 'Em High**, which is available on Blu-ray as a *Shout Select 50th Anniversary Edition* from Shout! Factory (UPC#82666319-2551, \$35). And indeed, the world was so desperate for another Clint Eastwood western that they readily embraced the movie and secured Eastwood's orbital status as a major star in the movie heavens.

Directed by Ted Post, the 115-minute feature is ostensibly a tale of revenge, as Eastwood's character is mistakenly lynched for a crime he did not commit. Rescued by a lawman (nicely presented by Ben Johnson), he is eventually deputized by a judge and given warrants for the men who hung him, except that another crime interrupts his quest. The judge, played by Pat Hingle, also oversees official executions, and the centerpiece of the film is not staged gunplay with Eastwood, but an elaborate and lengthy depiction of the hanging of six men in a town square. The film seems to have been partially reconstructed in the editing room, as extreme close-ups have the sudden degradation of imagery one associates with opticals, presumably to better imitate, or at least evoke, Leone's stylism. Johnson's character is dispatched off screen, which is a real shame, and there is an assassination attempt on Eastwood's character that appears to have lacked appropriate coverage. Nevertheless, for all of the movie's patchwork, it remains an entertaining adventure with interesting political overtones, and its appeal is enhanced with every passing day by the preserved youthfulness of Eastwood's countenance, as if his character's trials within the film were adding to the history and emotional burdens of characters he would play later on.

Inger Stevens and Bruce Dern co-star, with terrific bits by Alan Hale, Jr., Ed Begley, James MacArthur, and an unrecognizable Dennis Hopper. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. We reviewed an MGM/UA DVD in Feb 98, which has a reasonably decent image transfer, although the colors are much nicer and sharper on the BD. Flestones are accurate and darker scenes are stable. The music and a few sound effects have been remastered in 5.1-channel DTS sound, which is both clear and crisp, and has a much greater presence than the sound on the DVD had. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

The presentation also has two commentary tracks. The first is an excellent piece by westerns enthusiasts Lem Dobbs and Nick Redman, who deconstruct the film, suggesting that it was thrown together as a way of capitalizing on Eastwood's fame from his Italian westerns to see if the boxoffice magic could be sustained in an American production, probably from scripts originally prepared for a different medium ("It seems absolutely obvious to me that this is three episodes of a potential television series, jammed together to form a movie."). They also talk about the far reaching legacies of the cast and the crew, and supply a decent analysis of the film's major scenes.

On a second track, film historian Brad Hemphill focuses more on the careers of the filmmakers and how the film reflects the themes and approaches Eastwood has followed with his own career. Although Dobbs and Redman claim that the movie was not exceptionally popular when it came out, Hemphill says that it was a big hit, and backs up his claim with some documentation. He, too, talks about the cast and crew, actually digressing at length on such things as the career of Hopper, whose appearance in the film is exceedingly brief. But he also discusses the film's dynamics as it attempted to straddle the traditional American western with the new type of western that Eastwood's Italian films had created, and he takes great issue with the critics and so forth of the day, who attempted to simplify their judgments of Eastwood's work as an actor and the films he appeared in. He points out that the films are not as easy to pigeonhole as people claim. "One of the reasons Eastwood's movies age so well is that they are full of complexities and contradictions, and encompass a wide spectrum of political viewpoints."

Before he could become a real movie star and not just a western star, Eastwood had to be weaned off of cowboy roles, and what better way to do that than to have him play in one of those great fish-out-of-water situations as a modern day Arizona lawman who goes to New York City to extradite a prisoner? That was the premise of Eastwood's next film, the 1968 "**Coogan's Bluff**", a Universal Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329254735, \$30), which not only works hard to make Eastwood into a sex symbol—he has more interactions with female characters in the first half hour than James Bond—but includes innumerable resonances to Eastwood's later breakout megahit, **Dirty Harry**. Indeed, it was shot by **Dirty Harry**'s director, Don Siegel, and has much the same tone, with invigorating action scenes, wry humor and a reactionary attitude that suggests the police are hampered by sociologists who want them to treat suspects more delicately. There are also homophobic gags, gags about harassing women, and gags involving ethnic characters, but that was the Seventies for you, no less so than when Eastwood was involved. Running 93 minutes, with Lee J. Cobb filling the role as the annoying police commander who tries to cramp the hero's style, the film sort of lunges forward from one interlude to the next. The prisoner escapes because of the ineptitude of Eastwood's character, and he proceeds to bulldoze his way through protocol and the rule of law to get the prisoner back. Like **Hang 'Em High**, the narrative has a somewhat erratic or slapdash construction, but there are enough moments of action and Eastwood's burgeoning star persona to provide the movie with a basic appeal and to make it especially worthwhile if you have maxed out on watching his bigger hits.

The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer is reasonably good, with fresh hues and accurate flestones. The film has that grimy late Sixties New York look at times, and there is some very minor wear in a couple of places, but overall the presentation looks great. The monophonic sound is fine—there is a decent Lalo Schiffrin musical score if you ignore the discotheque scene—and there are optional English subtitles.

Also featured are two trailers, a radio commercial, a nice 8-minute montage of memorabilia set to Schiffrin's score, a cute 9-minute retrospective documentary with co-star Don Stroud, and the same 8-minute black-and-white interview with Eastwood from the Sixties that appeared on **Two Mules for Sister Sara** (Dec 20).

Film historian Alex Cox supplies one commentary track and as usual, he eventual falls back on describing the action as it occurs on the screen, although initially he does a reasonably good job summarizing the creative forces that brought the movie to fruition, the path that Eastwood's career was taking (although he mistakenly claims that Eastwood's character had no female entanglements in **Hang 'Em High**), and scattered insights on Siegel's technique and filmmaking tricks. On a second track, Alan Spencer, an Eastwood fan who created the **Dirty Harry** TV spoof, **Sledge Hammer!**, discusses many of the same topics and yet manages to do so in a way that makes his talk seem very different from Cox's talk. He includes more specific details about how the film is constructed, and more background trivia (beware of hippie extras who are nursing babies), while also providing more elaborate background information on the cast and the crew, and pointing out their strengths in the film (Tisha Sterling, who plays the prisoner's girlfriend, is a superb comedienne, and he suggests this is why her very serious performance is so good as to have been singled out in what was generally a spate of negative reviews for the film in general). Having worked in comedy himself, he does try to go for the one-liner a bit too often, but over all it is worthwhile to hear what he has to say.

Good Fortune

The inspired 1966 Billy Wilder litigation comedy, which won Walter Matthau a well-deserved and significantly career-boosting Best Supporting Actor Oscar as a weasely, quick-thinking lawyer, **The Fortune Cookie**, originally distributed by United Artists, has been released on Blu-ray by MGM and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC# 738329254858, \$30). Jack Lemmon stars as a TV cameraman covering an NFL game who is hit when a runner falls out of bounds. Matthau's character is the cameraman's brother-in-law and persuades him to pretend the injury is much worse than it is in order to sue the corporations putting on the game.

In many ways, the film has not aged a day. As an expose of selfishness in American society, it is enduringly precise. It has aged less well, however, in its use of Ron Rich as the football player who hits Lemmon's character. Ostensibly, Rich fills a part that would normally go to a 'good hearted' female character, to contrast the hero's money-hungry ex-wife, played by Judi West. In some ways the film's romantic component is the relationship (built upon mutual guilt) between Rich and Lemmon's characters (Lemmon's character is equally torn because of how the scam has impacted the player's career). Yet Rich's character, out of remorse, becomes so subservient to Lemmon's character that the tale's reinforcement of African-American social acquiescence robs the movie of some of its satirical integrity. Nevertheless, the final scene, with Rich and Lemmon freely enjoying one another's company, is a pleasantly optimistic balm to a story that is otherwise hypervolemic in cynicism.

Running 125 minutes, the dialog is not just witty, it is sculpted with humor and irony, and while Matthau steals the spotlight, all of the performances are heartfelt and exact. Presented in letterboxed format with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the black-and-white image compositions, which are spotlessly and crisply transferred, are dazzling, playing off each edge of the image with a constantly invigorating dynamism as the characters move back and forth across the screen. The film has its detractors, because of its dated racial attitude and because it is too much about guilt to sell itself completely as a comedy, but it is a brilliant, highly entertaining creation that is an enduring reflection upon American values, both the genuine ones and the superficial ones.

The monophonic sound is solid and clear, and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer, a minute-long pitch by Lemmon to get extras to show up to the Cleveland Municipal Stadium for the shoot, a 3-minute introduction to the film, a dazzling (and amusing) 4-minute clip of the elderly Matthau, Lemmon and Wilder in front of an audience rehearsing a clip from an I.A.L. Diamond script about screenwriters, and a nice 2-minute tribute to Diamond by Wilder at a memorial. Film historian and Wilder biographer Joseph McBride supplies a commentary track, not only going over a history of the production and profiles of the primary filmmakers, but looking carefully at why Wilder was making the movie at this point in his career, going over the film's strengths and weaknesses (he takes the film to task repeatedly for its tone deaf racial dynamic), and talking quite a bit about Wilder's later career and how the film he made before the popular **Fortune Cookie**, **Kiss Me Stupid**, had bombed. At the movie's end, Rich and Lemmon's characters talk about their failures. "I think when [the characters bemoan what has happened to them] that really reflects Wilder and Diamonds' feelings about being rejected by the audience. Wilder was a popular filmmaker. He really cared about what the audience thought about him. He was trying to lead the audience forward, advance their thinking, and was not just into giving them simple, pandering pleasures. He was trying to tell them some unpleasant truths about life, but he also wanted people's approval, partly so he could keep working as a filmmaker, and also so he could have a connection with the audience. So he really felt he had been rejected and maybe he was through."

In the realm of the senseless

Progressively silly, the 1969 Yasuzo Masumura feature, **Blind Beast**, released on Blu-ray by Arrow Video (UPC#760137662389, \$40), begins with a young model being abducted by a blind sculptor (his mother helps him) who has become obsessed over her after examining a nude sculpture that she posed for. So far, so good. The heroine, played by Mako Midori, makes a token effort to escape and is readily thwarted, and so she starts to play the long game and manipulate the sculptor's feelings to make his mother jealous. Running 84 minutes, the film is fine up to that point, with the sort of nudity and weirdness (the walls of the warehouse room where she is kept are decorated with groups of sculpted body parts—legs in one group, ears in another and so on, while two enormous nude torsos made of some kind of spongy material dominate the floor) that viewers seeking out something different would look forward to, but instead of proceeding as a thriller, the film takes a left turn and the model genuinely falls in love with the sculptor—character logic is rather strained from the very beginning, but this clogs it completely. Apparently living in total darkness (the film is lit so we can see what they are doing, but she can't see anything), they develop a need to increase the amount of pain mixed with their pleasure to sustain the erotic frenzy they have embraced. How they eat after the mother is gone is never explained, but then how much of the movie is real and how much is just the fantasy of one character or the other is also left up in the air. The more that direct pain supplants implied pleasure, the less erotic or engaging the film becomes, and it just gets stupider and stupider until it can't go any further. The whole endeavor is so dumb it will probably qualify as somebody's guilty pleasure or cult obsession, but it really doesn't deserve even that amount of attention.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer is fine, although the image is a bit soft. The monophonic sound is adequate and the film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. Japanese film expert Tony Rayns provides a decent 18-minute summary of Masumura's career and a non-judgmental introduction to the film (Arrow has previously issued several excellent films by Masumura, including **Giants and Toys**, **Black Test Car** and **Irezumi**). Also featured is an 11-minute summary of the film's narrative with attempts to explore the movie's themes and symbols (apparently reading from a text, the narrator mispronounces the word, 'misshapen.'). Placing the movie somewhat viably with the Japanese 'pink' exploitation features; a trailer; and a good collection of promotional memorabilia.

Although during the second half he spends a lot of time detailing the plots of other movies (including **Contempt**), Japanese film scholar Earl Jackson supplies a reasonably good commentary track, talking about the backgrounds of the cast and crew, going over the themes and commonalities among Masumura's features, and supplying a valid interpretation of the film's objectification of body parts and sexual discordance. "The real woman is lost among the objects of fetishization or the deep personalization and fragmentation. Another interpretation one could gather from the image is how the fantasy of 'Woman,' with a capital 'W,' whether it be purely ideological or psychosexual fixation, allows no legitimate positionality or actual women. The film is a microcosm or compressed allegory of how women and men become social subjects differently, according to their respective relationship to representation."

Mixing it up with shorts

If you watch feature films day in and day out, sometimes it is worthwhile to check out a collection of short films in order to mix up the routine and provide some fresh perspectives on the meanings of cinema and life. Kino Lorber and Kino Classics have released a two-platter Blu-ray set, **Ken Jacobs Collection Vol. 1** (UPC#738329254711, \$40). Jacobs began making films in the Fifties and has pursued the endeavor as a quasi-hobby well into the Twenty-first Century. Some of the movies are terrible, some are really good and some are a mix of both, but all of them show an artist excited about the possibilities his camera and editing table present to him, and learning about his own artistic potential as he goes along.

The first and last films on the first platter, *Orchard Street* from 1955 and *Windows* from 1964 are excellent. Both are essentially documentaries and have no sound. Manhattan's Orchard Street, a bustling collection of bargain stores and street vendors, still retained the flavor in the Fifties of the older immigrant population that first swelled its tenements. The film is just a montage of images from the street, shot over the course of a summer, with kids playing on and off the curb, pets wandering around, shoppers moving up and down the sidewalks, delivery people coming and going, and the shop vendors tending to customers. The color footage, which is nicely restored, has everything from inflation-envy prices (a pound of tomatoes is a quarter) to the full mosaic of New York's ethnic population, readily mixing together to go about their daily businesses. Running 27 minutes, each shot is a delight. *Window*, which is in black and white and runs 12 minutes, is the complete opposite. It is just a montage of images from what may be an abandoned building but, regardless, is at least a building that is not in very good shape. The purpose of the film is just blend the angles from shots of doors and windows, but it sustains a succinct visual poetry of darkness and light, and is readily mesmerizing.

The other three shorter films on the platter, *The Whirled* from 1961 running 19 minutes, *Little Stabs at Happiness* from 1963 running 15 minutes,

and *Blonde Cobra* from 1963 running 36 minutes, are pretty bad. They are mostly attempts by the filmmaker to have his friends goof around for the camera, but there is nothing poetic or dynamic about the structure of the films and little that makes them any more than glorified home movies. *Little Stabs at Happiness* does have some documentary footage of homeless people, which could be said to have been set against the performance antics, but it is a stretch. *Whirled* includes an interesting sequence shot off a TV screen of Jacobs participating in a TV quiz show that utilized footage from another film he made (clips of which are also part of the short). As simple history, it is fascinating—the quiz show is actually interrupted by a legitimate but utterly pointless news bulletin about an Appeals Court decision regarding the formation of the New York City Council—but it is only partially linear and again, the overall impact of the short is middling. There is nothing but men posing in drag in *Blonde Cobra*, in what looks to be a very dreary and badly decorated apartment. When Kenneth Anger had his friends dress up and prance around (Feb 07), he had an overriding sense of theme and a precise satire. With Jacobs, it is just amateurish confusion and impulse, without a sense of purpose that is clear enough to have been communicated to the viewer. The three films have sound (some shift between sound and silence), including music and voices of people speaking abstractly, but not dialog coordinated with the action.

The centerpiece of the platter is a longer program, running 96 minutes, that mixes footage Jacobs shot in 1963 and 1964, which was compiled and manipulated by Jacobs in 2019, entitled *The Sky Socialist*. It is a mix of well composed sequences that are abstract but intriguing, shots from the streets of New York, which always have an inherent appeal, and more self-conscious footage of friends on a rooftop, dressed up and trying to act arty. Overall, the film is worthwhile because it has a sense of scope and individual explorations, but it plays much better if you aren't burnt out by the three shorter films beforehand.

Another 47 minutes of outtakes from *The Sky Socialist* are presented on the second platter. Interestingly, the outtakes are often more explanatory or directly stimulating than the footage that Jacobs chose to include in the original film. In any case, the segment is reasonably satisfying. As much as it stands on its own quite effectively, again mixing random shots of New York City with his friends playacting on the roof of a tenement, it works even better as a sequel or epilog to the longer film.

The centerpiece of the second platter is a whopper, a 116-minute manipulation from 1969 of a 1905 short that takes the short's title for its own, *Tom Tom The Piper's Son*. With a half-dozen or so sets, the short tells the simplified story of a young man stealing a pig during a carnival, being chased through several farmhouses, and finally getting his comeuppance. The heavily populated cast makes each scene look much busier than the narrative would suggest, with each performer doing some kind of business that is interesting on its own. What Jacobs does, after playing the film through once, is to repeat it with different alterations—isolated blowups, distorted screens, distorted contrasts, and so on. At its best, it does bring out actions in the corners of a scene that you might otherwise have passed up, or alterations in position and light that enable you to contemplate the dynamics of presentation, but it takes a lot of stamina to get through it, and viewers may not last to the end. In 2002, Jacobs did some further manipulations running 11 minutes, including split screens, stretched images and mirrored images, which he entitled *A Tom Tom Chaser*. An overall briefer and more inspired concoction from 1996, *The Georgetown Loop*, running 11 minutes, takes a 1905 documentary short that was shot on a train crossing a mountainous terrain in the Rockies. After the initial run through on the right of the screen, it replays the segment with a mirror image on the left, creating a widescreen thrill that looks like something out of Cinerama. Following that, other distortion manipulations to the paired images add to the thrills.

In 2006, Jacobs turned his cameras on two stereoscopic pairs of photographs in *Capitalism: Child Labor*, which runs 14 minutes and *Capitalism: Slavery*, which runs 3 minutes. In both, the images jump back and forth between the left eye and the right eye photos, although no discernible 3D effect is forthcoming, and then proceeds to deconstruct and manipulate different parts of the photographs, while maintaining the back-and-forth flicker. Like *Tom Tom* (although not as exhausting), Jacobs' work enables the viewer to spot details in the two photos (one is set in a factory where child workers are posed next to the machines they operate, and the other is set in a cotton field where laborers that one assumes are slaves, with an overseer on horseback, are picking the cotton) that enhance an appreciation of the compositions, whether it is their political content or simply their historical significance. Finally, there is an abstract 2021 piece running 20 minutes that Jacobs has entitled *Movie That Invites Pausing*, in which images of repeated honeycomb-like hexagons and bubble-like half-spheres are spread across the screen and then undergo changes in contrast, proportion and other shifts. Unlike most of the films on the platter, it has a soundtrack, hovering somewhere between an industrial hum and a high tech electronic score. Whatever it is, it is effective, adeptly supporting the visual input.

The first platter also contains a 29-minute interview with Jacobs from 2021, conducted by film teacher Tom Gunning, but it is best to wait and watch the piece after you have seen all of the films on both platters, since they talk about all of them. Fortunately, the segment is supported by optional English subtitles, since the men tend to mumble a little bit and their audio

equipment is something less than state of the art. They essentially chat about each piece and provide some needed context to understanding what Jacobs was after in the creation of each work, while also providing a basic sense of the filmmaker's personality and his passions. If you like the films, then you will enjoy the talk, but if the films do not intrigue you, the talk is not going to change your mind.

The second **Strike** is a home run

HBO's adaptation of the initial **C.B. Strike** detective stories from J.K. Rowling's pseudonymous 'Robert Galbraith' (Nov 18) were terrifically entertaining, and fortunately, the quality and intrigue continues with an excellent 2020 four-part adaptation of another series installment from HBO and Warner Bros., **C.B. Strike: Lethal White** (UPC#883929739950, \$20). Tom Burke stars as the disabled Afghan war vet who runs a London detective agency and Holliday Grainger is his professional collaborator. The two were clearly meant for each other, but are never romantically available at the same time—the show's beginning picks up immediately after the last story left off, with Grainger's character getting married at a wedding not without tension, and then advances a year to have Burke's character seeing another woman while that marriage teeters on the stresses of the daily separations caused by work. That both characters also have psychological problems created by previous traumas means that the 240-minute story would be well worth savoring even if there were no murders and thefts and so on to provide additional excitements. But, of course, there are. The story has many elegantly knotted twists and turns that are best left to be discovered as it unravels. The hero is hired to assist a prominent and wealthy government official who is being blackmailed. At the same time he also takes an interest in the ravings of a young, mentally ill homeless man, discovering that there is truth behind the ravings. Needless to say, the two cases are linked, for logical reasons, and in addition to the suspense and drama, the way in which each story point and coincidence is actually founded upon a previous incident makes the entertainment not only viscerally stimulating, but satisfying on a subliminal level and very much open to repeated viewings.

All four episodes appear on one platter, and there is a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is fine, and scenes set in darkness or near darkness are clear enough to follow. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a pleasing separation mix and a solid dimensionality. There are optional English subtitles.

DVD News

CRITERION GOES 4K: The Criterion Collection has announced a slough of 4K releases, including a return to the motion picture that was Criterion's very first LD release, **Citizen Kane** (Jan 85). The other 4K releases will have something for everyone, including **The Red Shoes**, **Menace II Society**, **Mulholland Dr.**, **A Hard Day's Night** and **The Piano**. Orson Welles' **Citizen Kane** will appear on a 4K platter and also on a standard Blu-ray platter with two additional BD platters of special features. The three BD platters are also being released separately. The special features are three commentaries—one from 2021 featuring Orson Welles scholars James Naremore and Jonathan Rosenbaum, one from 2002 featuring Peter Bogdanovich and one from 2002 featuring film critic Roger Ebert; *The Complete Citizen Kane*, (1991), a rarely seen feature-length BBC documentary; interviews with critic Farran Smith Nehme and film scholar Racquel J. Gates; a video essay by Welles scholar Robert Carringer; a program on the film's special effects by film scholars and effects experts Craig Barron and Ben Burt; interviews from 1990 with Robert Wise, Ruth Warrick, optical-effects designer Linwood Dunn, Bogdanovich, Martin Scorsese, Henry Jaglom, Martin Ritt, Frank Marshall, and cinematographers Allen Daviau, Gary Graver, and Vilmos Zsigmond; a documentary featuring archival interviews with Welles; interviews with actor Joseph Cotten from 1966 and 1975; *The Hearts of Age*, a brief silent film made by Welles as a student in 1934; television programs from 1979 and 1988 featuring appearances by Welles and John Houseman; a program featuring a 1996 interview with William Alland on his collaborations with Welles; and a selection of *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* radio plays featuring many of the actors from **Citizen Kane**. The other five 4K presentations will have two platters, one with the 4K film, and a standard BD with the special features, which will also be available separately. **Menace II Society** will come with two audio commentaries from 1993 featuring directors Albert and Allen Hughes; *Gangsta Vision*, a 2009 featurette on the making of the film; a conversation among Albert Hughes, screenwriter Tyger Williams, and film critic Elvis Mitchell; a conversation among Allen Hughes, Bill Duke, and Mitchell; an interview from 1993 with the directors; deleted scenes; and a film-to-storyboard comparison. **Mulholland Dr.** will have the same special features that Criterion included in the BD we reviewed in Nov 15, and the special features for the other three films have not been announced yet. Criterion is also releasing the five exhilarating martial arts films. **Once upon a Time in China The Complete Films**, apparently without any additional special features. Federico Fellini's **La Strada** will come with an alternate English-dubbed soundtrack, featuring the voices of Anthony Quinn and Richard Basehart; a commentary from 2003 by Peter Bondanella, author of *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*; an introduction from 2003 by Martin Scorsese; *Giulietta Masina: The Power of a Smile*, a documentary from 2004; and *Federico Fellini's Autobiography*, a documentary originally broadcast on Italian television in 2000. Kaneto Shindo's scary **Onibaba** will have a commentary from 2001 featuring Shindo and actors Kei Sato and Jitsuko

Yoshimura; an interview from 2003 with Shindo; and on-location footage shot by Sato. Raoul Walsh's **High Sierra** will come with **Colorado Territory**, Walsh's 1949 western remake of **High Sierra**; a conversation on Walsh between film programmer Dave Kehr and critic Farran Smith Nehme; *The True Adventures of Raoul Walsh*, a 2019 documentary by Marilyn Ann Moss; *Curtains for Roy Earle*, a 2003 featurette on the making of **High Sierra**; *Bogart: Here's Looking at You, Kid*, a 1997 documentary aired on *The South Bank Show*; an interview with film and media historian Miriam J. Petty about actor Willie Best; a video essay featuring excerpts from a 1976 American Film Institute interview with **High Sierra** novelist and co-screenwriter W. R. Burnett; and a radio adaptation of **High Sierra** from 1944. Lynne Ramsay's **Ratcatcher** will have an interview with Ramsay; an audio interview from 2020 with cinematographer Alwin Küchler; three award-winning short films by Ramsay: *Small Deaths* (1995), *Kill the Day* (1996), and *Gasman* (1997); and an interview with Ramsay from 2002.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles have recently been released on Blu-ray—*She Freak* (AGFA); *A Discovery of Witches* Season 2, *Murdoch Mysteries* Season 14 (AMD); *Luca* (Buena Vista); *Being Trump*, *A Child of the King*, *Patient-Zero*, *A Promise to Astrid* (Bridgestone); *The Bridge*, *The Cabin*, *Coronavirus Perfect Storm*, *The Follower*, *Jack Jonah*, *John Light*, *The Man Who Went to Heaven*, *Megan's Christmas Miracle*, *Mercy*, *The Notebooks*, *One Life at a Time*, *The Perfect Day*, *Strange Friends*, *Uncommon Man*, *Virtuous*, *The Zombie Club* (Burning Bulb); *The Frenchman's Garden*, *Forgotten Gialli V.2*, *Killer's Delight*, *The Lamp*, *Silip Daughters of Eve*, *Sound and Fury*, *Through the Fire* (CAV); *The Borrower*, *The Boxtrolls*, *Dreambuilders*, *Havoc*, *The Oh God! Collection*, *The Rebels of PT-218*, *A Return to Salem's Lot*, *Take Back* (Cinedigm); *The Little Rascals The Classic Flix Restorations Volume 2* (ClassicFlix); *After Life*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Beasts of No Nation*, *Original Cast Album Company* (Criterion); *Evil in the Deep* (Dark Force); *The Gang/Three Men to Kill* (eOne); *The Maid* (Epic); *Angel of Death* (Full Moon); *Rancho Deluxe* (Fun City); *About Pie*, *Because We Are*, *Big House*, *Chasing Comets*, *Chasing Wonders*, *Events Transpiring Before*, *During and After a High School Basketball Game*, *Ellie and Abbie and Ellie's Dead Aunt*, *Eye without a Face*, *The Florist*, *Holiday Monday*, *Love Spreads*, *Open Your Eyes*, *Pulk*, *Resurgence*, *A Rock N' Roll Heart*, *A Savage Nature*, *Sparkling The Story of Champagne*, *Steel Song*, *Too Late*, *Tougher Than a Tank* (Gravitas); *Awaken* (Gunpowder & Sky); *Séance*, *The Water Man* (Image); *Arise My Love*, *Back Street*, *Butcher Baker Nightmare Maker*, *The Clockmaker of St. Paul*, *The Comedy of Terrors*, *"Coogan's Bluff"*, *Desire*, *The Devil's 8*, *The Emperor Waltz*, *F.P. 1 Doesn't Answer*, *Fitzwilly*, *The Fortune Cookie*, *Four Frightened People*, *Guyana Cult of the Damned*, *The Indian Doctor Complete Series*, *The Last Man on Earth*, *Lillies of the Field*, *Love Rites*, *Master of the World*, *Moment by Moment*, *No Time for Love*, *O.S.S.*, *Peek-a-Boo/B Girl Rhapsody*, *The People Next Door*, *Percy*, *Peter Ibbetson*, *The Raven*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Union Pacific*, *The Valdez Horses*, *Viva*, *What's So Bad about Feeling Good?* (Kino); *American Traitor* the *Trial of Axis Sally*, *The Curse of Oak Island* Season 3, *Fear the Walking Dead* Season 6, *Finding You*, *The House Next Door Meet the Blacks 2*, *Lansky*, *Ran*, *Rogue Hostage*, *Sundown The Vampire in Retreat* (Lionsgate); *Better* (Little Sister); *Riders of Justice* (Magnolia); *Black Rat*, *Flesh for the Beast*, *Guilty Pleasures Double Feature #2 Passport to Pleasure plus Sappho 68* (Media Blasters); *How It Ends* (MGM); *For Richer or Poorer*, *Gridman The Hyper Agent*, *Rad*, *The Watcher/The Skeleton Key* (Mill Creek); *My Heart Can't Beat unless You Tell It To* (MPI); *Beginning* (Mubi); *Summer of 85* (Music Box); *Blind Beast*, *The Brotherhood of Satan*, *Cannibal Man*, *Chariots of the Gods*, *The Dark*, *Drunk Bus*, *Eloy De La Iglesia's Quinqui Collection*, *Evil Dead Trap*, *Golden Arm*, *Habit*, *No One Heard the Scream*, *One Dark Night*, *Overboard*, *Pirate Treasure*, *The Sergio Martino Collection*, *Superstars The Documentary* (MVD); *Demented* (New Blood); *Bugsy Malone*, *Friday the 13th*, *The Haunting*, *The Misfits*, *Nashville*, *A Place in the Sun*, *The Sheik*, *The SpongeBob Musical Live on Stage!*, *The Time Machine* (Paramount); *Built to Kill*, *A Day of Violence*, *The Fusion Generation*, *The Lightest Darkness* (Rising Sun); *Gakko School-Live! Another Story* (Section 23); *The Best People*, *Careless*, *El Camino del Vino*, *Father's Chair*, *Good after Bad*, *Grey Eyes*, *Guardian Highlands*, *Hidden Moon*, *How You Look to Me*, *I Had a Bloody Good Time at House Harker*, *Innocent Kiss*, *Irrefutable Proof*, *Killed My Husband!*, *The Knot*, *Krotoa*, *Leave*, *Lengthy Night*, *Man from the Future*, *Mary Loss of Soul*, *Medicine Buddha*, *The Minis*, *Mountain of Gold*, *No Right Turn*, *Orgies and the Meaning of Life*, *Original Sin*, *Pale Blue Moon*, *Road of No Return*, *Road to Hell*, *The Pineville Heist*, *Point Defiance*, *Prosthesis*, *Ten Inch Hero*, *Todus Tus Muertos* (Shoreline); *Bingo*, *Here Today*, *Peter Rabbit 2*, *The Truffle Hunters* (Sony); *Profile*, *Spirit Untamed The Movie*, *Till Death* (Universal); *Batman The Long Halloween Part Two*, *The Conjuring The Devil Made Me Do It*, *In the Good Old Summertime*, *In the Heights*, *Mortal Kombat Legends Battle of the Realms*, *One Crazy Summer*, *Prince of the City*, *Prodigal Son* Season 2, *Shadow of the Thin Man*, *Those Who Wish Me Dead* (Warner); *The Fatal Raid*, *Little Q*, *Midnight Diner* (Well Go)

NEW IN 4K: The following titles have recently been released in 4K format—*Luca* (Buena Vista); *Awaken* (Gunpowder & Sky); *The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard* (Lionsgate); *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, *Django*, *Dune*, *Two Evil Eyes* (MVD); *Labyrinth* (Sony); *The Conjuring The Devil Made Me Do It*, *In the Heights*, *Mortal Kombat Legends Battle of the Realms* (Warner)

