Jacques Tati

Because his output was limited to little more than a handful of cinematic treasures, The Criterion Collection has managed to gather the works of the wonderful French film comedian, Jacques Tati, in a comprehensive seven-platter Blu-ray boxed set, **The Complete Jacques Tati** (UPC#715515128315, $125). Each of the six feature films appears on a separate platter within a separate loose jacket in the box (they kind of all slide out once you dislodge the first one), along with a platter holding four of Tati's short films. Although dialog is rarely, and sometimes never, essential, all of the films are in French with optional English subtitles.

The first film is Tati's depiction of a carnival day in a small rural town, the 1949 *Jour de Fête,* a bucolic mix of slapstick and ironic humor. Tati himself portrays a postman whose inebriated antics begin to dominate the second half of the 87-minute film. It is the film's first half, given over mostly to the carnival team and the townspeople, that is the most charming, for its diversity and continual invention, yet the entire movie is a sweet delight. Tati's physical performance is often balletic, although there are also times where you can feel the pain his stunts likely caused him. Once the principal characters of the town and the carnival are established, then Tati's character weaving around them back and forth as he makes his deliveries enables the movie to update the status of each one's foibles, sewing the film together, as it were. The movie is still a rough first effort—are the townspeople mocking the postman's foolishness, or celebrating his spirit?—but it is coherent and steadily inventive, containing a sufficient amount of varied humor to hold a viewer's attention regardless of what one considers funny and what one does not.

The squared full screen black-and-white picture has been restored, but remains soft looking at times, as the movie's age and shooting conditions could only allow for a modest presentation at best. That said, the film's image is generally clean and the gags are unharmed by whatever compromises remain. In a way, the presentation matches the tone of the locale. The monophonic sound is clean and delivers Jean Yatove's musical score with a bubbly clarity.

Along with an original French trailer, two more versions of the movie are presented in the supplement.

In 1964, Tati recut the film, adding splotches of hand-applied color and including non-comedic footage of a young, handsome artist walking around the town, cut so that he appears to be observing what is happening. Running 81 minutes, Tati removes the film's very first and loveliest gag—a shot juxtaposing the wooden horses for the merry-go-round being brought to town on the back of a truck with a horse working in a field and clearly annoyed that he's not getting a luxury ride—thus leaving just the film's second and more obvious gag—the wooden horses juxtaposed with a pair of horses who take off running together in the field. The dabs of color—flags, streamers, balloons and so on, now and then—pull your attention away from the comedy, but become kind of a substitute excitement if you are seeing the film for a second or third time. The tone of the black-and-white footage shifts to a slightly bluer grey for footage containing the colors. Otherwise, the transfer is on par with the initial version. The gist of the movie remains, but for all of the effort Tati put into reworking it—the new footage is expertly blended with the older footage—it doesn't really seem worth it.

Tati actually shot *Jour de Fête* in sort of genuine color, simultaneously with shooting it in black and white, but the lab he was using at the time was unable to do the processing, which required special technology, and so he had to let it go. In 1995, his daughter, Sophie Tatischeff (Tati's surname at birth was Tatischeff), had a version of the film colorized and that version, which runs 80 minutes, is also presented. Contrary to claims, it cannot be Tati's original vision, because his original color camera was his 'A' camera and his black-and-white camera was his 'B' camera, so the film that does exist is only comprised of takes from the 'B' camera. The presentation looks like a bad Cinecolor transfer. It is mainly brown and olive green—wood objects look fine. Blues are often clear, and there are brickish reds, but that is about it. There is no yellow. Fleshtones are simply a lighter brown. Objects that are deeply colored often blur a little too much. The night scenes are virtually black and white, and make an enhanced differentiation from the day sequences that you don't get in either of the previous versions. The source material is also riddled with scratches and speckles. Many of the gags removed from Tati's partially colored version, however, are back, including the opening horse bit and a lovely moment, near the end of the day, when a young woman takes off her high heels. It does give the viewer an excuse to watch the film yet again, and marvel at Tati's stunts and timing, but it is nothing like his genuine color features. In the supplement, there is a fascinating 30-minute piece from 1988 in which François Ede, often using reenactments, explains how he tracked down the color processing method Tati had used in order to replicate it—essentially, it was to be the processing company's first feature but they folded instead in the face of competition by better systems—and interviews with a few people who were involved with the production.

Also featured is an 81-minute retrospective documentary using all three versions of the film, clips from Tati's other movies, the silent films that inspired him and other odds and ends (including a terrific clip of Tati meeting Buster Keaton) to analyze various aspects of the film, such as its reflection upon America's efforts to revitalize France after the war. Nevertheless, it is primarily a good excuse to revisit all of the film's best bits again.

Two versions of Tati's next feature, *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*, are included on the next platter, his original 1953 cut, which runs 100 minutes, and his re-edited version from 1978, which runs 89 minutes and is the default presentation, adding new footage as well as eliminating footage. The full screen black-and-white picture looks gorgeous. It is spotless and sharp. The 1953 version, which has lots of speckles and softer lines, is part of the supplement.

While the thrust of the humor in *Jour de Fête* is the physical comedy and stunts, the best moments are the subtle visual gags and discreet character humor—the comedy a viewer has to 'work' to catch. The balance favoring the latter is even greater in *Holiday*. In *Jour de Fête*, for example, there are a handful of scenes where sound effects are used to represent what is not seen or to accentuate the presence of what is otherwise a background object of little regard. Tati employs this sort of gag more elaborately in *Holiday*, such as a door to a dining area that makes a particular creaking sound whenever it swings open, so that in addition to the music, the sound effects, enhanced by the sharp clarity of the BD's monophonic playback, add significantly to the film's amusing atmosphere. Like Eric Rohmer, Tati, while going about his business in the film, captures the essence of how a summer vacation feels, from the moments of frantic and irritating chaos to the brief periods of true relaxation, amid the rituals of participating in activities practiced (and only sporadically) within a single month out of the year. The narrative is the arc of the time Tati's character—the 'Monsieur Hulot' character, with his signature hat, overcoat, pipe and umbrella, is introduced in the film, but then carried on in other films, like Charlie Chaplin's 'Tramp'—spends at a hotel on the beach, arriving when a mass of other people arrive and leaving when the mass of other people leave. Amid the mass and the hotel staff are the other characters (if you watch the films back to back, you will recognize some of the performers from *Jour de Fête* and even gain greater appreciation and satisfaction for their respective shticks). In addition to staging the film and its many comical incidents, Tati's great accomplishment is in how he edits everything together, never calling attention to the way that he is divvying out each comical personality and associated trope. We laughed aloud at one moment, where a child is using a magnifying glass to burn a hole in a tent, and we realized that the laughter had come because we hadn't seen what the children were up to for a while. Tati didn't just stage the gag, he placed it perfectly amid the others, mixing them with his own character's actions (more than the other characters, he tends to accidentally disrupt decorations and events) as the days and activities advance. The amount of humor is sufficient to justify what there is of the narrative, and you really feel like you've been on a summer's adventure by the time it is over.

Tati's changes are immediately evident in the revised cut. He uses a different shot in the opening credits, and changes the typeface in the credits, so you can better make out the movie's first and still very subtle gag, in which it looks like a rock formation is fishing in the surf. He also adds a very amusing ending to a gag about a boat folded in half that had previously stopped there, but is extended to make the boat look like a sea monster that scares bathers on the beach. As for his trims, they mostly just drop the beginnings and endings of scenes to help move things along faster, as well as less comical sequences, such as the initial tennis game Tati's character plays before he learns how to serve (and his run-in with a priest). While for the shear pleasure of getting as much Tati as possible, the longer version is worthwhile, unlike *Jour de Fête*, the shorter version is the best way to experience the film's joys.

The shorter version also has an alternate English language track. The hotel has visitors from all over the continent, and the incidental dialog is already a polyglot. What the track does is alter some conversations to English, while leaving others in their original language. The radio in the hotel lobby, for example, broadcasts the BBC news on the revised track rather than French news. Since virtually none of the talk is relevant to the narrative, it really doesn't matter, and the English rescues one from having to read what subtitles there are. Also featured in the supplement are a decent 3-minute introduction to the film by Terry Jones; a passable 32-minute analysis of the use of sound and dialog in Tati's films; a viable 40-minute overview of the film's themes, replaying many of the comedic highlights and also presenting clips from Tati's other movies, concluding with a comparison between the two versions that admits Tati shot extra footage for the 1978 presentation so he could include the 'sea monster' spoof of **Jaws**; and a wonderful 27-minute interview with Tati in front of a Movieola as he explains his visual, aural and comedic strategies, and shares stories about his experiences with the film.

Our favorite Tati feature is his 1958 **Mon Oncle**, which incorporates an elaborately planned and executed production design component to embellish Tati's mix of slapstick, subtle ironies and human foibles. It is set in Paris, and while the film's geography is deliberately cryptic, its social geography is not only clearly defined, but the core of the narrative dynamic. Tati's character—named Hulot as he was in the previous film, sporting the same pipe and dressing in the same overcoat and hat—lives in a charming old-style Parisian neighborhood, featuring vendors who still use horses to pull their carts, and he dwells in a small rooftop apartment that he must reach by scaling stairwells in what appears to be three different buildings—his progress as he comes and goes is viewed from the outside by the patient camera. His sister lives in a comically modern suburban home. The furniture is minimalist, the kitchen is fully electronic, the windows on the second floor look like eyeballs, and there is a wonderful fish fountain in the front yard that she only turns on when visitors ring the gate buzzer. Her husband is the general manager of an enormous factory that produces plastic pipes and hoses. Her son goes to school and Tati's character picks him up every day to bring him home, where they traverse a large undeveloped wasteland that the kids use as a playground. The husband tries to get Tati's character a job in the factory

twice, but neither time works out well, and the husband becomes increasingly concerned with the way that his brother-in-law's lifestyle is impressing his son.

While the story, such as it is, gives the 116-minute film its momentum, it is the visual and character humor that make it such a repeatable delight. There is so much emphasis on daily habits and activities that you come away from watching the film with a heightened awareness not just of your surroundings, but of your own quirks and routines, from the way you open your blinds in the morning to the way you set your table and arrange your day. You don't just enjoy the movie, you digest it, absorb it and assimilate it.

The film is in color and the squared full screen image has vertical designs (actions above and below at both the house and the apartment) as well as regular horizontal designs. The colors are wonderful, and add to the sheer pleasure of watching the film unfold before you. The monophonic sound is clear and sharp, and there are even more amusing audio effects in **Mon Oncle** than there were in *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*. We reviewed a weaker looking Criterion DVD in Sep 01.

Tati also shot a few scenes more than one way to create an English language version of the film, with the cringe-inducing title, *My Uncle*. For example, very large letters on the building where the nephew goes to school read, 'Ecole,' but on the English version, they read, 'School.' Some characters still speak French and some background conversations are in French while other characters speak English and other background talking is in English. Tati was never consistent. In the factory, there is a door with a window so that you can see the word written on it in reverse when you are inside. On the outside on both versions, it reads, 'Prive,' but reading it in reverse on the inside on both versions, it reads, 'Private.' Tati also removed a little extraneous material and tightened other things up, so that the running time is just 110 minutes. He also changed footage for no apparent reason. In a scene that has no direct dialog or observable writing, the 'bouncing pitcher' gag is funnier on the French version than it is on the English version, which uses a different take. The colors are slightly brighter on the English version, but the image is also softer and so the invigorating sharpness of the French version, and the relative robustness of its hues, make it the preferable presentation, although it seems like there remains room for further improvement.

Also featured in the supplement is a great 5-minute introduction by Jones; a terrific 2008 retrospective documentary running 52 minutes from the British TV series, *A Film & Its Era,* interviewing many of the crew and French film figures, including Pierre Etaix (see page 16) and Jean-Claude Carriere, who were involved in the film's production, and David Lynch; an intelligent and entertaining 52-minute critique of the film's themes that includes a number of deleted scenes; an excellent and very entertaining 53-minute analysis of the film's designs by architectural specialists, fashion authorities and design experts that includes visual gags and other comedic business of its own (they also build the furniture seen in the film, and try it out); and a wonderful 9-minute interview with Tati from 1977 about his dog and his use of dogs in his films.

While **Mon Oncle** remains our favorite Tati film, it is generally recognized that his masterpiece is the 1967 **PlayTime**, a 124-minute epic of brilliant visual humor that was not successful in its initial release but has gained enthusiastic admiration over the years for its exceptional craftsmanship. It is to some effect two shorter films combined to depict a day in Paris, beginning at an airport, proceeding to an office building, pausing for an 'after work' interlude in a ground floor apartment, and the diving into the mayhem of a classy restaurant on its disastrous but rollicking opening night. Many of the same characters, including Tati's Hulot, appear in both halves of the film, and you do get to understand their superficial personalities, but very little more than that. Like the modern house in **Mon Oncle**, however, the film presents a fabulous celebration of the flaws of modern designs and their correlative humor. The scale of the offices depicted in the first half is breathtaking, while the directorially-controlled confusion of the restaurant sequence, brilliantly paced from its first customer to its last, is remarkable. There is a great deal of funny slapstick, more uncategorizable humor (after a glass door breaks, the doorman attempts to hide the flaw by continuing to hold the large golden knob and pretend he is opening it for those walking in) and so much activity in both halves that you could spend the rest of your life watching just this one film and never see everything that is has to offer.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The framing never looks compromised, and the color transfer is gorgeous. The sharpness of the image is riveting, and its carefully defined hues are continually transfixing. Much of the film's first half is variations of greys—with a few colorful intrusions—while the second half attempts, with similar intrusions, to go with black, white and gold. The focus is so sharp that you can look in any corner of the screen and see something interesting going on, or if not moving, just existing. The three-channel DTS sound has a decent dimensionality that adds to the viewer's immersion in the movie's magic. The dialog is a mix of French and other languages depending upon the nationalities of the tourists, while a second 'International' track changes a little bit of it from French into English, maintaining the same general mix. The conversations are not elaborate and are just intended to set up what is happening in a scene. While the extra English helps to cut back on the subtitling, there isn't really very much to begin with.

A great 47-minute history of the film's production and analysis of its themes presented over images of the film is included in the supplement. It goes into detail over the scenes that Tati took days or even weeks to complete, describes the production environment (although the outdoor set was torn down after he was finished, he had intended to leave it standing so other filmmakers could use it), points out the experiences of specific performers (Tati had an affair with leading lady Barbara Dennek—"The liaison broke up during the course of the long shoot, which may well have added to the air of melancholy that pervades the movie."), delves into the film's sad financial fate (Tati had to give up his house, his rights to his films and many other things to complete the production), points out minutia that Tati would include in the backgrounds of scenes that you don't catch until multiple viewings, and laments the fate of a half-hour of footage that was removed after the premiere and while rumored to exist, is still missing.

Also featured is a passable 6-minute Jones introduction; a lovely 7-minute summary of the film's production effort that is set to a fantastic collection of behind-the-scenes footage; a rewarding 12-minute interview with script supervisor Sylvette Baudrot sharing many different anecdotes about the shoot and Tati's cinematic tricks; an excellent 26-minute visit to the set by Mike Hodges and a British film crew that includes interviews with Tati and English-speaking extras, as well as some great imitations of Tati's humor while observing his production; 45 minutes of enlightening deconstructions of various scenes; and a 17-minute audio only interview with Tati from 1972 at the film's American premiere.

Criterion also released a standalone **PlayTime** Blu-ray (UPC#7155-15047616, $40), but it not only has a blander color transfer, it also has a weaker two-channel stereo sound mix. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, adding a sliver of picture information to the top and right side of the image. Most of the supplemental features from the other **PlayTime** platter are included, except the Hodges interview and the 45 minutes of scene deconstructions. Also featured is a short entitled *Cours Du Soir* and a Tati biographical featurette that appear on the final platter of **Complete Jacques Tati**, and an interview featured on the British TV series, *Omnibus*, that is included on the *Traffic* platter (see below).

It took a long time, but Tati eventually made another film, the 1971 *Traffic*, a comedy about automobiles, and while it may not achieve the heights that **Mon Oncle** and **PlayTime** achieve, it has many inspired sequences and is worthwhile entertainment, especially when the viewer is tuned into Tati's mindset. Tati uses his Hulot persona again, but this time he is a car designer, helping to transport his creation—a car that can double as a camper—to an auto show, a task that is only supposed to take a few hours and ends up taking several days. As a director, Tati not only grabs shots of real traffic, inserting footage of drivers caught being human, but he also had access to a genuine auto show, which he deftly mixes with his staged set ups. He opens the film with shots of a real automobile assembly line. Running 97 minutes, the film has several laugh aloud moments—there is a gag with a hairy dog and a shag jacket that is absolutely hysterical and probably the best, most sustained laugh in the entire collection—and once again mixes outright slapstick with beautifully subtle moments of humor (the truck transporting the show car runs out of gas on the highway, and while the driver is waiting for Tati's character to return with a canister, he is passed by numerous oil trucks) and design (windshield wipers can be seen through the windows of sequential cars, each swiping at a different rhythm, but perfectly so). Like **PlayTime**, the characters are not explored with any depth, they are just put to good use, but otherwise, the film is another delight.

The picture is in a square, full screen format. The color transfer looks terrific, although it is so accurate that you can spot now and then the difference between Tati's staged shots and the shots he grabbed on the sly. The monophonic sound is reasonably strong, although there are not too many inventive car noises added to the mix. Along with a trailer, there is a marvelous 1976 visit to the locations used in *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* with Tati, while he is interviewed about his films and his craft, for the 49-minute British TV show, *Omnibus*.

Tati's skills as a comedian came from his experience on the stage and he continued to work and hone those skills in front of audiences throughout his life, so it was only fitting that he chose to take his final cinematic bow by replicating those experiences in a program ostensibly shot on a stage before a (mostly) live audience, his 1974 *Parade*. Incorporating performances by a Swedish circus company, he presents himself as the emcee, and also does a number of classic mime skits—a traffic cop, a fisherman, a soccer goalie and so on—while the acrobats around him supply a deft alternative showcase of visual and comedic distractions. Both the troupe and the audience are dressed like they've dropped out of a touring company of **Godspell**, but that was the Seventies for you. Running 90 minutes, the production is consistently delightful, often dazzling and constantly smile-inducing.

Much of the program was shot on video, but regardless of the source material, the image remains in a squared full screen format. Sometimes it looks sharper than film, and other times it looks not as sharp as film, but the colors are always very bright and the image is always clear and fresh. The monophonic sound is fine. In 1989, Tatischeff compiled the definitive summary of Tati's career, *In the Footsteps of Monsieur Hulot*, which has also been included on the platter. Running 103 minutes, it contains many super archival clips (including an interview with Steve Allen) and cogent summaries of every work. Also featured on the platter is a good 28-minute appreciation of the feature program and an excellent 15-minute interview with art designer Jacques Lagrange about working with Tati (and tantalizingly describing Tati's unfilmed final project).

The last platter holds seven short films that Tati was involved with as a performer, writer and/or director, at least peripherally, spanning his entire career.

The first, *On Demande Une Brute* from 1934, was directed by Charles

Barrois and conceived by Tati—who also stars—and an uncredited René Clément. Tati is an out-of-work actor who takes a job as an opponent to a wrestler everyone else is afraid to get into the ring with. Enrico Sprocani, known as 'Rhum,' is his partner. What plays out is like a cartoon, with Tati's character, so desperately attempting to avoid the other wrestler that he by accident defeats him, with the help of a Rhum's character at ringside with an iron bar. Running 25 minutes, the squared full screen black-and-white source material is heavily battered but coherent, and the piece is fully entertaining, as much for the opportunity to see the lanky, baby faced Tati do his thing as it is for the solidly composed narrative.

While it is easy to imagine any two comics making *On Demande Une Brute*, the second short from 1935, *Gai Dimanche*, also featuring Tati and Rhum, and directed by Jacques Berr, has quite a few Tati-style gags about cars, including some that he would use again in his features. The 22-minute piece is about two hustlers who try to start up a sightseeing business and fail miserably, and some of it is standard comedic bits—they have to chase after a chicken that is supposed to be served to their customers for lunch—but the visual gags that are pure Tati (they hear a noise in a car, open up the hood, and discover a child pretending to drive inside; one door of their tour van opens when its opposite is shut) are timeless. Again, the full screen black-and-white short looks a bit battered, but workable.

Clément directed the 1936 *Soigne Ton Gauche*, about a prizefighter who has set up camp in a country farm to train for his next bout. The young Tati is bailing hay, but when the manager runs out of sparring partners, he talks the boy into going a couple of rounds. Other farmhands also get involved. There are some good gags, and a lot of general boxing slapstick. The squared full screen black-and-white source material is in progressively better condition than the first two shorts, but is still somewhat aged in appearance. The 13-minute film opens with a rural postman on a bicycle, like *Jour de Fête*.

After World War II, Tati would follow up with his own first effort at directing, the 1946 *L'École des Facteurs*, himself playing another bicycling rural postman, industriously delivering the mail to various farmers. The 16-minute piece, which was also included on Criterion's **Mon Oncle** DVD, is not just a warm up for *Jour de Fête*, it is an initial working of the film. Not only would he go on to repeat numerous gags in the feature, there is footage in the feature, such as the delivery of a letter to a rector as he is ringing a church bell, that is lifted directly from the short. The full screen black-and-white picture is in great shape—much better looking than the DVD presentation—sharp and free of significant wear.

In 1967, Tati took time out from making **PlayTime** to appear in *Cours du Soir*, directed by Nicolas Ribowski, essentially doing his pantomimes, such as smoking and fishing, that he would later replicate in *Parade*. The premise is that he, as the Hulot character, is instructing a class of men in business attire in the art of mime. There are cutaways—they pretend to look out the window or watch a projected film—to Tati playing tennis and (the film's best sequence) horse riding, and there is a spot-on imitation of *L'École des Facteurs*, in which the performers use a black-and-white background so that it looks as if the skit was shot in black and white. Ribowski also made use of the models constructed for **PlayTime** to give the 29-minute film a perfect punchline. The squared full screen image may not be quite as intensely sharp as **PlayTime**, but it is otherwise smooth, reasonably fresh looking and free of wear.

Tatischeff's 1978 short, *Dégustation Maison*, was shot in a café in the same town where Tati shot *Jour de Fête*, but otherwise he was not involved with its creation. Very clever and exceedingly subtle, the 14-minute film appears to be about a day of business at a pastry shop, and it is only somewhere halfway through that you suddenly realize the customers are not acting as if it were a pastry shop, they are behaving and patronizing the establishment as if it were a bar. That is all there is to the film, but it is brilliantly conceived and executed in that regard. The squared full screen image is a little grainy, but the colors are reasonably fresh.

In 1978, Tati went to Corsica's second largest city, Bastia, to film the town going nuts over holding the first leg of the UEFA soccer cup. It rained like heck much of the afternoon and by the evening when the game started the field was all mud and surface water, and the game ended without any scoring by either side. He never finished putting the movie together, which is a shame—he was probably gambling that the home team would win, which would have capped the movie wonderfully—but in 2000 Tatischeff got hold of the existing footage and completed what Tati had started, which became a wonderful 28-minute documentary, *Forza Bastia 78 ou L'île en fête*. Not only is it a unique creation, it is a very entertaining portrait of reality at its dampest. Tati had cameras both at the field and in the town, and an exceptional eye for the humanity and absurdity of the fans and their enthusiasms. The film follows sort of a bell curve, capturing the frantic excitement that builds during the morning (before the rains come) and then monitoring the fans at the stadium and in the local bars as the air goes out of the balloon until all that is left, the next morning, is soggy garbage. The squared full screen color picture is grainy, as one would expect from a documentary, and otherwise has fresh hues. The stereo sound has a passable dimensionality, especially at first (it also seems to die down as the film proceeds).

Also included on the platter is an excellent 31-minute overview of Tati's themes and strategies throughout his films that also presents several marvelous commercials Tati made for a weight control supplement, and a succinct but comprehensive 21-minute Tati biography.

François Truffaut

"Poor France will be in a sorry state in 10 years," says the exasperated teacher in the opening classroom scene of Francois Truffaut's 1959 **The 400 Blows** (*Les Quatre Cents Coups*). For cinema, the opposite was true. In the subsequent decade, French filmmakers made an indelible stamp upon both the manner and content of motion pictures, and **400 Blows** became a herald for this wave of fresh syntax and new, often hyper-personal content (pointedly enabled by advances in technology that had simplified image and sound recording). The acknowledgement that a film director often imprinted a recognizable authorship upon the films that director made, in both content and style, came from the French critics such as Truffaut, who then absorbed and displayed their theories in the motion pictures they had enthusiastically begun to create. For **400 Blows**, a clearly autobiographically tinged tale of childhood starring Jean-Pierre Léaud as a teenage boy who never seems to be able to catch a break from either his teachers or his parents, the film also became a cornerstone for a more personal and still slightly autobiographical series of movies that Truffaut would go on to create amid his other features, utilizing the maturing talents of Léaud to continue the exploits and confusions his character encounters with life and adulthood, first in a 1962 short running 30 minutes, *Antoine and Colette*, and then with the monster boxoffice smash, *Stolen Kisses* in 1968, followed up immediately by *Bed and Board* in 1970, to be capped later on by the very clever *Love on the Run* in 1979. All five of these films have been gathered in an eight-platter 4K Blu-ray boxed set by The Criterion Collection entitled **The Adventures of Antoine Doinel** (UPC#715515315814, $125). The four 4K platters contain just the films, while four standard Blu-ray platters hold both the films and a number of supplements. Previously, Criterion put out a five-platter DVD set (UPC#71-5515013529), with a few of the same supplementary features ascribed to the fifth platter. On all five films, the picture quality on the DVDs are weaker than the BDs, with more speckling and scratches, greater color saturation, lighter hues and softer details. All five films are monophonic, with reasonably strong and clean audio tracks (again, weaker on the DVDs). The films are in French with optional English subtitles.

In **400 Blows**, Truffaut uses a number of different filmmaking strategies to compile what is essentially a drama. There is an outright documentary segment—capturing the amazing reactions to younger children watching a puppet show behind the camera—along with plenty of stolen footage on the sidewalks and streets of Paris, mixed with scenes set in classrooms (where the children somehow know how to be mischievous in unison) and in ghastly apartments (Paris may be a romantic place, but one of the things we have learned watching French films over the years is that Parisian apartments are all decrepit, even the supposedly nice ones). That **400 Blows** is both a dark feature about how wrong a child's upbringing can go if the hearts of the parents aren't in it a hundred percent (or even if they are), and a joyously lighthearted tale that turns the freedoms and discoveries of childhood into cinematic pleasures and confections reflects Truffaut's career as a whole. He would continue to be as comfortable with serious drama as he was with cheerful comedy. In fact, the film's iconic final freeze frame speaks to both the beauty and the tragedy of Truffaut's life, stopped suddenly (after the completion of his best, most joyful movie, *Vivement dimanche!*) long before it deserved to be.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The black-and-white picture is somewhat soft at times and not as crisp or impactful as one might hope. The 4K image is smooth and nicely detailed, but a bit dark, while the standard BD, also a touch messier, is brighter. Neither version is entirely satisfying, but both are an improvement over the Criterion Blu-ray we reviewed in Apr 09, eliminating all of the most obvious scratches and other impurities. The monophonic sound is solid and clear. Jean Constantin's musical score suggests that Truffaut owes more than he realizes to Jacques Tati, especially with the scenes involving the school children (in one instance, peeling off from a gym teacher as he takes them for a jog through the streets of Paris), which recall the children frolicking in **Mon Oncle**. The two commentaries that appeared on the previous BD, a detailed analysis of the film by film historian Brian Stonehill and reminiscences by Truffaut's buddies, Robert Lachenay and Marcel Moussy (the latter talk in French with optional English subtitles), have been carried over on both platters.

A narrator in the opening of *Antoine and Colette* magically provides Léaud's character, at seventeen years of age, with a decent job for an LP record manufacturer and an apartment in Paris. A couple of brief clips from **400 Blows** are also integrated at the beginning to help sell the otherwise unlikely transition. Once all of that has been set up, his character attends classical music lectures, sees another attendee played by Marie-France Pisier, and sort of starts stalking her, although they eventually become friends and start attending the concerts together. He also meets her mother and father, who become more enamored with him than she is, and that is the essential punchline of the film, that she only wants to be 'friends.' Truffaut also includes some nice semi-documentary footage of how LPs are made, with Léaud operating the equipment.

The film was an installment in an omnibus feature, *Love at Twenty*, and while we always find it irritating when such films are not otherwise available in their entirety (the other directors featured include Andrzej Wajda, Shintarô Ishihara and Marcel Ophüls), it is better to have the piece in some format than to not have it at all. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the black-and-white image is of similar quality to **400 Blows**, smoother and better detailed on the 4K image, but slightly brighter on the standard BD. On both versions, unlike

the feature film, the short does not start up where it left off if playback is terminated. The standard BD presentation is somewhat blurrier and messier.

The supplement on the DVD and the set's BD is carried over from the previous BD, including 6 minutes of auditions, a terrific 6-minute piece about Truffaut and Léaud at Cannes, a 7-minute interview with Truffaut from 1960, a 22-minute interview with Truffaut from 1965, and a trailer. The supplements on the BD platters throughout the set do not start up where they left off if playback is terminated.

Also featured on the standard BD platter and the DVD's fifth platter is Truffaut's 18-minute black-and-white *Les Mistons*, from 1957, which is also about the antics of children, depicting five boys on summer vacation in the countryside, who stalk an older teenage girl and her boyfriend. Shot mostly without sound—there is a voiceover narration, as well as music and sound effects, along with snippets of dialog at important moments—the film has an impactful ending and otherwise kind of uses the excuse of the narrative to explore the locations (including Roman ruins), basking in the freedom of summer. There is a tennis sequence, and while there are probably plenty of other movies that Truffaut saw at some point that included characters playing tennis, you cannot help but notice how closely it aligns to the tennis footage in the older version of *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*. The short is also accompanied by a commentary featuring Truffaut's collaborator Claude de Givray, in French with optional English subtitles, who goes over his own background, how the production was executed and what they were striving for, and a 2-minute overview of the short's creation. Additionally, on both the standard BD and the DVD, there is a 25-minute interview with Truffaut from 1961 talking about his filmmaking strategies (he did everything in **400 Blows** on location—the cinematographer had to sit on the windowsill for the dinner scenes) and how he got started. The BD also has a second trailer.

Léaud's character is actually a more believable extension of his character in **400 Blows** in *Stolen Kisses* (*Baisers volés*), as the film opens with him being discharged from the Army for disciplinary reasons. The film covers the rest of the transition by switching from the darker dramatic aspects of **400 Blows** to a more generally lighthearted tone, so that its humor negates any other qualms one might have about the vector of his character's maturation. He can't hold down a job, but the film centers on his time working at a detective agency, so that it combines elements of romantic comedy with the frameworks of mysteries. Michel Lonsdale, for example, plays the owner of a shoe store who wants to find out why nobody likes him, and so Léaud's character goes undercover as a stock boy, attracting the undue attentions of the owner's wife, played by Delphine Seyrig (who is also being followed by another employee of the agency). Léaud's character falls back into a habit of socializing with the family of a girl he met before joining the Army, played by Claude Jade—a situation similar to the situation concluding *Antoine and Colette*, except that the family lives in a house instead of an apartment (there is also a brief cameo of Pisier, showing that her character has an entirely different life, to help with any potential confusion). Jade's character is politely friendly until, naturally, the distracted attentions created by the jobs Léaud's character has kindle her interests in the way that his direct attentions could not. Running 91 minutes, the film is inventive and cheerful, filled with small humors and human foibles. Léaud is brilliant in the role—not something that all former child actors can achieve—and Truffaut creates a skillful balance between keeping the center of the film held on Léaud while still allotting enough time to the other characters so that many of the performers can extend themselves and create their own lasting impressions.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The colors are fresh, but once again, the 4K presentation, although smoother and crisper, is darker than the presentation on the standard BD, which has brighter hues and less olive-cast fleshtones. On the one hand, either version looks great and both convey the film's delights much better than the speckled DVD, but both also have drawbacks when compared to each other. You see how much darker the 4K presentation is, but also how free of grain and other minor distractions it is.

Both the standard BD and the DVD come with a 3-minute overview of the film and Truffaut's attempt to defend and fight for Henri Langlois's reinstatement at the Cinémathèque Française while he was shooting the film (suggesting that these distractions helped loosen up the creative team); a more detailed 12-minute piece specifically about what happened to Langlois, including newsreel footage of the many celebrities participating in the public protests—it was, as the narrator points out, a rare moment where all of France's film industry, old and new, were united; a minute-long plea from Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard to join in the fight intended to be shown in movie theaters; a 7-minute interview with Truffaut talking specifically about Léaud, his character and his performance; 7 minutes of footage from Cannes in 1968 depicting the hubbub over the general strikes in France—Truffaut was knee deep in the movement to cancel the Festival; and a trailer. The standard BD also has a second trailer and a terrific 26-minute interview with Truffaut's daughter, Laura Truffaut, from 2019, talking in particular and lovingly about the portrayal of children in his movies and his own childhood.

A flagrant reference to Tati appears in the last act of *Bed and Board* (*Domicile conjugal*)—a man dressed like Tati's Monsieur Hulot does some business with his umbrella before getting onto the same subway train that Léaud's character boards. Since the moment serves no direct reference to the film at hand, it can only be a general tribute that Truffaut slipped into the film as he does with book titles, film marquees, record jackets and so on. The 97-minute movie, one of Truffaut's best, is about the initial marriage of Jade and Léaud's characters and the beginning of their family. Léaud's character is still unsettled, starting the film as a flower seller before landing a position at an international construction firm (operating toy boats in an elaborate model harbor), and his attentions are turned for a while by a Japanese client. While there is plenty of humor in the film, it is not a romantic comedy in the way that *Stolen Kisses* is, but rather a drama about the frailties of marriage that uses humor to levitate the distresses of an uneven relationship. Truffaut's inventiveness—there is a clever time-lapse shot that has a direct bearing on the narrative, and a number of other creative moments—prevents the film from being pulled down by its emotional conflicts. In another actor's hands, the hero's antics might seem tiresome, but there is a measure of growth in Léaud's character compared to *Stolen Kisses* despite his still arrested maturity, and his earnestness becomes endearing, even when his misguided attentions are frustrating.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The standard BD looks terrible. The Nestor Almendros cinematography looks over-saturated and outright fuzzy at times, hardly better than the DVD, so that the 4K presentation, which looks smooth and stable, is definitely preferable. Fleshtones are a bit darker, but not to a point of distraction, and details are clear. Included in the supplement on the standard BD and the DVD is a trailer, a minute-long interview with Truffaut about Léaud's character, 3 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage, 5 minutes of kind of staged footage depicting Truffaut working with screenwriter Bernard Roven, going over ideas for specific scenes, and a welcome 5-minute interview with Léaud about his career and working with Truffaut. Also featured on the standard BD and the fifth DVD platter is a wonderful 44-minute interview with de Givray and Revon, who talk about the scripts they wrote for Truffaut, of course, but spend most of the time talking about what Truffaut was like, his strengths and weaknesses, and sharing anecdotes, also describing in detail the completed script for what would have been his next film if he had not passed away.

What in television would be known as a 'clip episode,' *Love on the Run* (*L'amour en fuite*) uses footage from all four previous films as flashbacks while it constructs an amusing 'small world' tale about the convergence of both Pisier and Jade's characters in the life of Léaud's character, delightfully wrapping up some loose ends from **400 Blows**, as well. The film brings cohesion to a quintet spanning 2 decades, creating a work essentially unparalleled in the history of cinema. *Bed and Board* has a happy ending—that is one of its strengths as a standalone film—that is initially undercut when *Love on the Run* opens with the Léaud and Jade's characters finalizing their divorce. At this point, Léaud's character is working at a large print house (again, there are glimpses of the manufacturing process that Truffaut cannot resist including), though he manages to maintain that one job throughout the film. He meets Pisier's character on a train and they catch up with each other's lives, as there are also 'new' flashbacks to what happened between his and Jade's characters between the conclusion of *Bed and Board* and the divorce. While the other flashbacks can make viewers who are watching the movies over a day or a weekend feel impatient, the fresh content in the 95-minute feature always reinvigorates any flagging attentions, and the film becomes an inspired and joyful summary of not only the characters, but of Truffaut's cinema, which sustained the freshness of its pioneering spirit even as it advanced into the mainstream.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Although not as fuzzy as *Bed and Board*, the image on the standard BD is still a bit mushy so that while the colors on the 4K presentation are slightly darker, it is preferable. Both the standard BD and the DVD have a great 7-minute interview with Truffaut and Pisier talking about the story development, the use of flashbacks and the performances; a 3-minute interview with Truffaut about the series (he says he is disappointed in *Love on the Run* because it is too experimental, but his disappointment is unfounded); and a trailer. The BD also has a 7-minute interview with Truffaut from 1981 talking about working with Léaud that is included on the fifth DVD platter, and a second trailer.

The fifth DVD platter also contains a small still frame section of memorabilia for the four feature films.

Truffaut's second feature film, the 1960 **Shoot the Piano Player**, feels more like a student movie than **400 Blows**. It isn't a bad film, but it is riddled with errors (the shadow of the camera passes across a couple walking down a street at night) and sophomoric choices (the hero's interior monolog is critical to understanding not just his emotional state, but his entire consciousness), and it is saddled with jump cuts and similar distractions that would soon be abandoned even by the New Wave's most dedicated practitioners. Charles Aznavour, who feels miscast, is a former concert pianist who earns a living as a musician in a small neighborhood bar. At the point where it seems he might actually try to make something of his career again, because he has worked up enough nerve to open his heart to a barmaid, his brothers are involved in an armored car heist and he gets dragged into the conflict they have with their collaborators.

Running 81 minutes, however, the film is brief enough that its shortcomings do not undercut its vitality. Mistakes aside, Raoul Coutard's black-and-white cinematography creates a compelling atmosphere, particularly since much of the film takes place at night. The music may not be Georges Delerue's most compelling score, but it has periodic hints of the effervescence that would blossom in his later music. If Aznavour is miscast, he's still Aznavour, and his charisma supersedes the ill-fitting appearance of his character. The other cast members, including Marie Dubois, Nicole Berger, Serge Davri and Daniel Boulanger, do not feel out of place, and since they are personable and consistently accept Aznavour's character as one of their own, it is easy enough to

go along with them. Then, as the crime story heats up, the suspense hooks invigorate the film's pace and provide a welcome counterpoint to the pianist's repressed love life. One imagines that there are many moments in the film that even Truffaut would likely have wanted to go back and change, but if you approach the film not so much looking at its creation coming from a filmmaker at the top of his skills but as a master still learning and growing in his craft, and accept it for what it is, it can be a satisfying entertainment.

The film has yet to be released on Blu-ray, but The Criterion Collection did issue a two-platter DVD set (UPC#037429212721, $40). The film appears on the first platter. The opening and closing shots are squeezed for fear of losing the edge of the credits, but the rest of the presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. There are some scratches here and there, and while much of the graininess is intentional, the image could stand to be sharper than it appears. There is room for improvement here. The monophonic sound is adequate and there are optional English subtitles, along with a trailer. Film historians Peter Brunette and Annette Insdorf supply a worthwhile commentary track, pointing out the film's innovations, analyzing the narrative, examining the quality of the performances, hailing its memorable moments, and positioning the film in the context of Truffaut's career at the time, as well as the impact of the French New Wave.

"These guys were completely obsessed by Forties and Fifties American film, and they used to pile into the Cinémathèque and watch these films one after the other even though they really didn't understand English and there were no subtitles. So their view of these movies is quite crazy, but fun."

"But you see, they became wonderful readers of visual language in film because they didn't understand the films which didn't have subtitles. They really figured out that stories are told through camera placement and movement, through editing, through music."

The second platter contains two fascinating TV interviews with Truffaut running a total of 22 minutes in which he talks about the film (he says that he dislikes French gangster movies because they are all the same) and the author of the source novel, David Goodis, which leads into an inspired analysis of the difference between France, where all of the book people know each other, and America, which is so large that publishers on the East Coast have no idea what publishers on the West Coast are up to; a wonderful 2005 interview with Aznavour running 24 minutes (he complains that people always expect him to play the piano, which he actually does not do), recalling his experiences on the film, his costars and working with Truffaut ("The thing about Truffaut was that you had to understand him. You had to experience his film with him."); a sweet 10-minute interview with DuBois from 2005 (along with her very amusing 3-minute screen test where Truffaut encourages her to curse); a good 14-minute interview with Coutard in which he delves into the challenges of the shoot; an interesting 15-minute interview with Truffaut collaborator Suzanne Schiffman about her experiences on his films and working with him; and an excellent 17-minute deconstruction of Delerue's score.

And then, just 2 years later, in 1962, Truffaut's next feature film was a work of complete maturity and abundant talent that cemented his reputation as one of France's greatest filmmakers, **Jules and Jim** (*Jules et Jim*), as well as that of Coutard, Delerue and the film's star, Jeanne Moreau. Indeed, arguments about the film rise to another level and are not about shot choices or tonal shifts, but about whether or not the film should have been titled after its two male leads, played by Henri Serre and Oskar Werner, or after Moreau's character. Set in the early Twentieth Century, before and after World War I, the film is ostensibly about the triangular relationship between those three characters, although there are plenty of peripheral characters that develop relationships with those central characters, quite specifically so that the simple description of the film as a triangular romance is negated by its actual permutations and advancements. The period setting is a delight, as are the characters during their happy times, underscored by Delerue's music and the careful, exquisite choices of lighting and widescreen framing by Truffaut and Coutard, while the intrusions and complications of reality undercut and refine each character's true nature. The performances are excellent, both on a superficial level and with the darker shortcomings that negate that superficiality as the story advances. Running 105 minutes, the film is a rich contemplation of human nature, presented in a joyful outburst of fresh technique that celebrates the possibilities of cinema with the same enthusiasm the characters discover in their friendships and romances.

Criterion, so far, has released by film three times on DVD and Blu-ray, the most important version being the three-platter DVD & Blu-ray presentation (UPC#715515113519, $40), which was preceded by a two-platter DVD set (UPC#037429184226, $35), and a single-platter DVD in the Criterion and Janus Films *Essential Art House* series (UPC#715515056717, $30), which has no special features. The black-and-white film is in French, with optional English subtitles. It is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, and all of the DVDs have enhanced 16:9 playback. The two older DVD releases have the same image transfer, which doesn't look bad, although wear is apparent at regular intervals. The image is reasonably sharp, and the monophonic sound is clear. The wear is not entirely removed, but it is cleaned up a great deal on the Blu-ray and DVD combination release, and while the DVD looks terrific, the BD is even better, with a sharper, more detailed image and a stronger delivery on the mono audio track.

The first platter of the DVD release has two commentary tracks. One originated on Criterion's LD release, featuring the translated recollections of Schiffman, co-screenwriter Jean Gruault and editor Claudine Bouché, augmented by insightful analysis from Insdorf. The talk contains many rewarding tidbits and revelations, and is consistently interesting. "The fog was not something we wanted for the scene, either. The fog just happened when we were shooting there and Coutard said, 'There's nothing we can do, really, but wait till it dissolves.' And François says, 'If we can see something, there's one scene we can do. It's the scene where Jim is leaving the house,' which is what we did. And after the film came on the screen, François received letters from the Hollywood producer asking could he give them the name of the special effect man that made that wonderful fog for the scene."

On another track, Moreau supplies a commentary prompted by film critic Serge Toubiana, which is in French with optional English subtitles, although Moreau's voice is so transfixing it barely matters what she has to say. There are a few gaps in the talk, but in addition to using the film to spark memories of the shoot ("I still have that sweater. A lot of the clothes belonged to me."), her insights on the film (she points out that people arrive left to right, like reading, and leave right to left), and general comments about moviemaking ("You can be miserable on a film and still give a lovely performance."), she also talks about her relationship with Truffaut and the things they shared together.

Additionally, the first DVD platter holds a trailer, a 7-minute interview with Truffaut from 1966 talking about author Henri-Pierre Roché and speaking glowingly about the novel and why he wanted to film it, and a fascinating 31-minute documentary from 1985 about the three individuals the story is based upon (including Roché himself) that contains extensive interviews with their adult children.

The second platter contains a rewarding collection of interviews with Truffaut running a total of 108 minutes (including one where he is shown excerpts from an interview with Moreau describing him, and then asked to comment on her statements); a good 19-minute interview with Coutard from 2003 about the shoot; an interesting 21-minute interview with Gruault talking about the various projects he did with Truffaut and their process for working on them; a decent 23-minute analysis of the film's artistry; and a carefully annotated collection of script pages, letters, production photos and so on in still frame.

The BD platter has all of the commentaries and supplementary features from both DVD platters, except for the still frame archive.

Truffaut's next feature-length film, **The Soft Skin** (*Le Peau Douce*) from 1964, a Criterion Blu-ray (UPC#715515141116, $40), then certified his filmmaking skills. It is nothing like his previous movies. There are no cinematic gimmicks or impish asides. It is a clean, straightforward tale of infidelity, not so much a romance as a fully depicted trajectory of hormonal attraction. Jean Desailly is a famous writer and magazine editor who has a wife and a young daughter. While he comes across as a bit dowdy and comfortably middle aged, he is moderately famous—there are posters with his picture on them when he is to do a lecture, and his photo is in the paper—so it is entirely believable that a stewardess in her twenties, played by Françoise Dorléac, would be flattered by his attraction and reciprocate, and since she is drop dead gorgeous, it is no mystery as to why he would be tempted by her, so long as his wife can be kept in the dark. Running 118 minutes, the film systematically and smoothly follows the affair, from its giddy initial excitements to the anxieties of trying to remain discreet and doubts about continuing. While, after the opening credit sequence depicting two pairs of hands caressing one another, the film avoids scenes of sensuality, closing the door whenever the lovers unite (Remember the sequence in **Day for Night** where they try to get the cat to drink from the breakfast tray outside of the motel room? This is where Truffaut got it.), focusing instead on the arrangements they make to meet and the conversations they have before and afterward. Presented with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, it helps that the black-and-white images on the disc are impeccable. Coutard's cinematography seems effortlessly lit and framed, advancing with one clear, sharp, unblemished image after another so that you are totally attentive to the characters and what they are thinking and feeling. Thanks to the performances and the quality of Truffaut's script, their flaws are as vivid as their charms and impulses. When, at the very end, the film suddenly concludes with extreme melodrama, it does not feel out of place but rather presents itself as the thing that separates entertainment from reality, thus making the movie a very worthwhile experience and not, as it might feel at certain moments, a drab depiction of life's misguided choices. If Jean-Luc Godard had made the exact same film and brought it to Cannes at the exact same time, it would have been hailed as a masterpiece, but people expected a different tone and manner from Truffaut, and the film flopped badly with the critics and the public, taking a very long time before it was recognized as one of Truffaut's greatest works.

The monophonic audio track is also strong and clean, and the film is in French with optional English subtitles. Criterion also released the film on DVD (UPC#715515141215, $30), but the image is inherently softer (as is the sound) and nowhere near as compelling. Both discs have the same supplementary features, including a good 11-minute interview with Truffaut analyzing a couple of sequences from the film, and a 12-minute look at Truffaut's fascination with Alfred Hitchcock (it is very clear that **Soft Skin** was greatly influenced by Hitchcock's filmmaking, with its many compelling subjective point-of-view shots). After **The Soft Skin**, Truffaut took some time off from directing and collaborated on a famous book with Hitchcock, which was detailed in the documentary, **Hitchcock/Truffaut** (Jul 17), and is also covered in a 30-minute documentary from 1999 presented in the supplement, although where the former covered the content of the book, the latter is about Truffaut's experience putting

it together, making it a terrific companion piece.

Scenarist Jean-Louis Richard provides an audio commentary for the feature in French, with optional English subtitles, prompted by Truffaut expert Serge Toubiana. Richard supplies a wealth of information about the creation and execution of the film, and its aftermath, explaining that the embittered Desailly thought ever afterward that the movie had destroyed his career. They analyze the film's scenes, discuss the contributions of the cast and the crew, and they talk quite a bit about Truffaut, including the lively discussions he would have with Richard as they honed the script.

"Did you use the formal 'vous' form?"

"Yes, we always did. That's one of my nicest memories, because it showed our respect for each other. We'd argue sometimes, so it was much better to be using formal address. It's harder to be vulgar or coarse."

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Truffaut's homage to Hitchcock, the delightful 1968 **The Bride Wore Black** (*La Mariée Était en Noir*), released on Blu-ray by MGM and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC#738329261795, $25), even uses Hitchcock's composer, Bernard Herrmann, who deliberately draws upon themes he used in Hitchcock's films as confections for the narrative. Based upon a story by Cornell Woolrich, Moreau stars as a woman bent upon revenge after her husband is shot down as they exit the church on their wedding day. She has a list of the men responsible and how she obtained that list is one of those questions you're never supposed to ask in movies because the answer is impossible, but as she visits each victim and creatively does him in, the viewer learns more about the characters while being fully entertained by the mayhem. It is in the movie's opening moments that Truffaut pays particular attention to how Hitchcock would set up shots and advance a scene, and even though he relaxes a little as the 108-minute film goes along, the spirit is established and carried forward by Herrmann's music, flashes of image compositions that seem to have been lifted directly from Hitchcock's movies, and the macabre nature of the entertainment. The performances are fully engaging and the film is a delight from beginning to end. Lonsdale, Charles Denner, Jean-Claude Brialy and Michel Bouquet co-star.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The image is smooth and sharp most of the time and hues are fresh, with accurate, finely detailed fleshtones. Herrmann's music sounds a little distanced on the monophonic audio track, but in that the dialog and other sounds are clear and immediate, that seems to be by design, adding to the score's evocative nature. The film is in French with optional English subtitles and is accompanied by a trailer. Also featured is a commentary track with French film experts Steven C. Smith, Julie Kirgo and Nick Redman (who really doesn't speak all that much). They spend a hefty amount of time talking about Herrmann, his fights with Truffaut, his fights with Hitchcock and his fights with everyone else, but they also talk about Truffaut and his own fights with others in the French film industry, as well as his relationship with Moreau and whether or not the film deserves to be called Hitchcockian. They don't think it does because it isn't much in the way of a suspense film, but that really isn't the point, since Hitchcock didn't always make suspense films, either, but he did use the same sorts of close ups of objects and character blocking that Truffaut uses way more in this film than in his other movies, and the cinematography, from Coutard (Truffaut also fought with him), has the same crisp delineation of colors that Hitchcock would have his cinematographers employ. At one point, they mention that a CD interview with Herrmann is included with the BD, but it is not, so far as the Kino release is concerned. They also claim that an English dubbed track is on the disc, where a few alternate Herrmann cues were utilized, but again, that is not the case with the Kino BD.

Like Hitchcock, Truffaut was a geography geek, and never more so than in his 1969 crime film based upon another Woolrich story (which Léaud's character can be seen reading in **Stolen Kisses**), **Mississippi Mermaid** (*La Sirène du Mississippi*). From an island off the coast of Madagascar to the Swiss border, and all across France as well, the film relies upon its permutations of adventure to carry the viewer along as its two protagonists wind themselves around one another's deadly hearts. Jean-Paul Belmondo is a wealthy plantation owner in Reunion, and Catherine Deneuve (famously, Dorléac's sister) is his mail order bride, or so he believes at first, and they do get married. She runs off with his money, he runs after her, and the more they get to know one another, the more they can't quit one another. Running 123 minutes, the film relies upon the compelling attractiveness of its two superstar leads (Belmondo even does an elaborate stunt, climbing up the outside of a townhouse to get in through the balcony), the changes in location (like **Shoot the Piano Player**, the film climaxes in the snow), and the general air of crime and betrayal to keep viewers attentive. Lonsdale shows up again, as a private detective. Truffaut dedicated the film not to Hitchcock, however, but to Jean Renoir, and ultimately, those who are seeking crimes and thrills are going to be a great deal more disappointed than those who are just interested in seeing two very flawed human beings discover that they are soul mates and unsure of what to do about it.

The film is available as another MGM Kino *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329261801, $25), but it was also released on Blu-ray by Twilight Time (UPC#811956020598). Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, colors are reasonably fresh and fleshtones are accurate, but both presentations are a little soft in places and have a steady presence of stray speckling. Overall, the presentations are workable, but it is also clear that a major restoration would perk up the film even more. On both versions, the monophonic sound is strong and sharp. The film is in French. Kino's version has optional (white) English subtitles, while the Twilight Time version has permanent yellow subtitles. Kino's presentation has one trailer and Twilight Time has two. The Twilight disc also has one significant special feature that Kino does not have—Antoine Duhamel's musical score has been isolated on a second track and sounds even stronger when it is by itself. Additionally, Twilight Time went to the source and obtained the original monophonic studio recordings, so that while the score that is present in the movie is all there, it is also extended on the alternate Twilight track to passages not in the film, and by extended we mean to the point where you can hear the musicians putting down their instruments and talking to one another.

Both discs come with the same commentary track, featuring Redman and Kirgo, who compare the story to a fairy tale (thus justifying the story's many farfetched coincidences) and spend most of their time analyzing its twists and turns, the motivations of the two characters and the performances of the two stars. They barely touch on the film's technical aspects and never even mention the music. They do go over in detail how Truffaut had intimate relationships with both Dorléac (who had been killed in a car accident barely a year before they began making the film) and Deneuve (he was also involved with Moreau, but that's another story), and point out a seduction scene that is lifted directly from **The Soft Skin**, remarking upon its unnerving resonance in this regard. While the film was generally considered to be a misfire, they not only supply many arguments in its favor, but explain why it may be alienating on its initial viewing. "I think his most personal movies, very often it was his failures that were his most personal. He was really about his obsessions."

Truffaut's superb 1975 biographical drama, **The Story of Adele H.** (*L'Histoire d'Adèle H.*), another MGM Kino *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC# 738329261818, $25), has a narrative with an even greater downward vector than **Mississippi Mermaid**, but from an aesthetic perspective, it has the opposite emotional effect. Isabelle Adjani delivers an outstanding, breakout performance as the daughter of a wealthy man who follows a young officer to an overseas outpost after he seduces her. Set in the mid-Nineteenth Century, the film is meticulously dressed in period, and Truffaut avoids establishing shots to keep his costs down, but that also adds to both the coziness and implied limitations of the story, which is about the gradual psychic deterioration of Adjani's character when she fails to retrieve the emotional satisfaction she must have felt when the officer first made love to her before the film began. Adding to the strength of the 98-minute film, it is based upon a true story involving established historical figures, and while by now most people know who they are, the discovery during the course of the film is one more compelling hook that keeps the viewer engaged even when it becomes clear that Adjani's character is a total basket case. The delicate Almendros cinematography often verges on graininess, but colors are fresh and carefully detailed, and the image's hovering between solidity and deterioration seems to mirror the heroine's own emotional state. Near the end, when the film's location has switched to a tropical setting (his enthusiasm for geography unabated, Truffaut keeps the viewer abreast of the locations with maps), there is an amazing tracking shot that follows an aide de camp as he makes his way through an outdoor party to find the officer and give him news. If the shot were to be removed, nothing in the story would change in the slightest, but the extended time that it takes conveys not just subliminal movement and progress, but the reestablishment of the setting and the detailed social and environmental contrasts to the film's previous locations. Since the film's narrative is winding down, that one shot covers a lot of ground.

The image is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and fleshtones are accurate. The monophonic sound is clear. The film is in pretty much equal amounts of French and English and has two subtitling options. The default is French only, but the second option covers both. A trailer is included, along with one of the better commentaries from Redman and Kirgo, deconstructing the film, its themes and its style ("There are so many incredible close-ups of faces in this movie. This movie is really about faces just coming out of a backdrop, and the backdrop is far less important than in other Truffaut films."), going over the details of its production, the performances, cinematography (Redman reads from Almendros's autobiography) and music (Truffaut utilized re-orchestrated themes from film composer Maurice Jaubert, who passed away in 1940), and sharing what is known about the lives of the people the film is based upon.

Marcel Pagnol

Marcel Pagnol was the author of three connected, chronologically advancing stageplays and stories about the lives and loves of characters living in a French port, and in the early Thirties, he oversaw the adaptation of all three stories into films, assigning the first two features to other directors but helming the third film himself. All three have been collected in the three-platter Criterion Collection Blu-ray set, **Marcel Pagnol Marseille Trilogy Marius • Fanny • César** (UPC#715515199018, $100). All three black-and-white movies are in a squared full screen format and all three have monophonic sound. All three are in French, with optional English subtitles.

Alexander Korda directed the first feature in 1931, *Marius*, which looks absolutely stunning on disc. There are plenty of Hollywood films from those years (we're looking at you, **King Kong**) which do not look or sound anywhere near as good. Of course, one of the reasons it looks so nice is that the drama remains relatively stagebound. There is enough cutting back and forth that the film never feels like a stageplay, but it was clearly shot in a controlled environment. Korda's shot choices are simple, but breathtaking, so that you

barely realize that each scene is just an extended conversation that gradually builds, over the course of the film's 127 minutes, to a captivating rumination upon love, sacrifice and the psychological drives that differentiate the sexes (in interviews, Pagnol explains that he worked with the cast, while Korda concentrated on the technical aspects of the shoot).

The title character, played by Pierre Fresnay, is the son of a waterfront tavern owner, played by the actor known as Raimu. The son is in position to inherit his father's bar, but he longs to go to explore the world outside of Marseille. Orane Desmazis plays the operator of a seafood stand outside the bar, who grew up loving him and has finally arrived at an age where others are starting to take notice. Another middle-aged storeowner, played by Fernand Charpin, offers to marry her, just as Freznay's character is making arrangements to go off on a ship, but it is only then that the chemistry between the youngsters comes to a boil. The drama and the atmosphere are Pagnol's, but the precise execution of the story and the comfortable humanization of every character is Korda's. Yes, there are cuts to a lighthouse and crashing waves at a couple of key moments where the characters are otherwise off screen, but as corny as that might seem now, it was a lot fresher and more rousing when the film was made. The movie is a definitive romance in a number of ways, and the disc looks and sounds so nice that the film hasn't so much aged as transitioned from one world to another, and will clearly continue to beguile viewers for generations to come.

With three shots lifted from the end of the first film, the 1932 sequel, *Fanny*, begins exactly where *Marius* left off. Directed by Marc Allégret, the camera setups are a little more pedestrian, but in compensation and an apparently larger budget, a great deal more of the film was shot on the streets and docks of early Thirties Marseille, including some scenes with dialog. The picture is generally a little softer than it is on the first film, but with the exception of a handful of moments that are out of focus, the image is still remarkably clean and smooth, and the sound is very strong (the film begins with a brief Overture). The four stars return (this time, Desmazis is the title character), essentially working out the consequences of the previous film's conclusion. Again, the stage source is evident in the lengthy nature of the conversations, but the location footage is an effective distraction, and once the drama really gets to churning, it doesn't matter what format the 127-minute story takes because of its investment in the characters. Because Korda was not involved, the film may not feel as profound as the first feature, adding insight rather than forging new paths, but the narrative and the performances are so tightly integrated that the two movies really are just one grand, slightly talky but pleasantly antique and French soap opera.

Pagnol waited until 1936 to wrap up the story, which is set a couple of decades later, directing the final film—named after Raimu's character, *César*—himself, with André Fouché joining the other four as another central character, and the many supporting players carried over from the earlier film. Running 141 minutes and not based upon a stageplay (but including the same sorts of music hall skits that embellished the humor in the other two tales), it is in some ways even less cinematic than *Fanny*. There are times when Pagnol doesn't seem to know where to place the camera or for how long. The film has an even greater amount of location work (there is one clever moment where a character who is supposedly in a room with the other characters turns and looks out the window at the real Marseille—Pagnol, as his career advanced, would embrace outdoor settings more and more), however, and essentially gets by on the compelling nature of Pagnol's original storytelling, the delightful setting and the familiarity one has with the characters from the previous films. Although there are a couple of hidden splices, the picture looks terrific, with some scenes conveying an unusually vivid immediacy in their clarity.

Every once in a while, in each movie, the dialog also includes an insight about life or love in general, and those moments, coupled with a general desire to see the characters find their happiness (after all, you may know that World War II is coming, but they don't), enhance the engagement of the entertainment. It is not that each director was shooting the same material, because it is the progress of the narrative that makes the films worth binging, but in watching all three, that is almost what it is like. As a trilogy, the films provide an interesting lesson for students of filmmaking, particularly in the reverse progression of Pagnol's approach, Allégret's approach and Korda's approach, but only because the performances and the tone of Pagnol's writing are so steadfastly consistent that the choices of camera angles and decisions about blocking and so on become so clearly delineated.

Each platter also contains a few supplementary programs. There is a good 20-minute introduction to the set by Bertrand Tavernier, who points out how innovative the film's sound recording was (especially for France); 85 minutes of excerpts from a 1973 French television series about Pagnol, including extensive interviews with him and his collaborators about the development of the three films, the cast, the advent of sound and many other topics (one of the things you learn is that at the time, Marseille could have been on the other side of the globe so far as Paris was concerned, and it was the films that brought a sudden enthusiasm for the Southern port town to the capital); a 3-minute piece on the outstanding restoration efforts; a 12-minute 1935 documentary, *Marseille*, which is part travelog (with lots of local music) and part a promotional featurette for the films; a sweet 4-minute interview with Desmazis from 1967 reminiscing about the film (and promoting a more recent feature); a nice 7-minute tribute to Raimu by Fresnay from 1956; a cute 11-minute interview with costar Robert Vattier from 1976 about his rewarding life as a character actor; an excellent 30-minute talk by Pagnol's grandson, Nicolas Pagnol, sharing many valuable insights about the films and the cast; a decent 30-minute analysis not only of the trilogy, but its financial and cultural legacy, and how, in its blending of working class and owner characters, Pagnol was embraced by all factions of the country ("It is also worth noting that the comforting allegory of national reconciliation he offered on screen was reinforced by journalistic accounts and publicity photos of the warm off screen camaraderie that he enjoyed with his actors and technical personnel."); and a trailer.

Claude Berri

Marcel Pagnol wrote and directed a film in 1952 entitled *L'Eau des collines* (*The Water of the Hills*), based on gossip he had heard as child living in the countryside. In 1963, he published two connected novels, the first being a prequel to what happens in the film, and the second an embellishment of the story told in the film. In 1986, Claude Berri shot both of Pagnol's novels as a two-part endeavor, and those two films, both from 1986, have been released in a four-platter 4K Blu-ray set by Pathé and The Criterion Collection, **Jean de Florette | Manon of the Spring** (UPC#715515312011, $70). **Jean de Florette**, which stars Yves Montand, Daniel Auteuil and Gerard Depardieu, runs 121 minutes. The sequel—or more properly, the second part—*Manon of the Spring* (*Manon des Sources*—the film's title card follows that with *Jean de Florette 2ème partie*), which stars Montand, Auteuil and Emmanuelle Béart, runs 114 minutes.

The two films are essentially a single work, and they are a magnificent cinematic creation—beautiful, compelling, gloriously uplifting and deeply heartbreaking, a sadness that is only abated by the film's outstanding direction and performances, and its transportive setting. In an array of flawless performances, Depardieu stands out not just because he is the film's ill-fated protagonist, but because in addition to hitting his emotional marks, he also projects an appeal that comes not just from the nature of his character, but from the charisma of his own stardom, which glows from his smiles under Berri's eager observations. Montand is nevertheless definitive in his role as the title character, a miserly landowner (a character named 'César'—there is another character named, 'Marius,' as with Pagnol's earlier stories, but they are common names in the region, reflecting its roots as a Roman outpost) who hopes to help his nephew, played by Auteuil, become a successful farmer and further his otherwise barren line. Depardieu's character inherits a property that would be perfect for the nephew's plans, and brings his family from the city to become a farmer, an effort that the two other men set about sabotaging. In *Manon*, Béart plays the title character, the daughter of Depardieu's character, who eventually and quite cleverly extracts her revenge. It is Pagnol's storytelling at its finest that carries the viewer eagerly through the two features, but it is Berri's superb and vivid realization of Pagnol's setting—southern hill country so remote that Twenties technology has essentially not reached it yet—which makes the combined films a masterpiece, especially as presented on the outstanding 4K Blu-rays.

Both films are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Both the 4K presentations and the standard Blu-ray presentations look gorgeous, but that said, the 4K is smoother, with better detail, and otherwise has the same light levels as the standard BD, so it is the preferable version for both features. On both, the 5.0-channel DTS sound is also highly appealing, with a rich dimensionality and many wonderful directional details, although again, the 4K presentation has slightly better delineated separations. Jean-Claude Petit's moving symphonic musical score has a wider breadth and deeper resonance on the 4K delivery. Because the picture and the sound have been rendered with such perfection—and the standard Blu-ray achieves nearly the same effect—every moment in the film is transfixing, even if it is just a shot of the dusty hillside, or a rock, with cicadas chirping behind you. The characters are alive, the town is alive and the hills, valleys and brush are alive, and so Pagnol's story can captivate you utterly because Berri's framing and staging are so real and so invigorating.

The films are in French with optional English subtitles. On the **Jean de Florette** standard BD platter, there a lovely 60-minute profile of Berri, and on the *Manon of the Spring* platter, there is an excellent 47-minute retrospective documentary that really explores how films are made as it shares terrific anecdotes about the cast and the crew. Each platter also has a trailer. While the films start up where they left off if playback is terminated, the special features do not.

Eric Rohmer

If you are in your twenties and dating, then you are living in an Eric Rohmer movie. Not all of his films fall into that category, but most of them do, and the way that his movies are so different from, say, a Hallmark Christmas romance, can make you wonder whatever happened to real imagination.

While it may have seemed like a marketing gimmick to kickstart his career, Rohmer actually put a lot of preparation into the first films that he made between 1963 and 1972, presenting them, from the beginning, as part of a greater whole. Gathered on a terrific three-platter Criterion Collection Blu-ray set, **Eric Rohmer's Six Moral Tales** (UPC#715515240116, $100), the collection has been bundled with Rohmer's book, *Six Moral Tales*, which he compiled in 1974. The book, at 262 pages, feels like a cross between a screen treatment and a novelization, essentially replicating each film in text with an emphasis on the thoughts (voiceovers) and conversations, and minimal additions to the environmental descriptions. Although the back of the book claims that it was composed before the films, Rohmer's introduction suggests otherwise and the most telling evidence to the contrary is the perfect concluding line presented in the book for **Claire's Knee**. Had Rohmer actually thought of it when he was

making the film, he surely would have composed his final shot in a different manner to capture it. In general, the stories make a handy reference for anyone studying the films, although the prose (the translation seems reasonably good although there are a couple of grammatical errors) does not come close to replacing the pleasures that the casts provide embodying the characters. Nevertheless, the book also demonstrates that Rohmer approached the stories—which have numerous rhymes and shared motifs—as a coherent whole, charting the paths of emotional maturity that men and women make over the courses of their lives (the men tend to lag the women).

Presented two to a platter, all of the films are in a squared full screen format (at Rohmer's insistence, although you can see the sound boom in both **My Night at Maud's** and *Love in the Afternoon*) and all are in French with optional English subtitles. We reviewed Criterion's DVD release of the collection, which did not come with the book but otherwise contained all of the same special features—essentially various interviews and early short films—in Sep 06. Almost all of the movies, as well as a couple of the shorts, feature cinematography by Nestor Almendros. The image transfers on the DVD already looked terrific. What the BD adds is greater detail and better definition, enhancing a viewer's concentration and adding additional pleasure to the viewing experience. The same is true of the monophonic sound, although with one exception, the sound mixes on the films are not as stimulating as the visuals.

Auspiciously, the first film feels more like a (very well made) student short, *The Bakery Girl of Monceau*, from 1963. Shot in black and white and running 23 minutes, it is about a student who, in his spare time, tries to stalk an attractive girl he has seen passing him on the street a number of times. As he revisits the streets where he hopes to see her again, however, he stops in daily at a bakery to buy a pastry, and gradually forms what initially appears to be a more genuine relationship with the girl behind the counter, eventually asking her out. What happens is not only devastating, but occurs in the dry, understated and subtly rich manner that would become the hallmark of Rohmer's filmography.

Rohmer's next effort, *Suzanne's Career*, also from 1963, carefully expands his cinematic palette. Not only is it longer, running 55 minutes, but it features a more complex array of characters, while retaining the same basic triangular romance. Another inside look at male strategies for collegiate seduction, a somewhat shy pharmacy student, played by Philippe Beuzen, has a more aggressive friend, played by Christian Charrière, who romances a gainfully employed store clerk played by Diane Wilkinson. Charrière's character explains to Beuzen's character how he intends to string her along, and he pretty much does just that, although gradually she and Beuzen's character become interested in one another, yet never to the point of consummating the relationship. A device that Rohmer would use again and again, the conversations that the two men have are actually intended to explicate what is going on inside of them and would normally be left unsaid. In any case, the ambiguities of the relationships—the other guy says he doesn't care about her, but he keeps going back to her—are more detailed and complicated than what one normally sees in films about romantic entanglements, and it is a richness that is not only sustained but enhanced the more times you see the film.

The black-and-white picture is still very grainy, but is otherwise in presentable shape and the monophonic sound is okay. Also featured is a 13-minute black-and-white Rohmer short from 1964 featuring Nadja Tesich, *Nadja in Paris*. It is presented entirely in voiceover and is ostensibly about a young American woman attending a school in Paris, although it is really more of a travelog view of that part of Paris where she resides and goes to school, as she points out the different sites and talks about her life and the social dynamics of her community. Although dated subsequent to the two **Tales**, it nevertheless feels like a preliminary exercise, with Rohmer flexing his cinematic muscles. The same approach to Paris is also used, less prominently, in those two initial **Moral Tales** films. Included as well is a 10-minute short shot in 1951 and then completed in 1961, *Charlotte and Her Steak* (about a couple having a winter's meal), and a rewarding 84-minute talk between Rohmer and producer Barbet Schroeder about all six movies.

Seen immediately following the initial tales, the two men in the opening of Rohmer 1969 breakout masterpiece, **My Night at Maud's**, although they are in their mid-thirties, played by Jean-Louis Trintignant and Antoine Vitez, seem quite obviously to be barely matured versions of the college boys depicted in the previous films. One still can't keep his mouth shut, explaining to the shyer one his plans when it comes to the woman they are about to visit, played by Françoise Fabian, and it is this open discussion of intentions that gives the film a dramatic energy, setting it apart, as it were, from the banal vagueness of real life. The conversations are also infused with discussions of philosophy and literature—something that still never happens enough in movies—which reflects directly upon the emotions and thought processes of the characters. In other words, the literary dialog isn't there just to show off, it is about genuine concerns and interests the characters have and how what they have read has guided their lives.

In addition to the improved cinematography and production values that come with a feature-length film, the status and depth of the female characters achieve equality with the male characters. At 111 minutes, Rohmer lingers on characters as others talk because he can, knowing that the scene will run long enough that there is plenty of time to get to the next character. By not cutting rapidly back and forth as they converse, he systematically invests the viewer in each character, so when the critical sequences that follow unfold, the nuances and shifting thoughts of the characters are vividly communicated, thanks to that familiarity. In the two shorts, while the female characters are superbly drawn and acted, they still have a secondary status as objects that baffle the male protagonists. In **Maud's**, Fabian's character is just as rich and just as involving as Trintignant's character (although the film remains mostly in his perspective), and it was the aggression and complexity of her inner being that skyrocketed the film's praise and fame.

The black-and-white picture is solid and flawless, which increases a viewer's alertness and involvement with the film, as well as encouraging an appreciation for both the outdoor and location settings, and the interiors. The monophonic sound is crisp. The subtitles contain one rather embarrassing error, where the word, 'brother,' has been substituted for the word, 'brothel.'

At one point in the film, Trintignant's character, who is a practicing Catholic, talks about reading Blaise Pascal and the contradictory feelings those works instilled in him. In 1965 Rohmer shot a wonderful 22-minute episode for a French television series, *En profil dans le texte* (which is like nothing we were stuck with on TV here in America at the time), that consists of the camera swinging back and forth between two men in armchairs talking to one another in a cozy little study about Pascal. One is a philosopher and the other is a theologian, and coming off of **My Night at Maud's**, their conversation is spellbinding, going over how Pascal became lost in what can be summarized as the conflict between numbers and words, reality and emotion, a conflict that goes to the very heart of why **My Night at Maud's** is so transfixing. In **Maud's**, the characters are very cognizant of their realities, and yet are mystified and enthused by their emotions, a dynamic that becomes even more complex because it is cinema—because the hard and fast reality of the images on the screen and the dialog exchanged by the characters manifest the ambiguities of their emotions and the ephemeral nature of their existence. In effect, by making a movie in which characters talk about Pascal's against-the-odds belief that a creator exists, Rohmer proves their theorem by having made a film in which they talk about it. Included as well is a satisfying 14-minute interview clip of Trintignant and others from 1974, talking about the film, and a trailer.

One of Rohmer's specialties was summer vacation movies. He first offered a taste of his skills in that regard with the final scene in **My Night at Maud's** (it's not just set at the beach, it's set on the sandy path that you walk down to approach the beach—he gets it just right), and followed that up with his first full fledged summer vacation movie, the 1967 *La Collectionneuse*. In some ways the film is a bit of a step backwards from **Maud's**, in that he returns to the objectification of the central female character, played by Haydée Politoff, although it is her unknowable psyche that so frustrates her two male housemates in the summer rental the three are sharing near Saint Tropez. Patrick Bauchau plays the central character, the only one who provides voiceover narration. He is a variation on the boorish character in *Suzanne's Career*, determined to escape from his job and do 'nothing' for an entire month but sit in the sun and flop about in the water. He gradually becomes obsessed, however, with Politoff's character, as does his other roommate, played by Daniel Pommereulle. It is worth noting that the story plays even more poorly in the book, without Politoff's sunny presence to light up the proceedings.

The feature is in glorious color, which provides its own adrenaline rush after the black-and-white films, and Rohmer experiments more with montage, cutting to close-ups of nature at the beach and other moments that help in establishing the lyrical summer atmosphere. The sound mix is outstanding, full of the noises of the country, and the audio sounds particularly crisp on the BD.

Along with a trailer and a good 1977 interview with Rohmer running 51 minutes, there is a rather disturbing 12-minute short from 1966, *A Modern Coed*, that is ostensibly about the post-war boom in French college coeds. While the stated purpose of the piece is to look at how female college students are achieving parity with their male counterparts, the unspoken purpose appears to be the promotion of the expanded French university system, eagerly glorifying the construction of new science buildings in the suburbs of Paris. But at the same time, the piece is trying its best to scare away women from choosing the sciences as a course of study. There is an elaborate sequence where women are connecting wires between the beating heart of a frog and an analog chart recorder, and an even more stomach-turning image of an amiable cat in a cage that has wires coming out of its brain and connected to a computer. It acts as if there is nothing wrong, and the student acts as if it is just a regular day in the class, but anyone watching it will probably be swearing off college and promising to just get married, have kids, and clean and bake all day, so they won't have to chisel open the skulls of kittens.

After *La Collectionneuse*, Rohmer fared much better with a somewhat similar but far more balanced and mediated 1970 feature, another summer vacation movie, **Claire's Knee**. Jean-Claude Brialy is yet another boorish protagonist, but you don't realize it at first. Hidden behind a forest of a beard, he seems earnest and charming, arriving on the Alpine Lake Annecy to finalize the sale of his childhood summer home, and bumping into an old flame, played by Aurora Cornu, who introduces him to a neighboring family. It is only over the course of the film's 106 minutes that you begin to realize what a creep he really is. Indeed, the film is so expertly crafted that you might not even realize it until long after you've seen the film, or after you've seen it several times. Innocently enough, he strikes up a friendship with the family's teenage daughter and her friends, but egged on by Cornu's character, he crosses a line or two with the daughter.

The narrative is a great deal more egalitarian, making the character

who manipulates the protagonist a female, and the reserved nature of the observations he is being encouraged by her to study and share enables the film to explore in wonderful detail the limitations, the complications and the emotional validity of young love. Unlike *La Collectionneuse*, there is less attention paid to the sounds and details of the environment, but the Alpine setting is so drop dead gorgeous that it doesn't have to add on nature to revel in it. The views from both the houses on the water and from the mountains up above are justifications themselves for spending time with the 106-minute film. Still, it is the vivid precision of the performances, especially by the younger actors, that enables the film to truly explore the natural relationship conflicts, which feel much more forced and artificial in both *Suzanne's Career* and *La Collectionneuse*. And don't discount the summer vacation setting. The film is able to set its own parameters (the day in which each sequence is taking place appears on a title card, allowing the viewer to monitor the progression of the narrative and, when a day or two are skipped, imagine the interim), which relaxes the requirements for momentum in the plot, as you know the end is coming with the changing weather. As the action of Brialy's character and his explanations to Cornu's character become more and more outrageous, the film gains a dramatic intensity that is entirely unexpected in what appears, initially, to be a superficial treat.

Like *La Collectionneuse*, the color transfer looks gorgeous. The sound mix is less attuned to the environment, but the monophonic presentation is solid.

America already had a **Love in the Afternoon** (Jan 03), so Rohmer's 1972 finale to his series, *L'amour, l'après-midi* was originally given the rather more charming title for the States, **Chloe in the Afternoon**, although in the **Six Moral Tales** set, it has been returned to its original apparition, *Love in the Afternoon*. In some ways, it feels like another breakthrough movie, in that nobody is a creep in the film. The hero, played by Bernard Verley, is tempted to be unfaithful to his wife, played by Françoise Verley (the actors were actually married at the time), when he begins spending his lunch hour in the company of an old friend, played by an actress known as Zouzou. Running 97 minutes, the psychologies and feelings of the characters are clearly communicated, so that while one may cringe during the course of the narrative at the risks and indecisions that Bernard's character is grappling with, he ultimately redeems himself, leaving one satisfied and grateful for the interesting journey he has taken. Set in Paris, there is also a wonderful fantasy sequence where his character imagines that he has the power to control the minds of women, those fantasy women being the actresses, in cameo roles, from the other **Moral Tales**, a gag that ends with the ideal punchline, about one being strong enough to resist his will. Like **My Night at Maud's**, there is a wonderfully ambiguous but compelling surprise at the conclusion, as well.

The color transfer looks fine and the source material is spotless, but the image does not feel as crisp or fresh as it does on the previous two features. The films come with trailers; an amusing 1958 black-and-white Rohmer short running 18 minutes, *Véronique and Her Dunce*, about a devious and basically uncontrollable little boy and a teenage tutor who is out of her depth trying to work with him; a marvelous 1999 color short running 17 minutes overseen by Rohmer and directed by Edwige Shaki, *The Curve*, about an art connoisseur who becomes obsessed with the similarities between his girlfriend and artists' models of the past; a pleasing 9 minutes of black-and-white interviews with the cast of **Claire's Knee** from 1970; and an 11-minute appreciation of the entire series by boorish male relationships director Neil LaBute.

The objectification of female characters may have lingered in those first half-dozen films (and a few other shorts), but had evaporated entirely by the Nineties. By then, Rohmer's female characters dominated his films (his crews became more populated with female artists, as well), as if he recognized how powerless his male characters were and no longer tried to talk his way around it the way his male characters try to do in his Sixties movies, or hold on desperately to their perspectives. His Nineties quartet of films about dating and relationships, **Eric Rohmer's Tales of the Four Seasons**, have been gathered in another wonderful four-platter Blu-ray set by Criterion (UPC#715515292214, $125). Each film is both simple and transporting, exploring the excitement of new romantic relationships and the inscrutable nature of love. All four are in French with optional English subtitles.

In every way imaginable a breath of fresh air, the 1990 *A Tale of Spring* (*Conte de printemps*) is a lighthearted presentation of conversations and friendships, complicated with equal lightness by potential relationships. The narrative may have less obvious momentum than the plots in the set's other films (in other words, you may not want to use it as the introductory feature to the set), but it is fully captivating, all the same. Anne Teyssèdre plays a young philosophy teacher who meets a budding pianist at a party, played by Florence Darel, and becomes friends with her. The two have a pleasant weekend together, and they continue to meet for a couple of additional weekends. The father of Darel's character, played by Hugues Quester, has a girlfriend, played by Eloise Bennett. Darel's character does not approve of Bennett's character and halfheartedly schemes to set Teyssèdre's character up with her father. Running 107 minutes, there isn't much more to the film than that. It is indeed spring, and they spend a couple of the weekends at a vacation house in the countryside, fixing up the yard a little. During a kind of turning point in the middle of the film, the four of them have dinner together and the discussion drifts into philosophy. They talk about the meaning of Immanuel Kant's differentiation between 'a priori' synthetic judgment and analytic judgment. The talk is as rich as the conversation in **My Night at Maude's**, but later in the film, as Teyssèdre's character and Quester's character begin to circle around one another a bit, they unwittingly begin to act out the same differentiations that had been argued about earlier when they attempt to analyze their impulses and responses. It is a beautifully structured scene, and the film works perfectly well—will they get together or won't they?—even if you don't notice it, but it is an example of how Rohmer's work matured so beautifully. He was, in essence, able to let go of the male perspective that favored the films in **Six Moral Tales**, and his initial sophomore excitement about exploring the study of philosophy on film, to create something a great deal more evenhanded and elegant, as perfectly and delicately structured as the petal of a flower.

Presented with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the color transfer is clear and strong. A trailer and a good 4-minute audio-only interview with Rohmer about how he approached the creation of the films in the series is included, along with a 44-minute silent black-and-white short Rohmer made in 1956, *The Kreutzer Sonata*. A throwback to his early movies about the frustrations men have with women, and based upon a story by Leo Tolstoy but set in contemporary Paris—one scene was even shot in the offices of Cahiers du Cinema—the film opens with a murder and then flashes back with the murderer's voiceover narration as he describes how he became obsessed with a woman, married her, and then alienated her with disgust until she sought affection elsewhere. The central character, played by Rohmer himself, may be Rohmer's most boorish creation of them all, with Brialy and Françoise Martinelli co-starring, along with film buddies François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol and even André Bazin.

The most accessible film in the collection, *A Tale of Winter* from 1992, has a clear, straightforward narrative that is best left to be discovered. It is set over the Christmas holidays and is about an unmarried mother played by Charlotte Véry deciding what life path she wants to follow after her lover, the owner of the salon where she works, asks her to move in with him in a new salon out of town. At one point, yes, there is another dinner conversation that touches on Pascal, Plato and so on, not to mention reincarnation, but it will not frighten off viewers who are just looking for some romance. The 115-minute film is probably the closest Rohmer ever got to imitating Claude Lelouch, but it is an engrossing story with richly drawn and acted characters, and a very satisfying demonstration of letting go, and holding on, to love.

Since at one point the characters attend a performance of William Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, one could argue that the film's title ought to be translated thusly, especially since the two works have the same title in French (*Conte d'hiver*), but the choice to keep it the other way is for the sake of consistency within the boxed set. We spotted one quick scratch, but otherwise the picture looks spotless and colors are fresh. The cinematography can get grainy when light sources are limited, but never to the point of distraction. The image is presented with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Another great 11-minute excerpt from the audio interview with Rohmer is included, going into more specific detail about creating *Winter*, along with 46 minutes of intercut interviews with producer Françoise Etchegaray, editor Mary Stephen, cinematographer Diane Baratier and sound engineer Pascal Ribler, talking about Rohmer's fascinating private life (his real name was Maurice Schérer and his family was barely aware of what he did for a living) and working methods (he liked to keep it as simple as possible, sometimes using no more than a three-person crew). On the sound mix: "He would not tell me his intentions. 'Can you jack up the construction noise?' What? Construction? It was an interior scene. 'Do it. I want the construction sounds to be loud.' Maybe he didn't love the dialog, or he found the scene to be less interesting than he had hoped. We would add those effects, add sound, and sound effects, to distract the audience from the scene."

Even *A Tale of Winter* has a brief prolog set on a summer vacation. The 1996 *A Tale of Summer* (*Conet d'été*—we reviewed Fox Lorber and Big World DVDs as **A Summer's Tale** in Sep 06) addresses the topic forthrightly. Having just graduated, Melvil Poupaud is a mathematician spending the summer in Brittany before he starts his first job. He is supposed to meet his girlfriend, but she is on another trip first, and so he hangs out on the beach by himself, for a while. What comes to pass in the 115-minute film is that he meets two additional girls, each one temperamentally different from the other two, and each having, well, advantages and disadvantages. Normally, a film about a guy juggling three girls would be annoying, but most of the time, it is each one of them who is giving him the runaround, so that while the film can be anxiety-inducing, it is also both erotic and entertaining, and by the end of the movie the personalities of all four characters are extensively explored. It is a lovely little movie that is the emotional equivalent of a summer book, highly satisfying and involving as it goes along, and it has a great punchline at the end that reinforces what a 'guy' Poupaud's character actually is.

Amanda Langlet, Gwenaëlle Simon and Aurélia Nolin co-star. The picture is stronger and sharper than either DVD, with slightly fresher colors, and is in a squared, full screen format. There are 13 more minutes of the audio-only Rohmer interview, talking about his penchant for summer vacation movies (each one is set in a different travelog location), how his small crew makes it easy to adapt to the weather (it was a beautiful day at the beach on a Sunday, so Rohmer ran to where the crew was staying to collect them for a shoot) and working with the cast. Also featured is an organized 98 minute collection of behind-the-scenes footage (beware, the subtitling defaults to 'off' and must be activated—the subtitles also disappear altogether after an hour, as if those responsible gave up trying to cover it or hoped nobody would notice) that sort of forms its own summer vacation movie, mostly (until near the end) depicting scenes between Poupaud and Langlet, with Rohmer, among his many other responsibilities,

putting sun lotion on Langlet's shoulders.

As an anchor, there is a major character in her twenties in the 1998 *A Tale of Autumn* (*Conte d'automne*) played by Alexia Portal, but as the title implies, the primary romance is between characters that are her parents' age. The plot is classic romcom, but its execution is both refined and exquisite, as one might speak of the wine that the widowed grower, played by Béatrice Romand, harvests and ages. Her best friend, a married bookstore owner played by Marie Rivière, puts an ad in the personals section of the paper and then arranges for the respondent to meet Romand's character. Portal is the girlfriend of the grower's son, who also takes it upon herself to set the grower up with an older previous lover of her own, and compounds the problem by making the wrong assumption when she sees the bookseller with the strange guy. The many complications come together and eventually get ironed out at an outdoor wedding. Rohmer basks in the provincial setting—like *Summer*, the film has an additional appeal as a travelog—and takes his time savoring the characters, letting the viewer get to know them all. Running 112 minutes, the film will be more immediately relatable to viewers of a certain age where *Summer* is simply nostalgia, but *Autumn* is also a capstone to the four very satisfying and universal features in the series that exchange the approaching stereotypes of Rohmer's earlier films for richly drawn and immediately relatable characters, each with strengths and flaws that, thanks to the consistently wonderful performances, are uniquely their own.

The picture is in a squared full screen format and the color transfer is impeccable. The image detail adds to an appreciation of the thoughts and moods of the characters as one watches their faces. A final 12 minutes of the audio-only interview with Rohmer is included, talking about the film's casting and how it contrasts to the other films, along with a great 14-minute documentary short Rohmer made in 1968, *A Farmer in Montfaucon*, about the life of a farmer's wife, covering her chores and responsibilities during all four seasons. The menu description mischaracterizes the film as being about the threats of technology, but that has nothing to do with the movie itself, which is carefully examining her feelings about the inherent loneliness and isolation of living on a farm, and accepting the lifestyle.

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One of Rohmer's best and most compellingly entertaining films is not about contemporary dating and marriage, and is not even in French, his outstanding Nineteenth Century drama from 1976 based upon a novel by Heinrich von Kleist, **The Marquise de O…**, which has been released on Blu-ray by Film Movement (UPC#810161482665, $37; curiously, the movie was co-produced by Janus Films, but the title has never been in The Criterion Collection). Part of the film's brilliance is how compelling its narrative is, drawing the viewer spellbound through its 103-minute running time with a constant emotional momentum, so the less said about the plot, the more thrilling its discovery will be upon an initial viewing. But even when seen multiple times, it is gloriously captivating. Edith Clever plays the title character, a Prussian widow living with her aristocratic parents, who is rescued from brigands by a dashing Russian officer played by Bruno Ganz. The film is especially effective if one views it after a hefty dose of Rohmer's contemporary features, because the strictures of Nineteenth Century manners and morals play an integral part of the film's dynamics and you are especially attuned to it from the contrast to the modern era films. From there, it is the openness and logical conflicts of the emotions of every character, superbly delivered by the cast—Edda Seippel, Otto Sander and Peter Luhr are also featured—that enable the viewer to feel every scene from every perspective, and anticipate with an ever-rising excitement what will happen next between them. It is storytelling at its finest.

Presented in a squared, full screen format, the cinematography by Nestor Almendros is exquisite and highly sensitive to the period lighting. On the Film Movement DVD we reviewed in Jan 03, the image succumbed to grain and over saturation, but on the BD, the image is both smooth and stable. Since each shot is a gorgeous period composition tantamount to that of a classic portrait, the presentation is as spellbinding visually as it is narratively, and no more so than early on when there is a shot of Clever asleep in a silken dressing gown, a shot that is so perfectly staged and lit that its textures are palpable, readily enabling the viewer access to the mind of another character. At another point, there is a shot that includes a clock on a mantle piece that otherwise in the film tells the correct time but in this instance, as characters declare that it is three o'clock, is pointing with its hands to noon. That one flaw serves as further proof that otherwise, **The Marquise de O…** is a perfect film.

The monophonic sound is solid and clear, and the film is in German with optional English subtitles. Along with two trailers, there is a fascinating 2-minute interview with Rohmer working on a stage adaptation of the Kleist story, and a 3-minute interview with Ganz (with a lengthy film clip) talking about the movie being his film debut, how screen acting differs from stage acting and what the movie can tell us about the past.

Claude Chabrol

MK2 and Arrow Video have released two Blu-ray collections of Claude Chabrol films from the Eighties and beyond, **Lies And Deceit Five Films By Claude Chabrol** (UPC#760137858485, $100) and **Twisting The Knife Four Films By Claude Chabrol** (UPC#760137101130, $100). Each of the films appears on a separate platter. We reviewed most of the films, produced by Marin Karmitz, on DVD and previous Blu-rays, and while they often looked decent, the new Blu-ray presentations are a great deal more confident and flawless than the DVD releases and on par or better than the BD releases. All of them are framed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The images are solid, colors are accurate, and the quality of the picture pulls the viewer more readily into the narrative. The same is true of the sound (monophonic, except where noted), which is also stronger, bringing a greater sense of presence to the wonderful Matthieu Chabrol musical scores, none of which, sadly, have ever been released as soundtrack albums, so far as we know (we've begged the powers that be). Most of the films are crime stories in one manner or another, although if there is a common theme that runs through all of the movies, it is betrayal, presenting the viewer with the pleasures of atmosphere, moral compromise, and actors embodying imperfect characters with exquisite perfection. All of the films are in French with optional English subtitles. Every film comes with a trailer, a 3-minute introduction, a collection of promotional materials in still frame and an enormously valuable talk, in varying lengths, by Chabrol in the early Aughts, commenting about the film at hand, reacting to selected scenes and explaining why he is choosing the camera angles that he chooses, among other things. What one also learns over the course of all of the supplements is that Chabrol was a joy to be around, on the set and off, and that is the feeling one comes away with listening to him talk about his filmmaking. Taken as a whole, his segments are as worthwhile as a semester, at least, in film school.

The first film in **Lies and Deceit** is the 1985 **Cop Au Vin** (Sep 05), also known as *Poulet au vinaigre*. The central character is a young postman played by Lucas Belvaux. His quadriplegic and widowed (or abandoned, it's difficult to tell) mother, played by Chabrol's ex-wife, the great Stephane Audran, is obsessed with holding onto him against the siren calls of several fetching ladies on his route and at his office. To make matters worse, a trio of businessmen are trying to buy their house to clear it for some sort of development, and the more they resist the offers, the dirtier the businessmen begin to play. One of the businessmen, a doctor, also suspects that his wife is not only being unfaithful, but wanted to pull their money out of the deal—the postman and his mother are aware of this because they steam open yet-to-be-delivered letters to try to keep ahead of the plots against them. Another one of the businessmen dies in a car accident, and a no-nonsense, break-the-rules detective played by Jean Poiret shows up to unravel what has been going on. Running 109 minutes, there is one lovely sequence set late at night, reminiscent of **Blue Velvet**, where Belvaux's character sneaks around the sleeping town, peaking in windows and spying on the businessmen, and that sets the mood until Poiret shows up and resets it. It is to the film's strength that it is not a normal straightforward crime story but instead kind of a stirred pot of simmering schemes and secrets that nevertheless sustains the captivating aroma of human folly.

The fascinating Chabrol interview runs 22 minutes. He describes working with the actors and explains his intentions during a couple of key sequences, noting at one point how the camera is indecisive because the characters can't make up their minds. Additionally, there is a wonderful 1985 TV interview with Chabrol, Poiret and Audran running 30 minutes, full of delightful anecdotes and thoughtful, erudite reflections on Chabrol's filmmaking; and an outstanding 75-minute interview from 1994 with Chabrol in English in front of a live audience sharing all sorts of anecdotes, many of them amusing, about his career and life (he quotes Henri Langlois to explain that there aren't any bad movies, you just have to watch a film enough times until you like it, which is probably a good way to approach many of Chabrol's movies, since they improve upon multiple viewings, when expectations give way to anticipations), and he also points out that every policeman he's ever met loves Poiret's character (in a separate 12-minute interview, Ian Christie, who emcees the talk, reflects upon his involvement in the event and upon Chabrol's career, praising his filmmaking for its exceptional technical astuteness and lamenting Chabrol's partial fall from the general French filmmaker canon).

French film expert Ben Sachs provides an intermittent commentary, talking a bit about Chabrol and the cast, going over the basics of the narrative, and explaining what makes Chabrol's movies so distinctive. "The villainous characters in Chabrol films, I think, are less interesting than the heroes because they seem a bit redundant. There's so much villainy in the characters we sympathize with in Chabrol's movies that when we meet a character who's flat out bad, they don't really embroil us in the same way. There's not the same complexity."

Poiret's character may not show up in **Cop Au Vin** until 40 minutes into the film, but he makes such a strong impression that Chabrol immediately turned around and wrote another script expressly for his character, the 1986 *Inspector Lavardin*, also known as **Inspecteur Lavardin** (Sep 05). Since it is not based upon an established novel, it is larkish in its construction and does not venture too far away from its central plot strand, but it does make an enjoyable follow up, particularly since the basic concept—Poiret breaking rules to get to the truth in a small Normandy town—is difficult to resist. His character discovers that the murder victim, found naked at the beach with a word scratched on his back in blood, was the husband of a former lover, played by Bernadette Lafont, and so he moves into the victim's rather large house so that he can keep an eye on her, her gay brother, played by Jean-Claude Brialy, and the daughter of Lafont's character from yet another marriage, played by Hermine Clair. Running 100 minutes, the film feels like it was put together in a rush—there is even a glimpse of the production van in one shot—but it is still a great deal of fun as Poiret's character continually grabs clues and stuffs them in his pocket to be examined later, slaps witnesses because he knows he can get away with it, and not only solves the murder, but comes up with a good alternative solution in

order to protect the real victim of the crime.

The Chabrol talk runs 34 minutes. Along with explicating his individual camera choices, he says that he wanted part of the film to be a murder mystery and part of it a film noir detective tale. There is also a 16-minute rumination upon Chabrol's career as a whole.

Sachs supplies another commentary, allowing even more gaps between comments (especially in the second half), but talking about the cast again and the film's dynamics. He also points out how badly the characters dance in a disco scene and blames Chabrol, lumping his disco scenes with equally awkward Eric Rohmer dance scenes, but perhaps he should just blame the French instead. Boogie-woogie is not their forte.

In 1991, Chabrol turned to the original French classic about adultery and betrayal, Gustav Flaubert's **Madame Bovary** (Apr 07). It is a genuine costume feature, well bankrolled and running 143 minutes. Nestled in the center of the collection of contemporary stories like a divertissement, every frame feels like a portrait from a gallery. The colors are fresh and the transfer is gorgeous, but the cinematography is deliberately grainy, the grain enhancing the feeling that one is observing something artistic and antique. Like a number of French directors, Chabrol latched onto Isabelle Huppert for a while and made quite a few terrific features with her, so the simple fact that he has placed her in the starring role of a competent adaptation of one of France's most famous novels is sufficient justification for the film's existence. Yet, watching it, we came to admire even more Vincent Minnelli's 1949 Production Code rendition of the tale, which we reviewed in Feb 25. Even though Chabrol is less constrained by dictated morality and running times, Minnelli actually did a better job at embodying the humanity of the characters. Although it is longer, Chabrol's film feels like it has more ellipses. Characters take sudden turns in their choices rather than coming to them organically, and the film is more of an enactment than an emotional drama. For the pure spectacle of the captivating period setting, the gorgeous costumes, the precision of Chabrol's interpretation and Huppert's representation of the title role, it is worth seeing, and as an option in a collection of Chabrol's films, it is worth having, but its quest for accuracy is affected, ironically, by its inevitable abridgement.

Chabrol's talk runs 38 minutes. He cites specific Flaubert sentences in the novel that he has transcribed onto film, and conveys the enthusiasm with which he tackled the project, showing how he nailed various individual scenes in replicating precisely what Flaubert wanted to capture in them. There is also an excellent and thorough 16-minute summary of other motion picture adaptations of the story and how they compare (including David Lean's **Ryan's Daughter**).

Feminist film critic Katt Ellinger speaks constantly throughout the film and still has plenty she admits she can't really get to by the time it is over. She focuses almost entirely, however, on the story and Huppert's character, and how everything else emanates from that, although by doing so, she also gets into a fairly comprehensive summary of both Chabrol's career and Huppert's, and other aspects of the film's technical contents. She cites the James Ivory films in the Eighties as having inspired an acceptance of costume dramas, although the film we thought of most of all as we watched it was Roman Polanski's **Tess**. She quotes a lot of the negative opinions about the film in order to shoot them down, but it is fairly easy to pick out the errors in those while brushing over the film's real flaws, which she willingly does because of her enthusiasm for the heroine's modern discontent. "Ultimately, for me, it is the best adaptation, and I know not everybody is going to agree with that statement, but I think that if you take the film within the canon of Chabrol and his obsessions, it becomes just another beautiful part of that. I think it is a success because he does render [the novel's] textures, and he does get that balance right. It's such a beautifully cynical version of **Bovary** that doesn't use sentimentality for romance."

Based upon a story by Georges Simenon, the 1992 **Betty** is constructed of flashbacks. The film opens in Paris on the title character, played by Marie Trintignant, wandering into a bar in the evening like an alcoholic and proceeding to act like one—J&B Scotch is practically a supporting character in the film. A man eventually picks her up, takes her out to a restaurant in Versailles, where the viewer sees a character played by Audran sitting at a nearby table. The drinking continues, her companion kind of disappears and she passes out, coming to in a room in a luxury hotel where Audran's character and the restaurant's owner have taken her. As she gradually sobers up and recovers, sort of, from a traumatic event before the film began, she tells part of her story to Audran's character, and thinks back herself in quieter interludes to other parts of the story, so that over the course of the film's 104 minutes, the tale of her marriage and how it ended are gradually pieced together. Her actual personality and the personalities of the characters also become clearer and clearer as the movie progresses, and the conclusion is simply an understanding of who she really is, emotionally, when she is sober. It's not a pretty picture.

Again, it is the film's inclusion in the set that enhances its appeal, not only because of Audran's presence, but because the films in the set do not have to prove themselves individually. It is a terrific and absorbing movie, a great deal of fun through the first pass of discoveries, and then equally engaging during subsequent views when the nuances of what is being depicted and how Chabrol chooses to divvy it out become clearer. By itself, it is a film that a viewer might first dismiss as inconsequential, only to discover that its resonance lingers longer than expected.

Chabrol's talk runs 32 minutes, but it is less enlightening than his other talks. He identifies what he lifted from Simenon and talks about the intricacies of Simenon's writing. He also identifies the visual metaphors he is employing, but spends less time delineating his thought process behind the blocking and individual camera setups.

Also featured is a fairly good 16-minute comparison and analysis of both Simenon's book and the film, and a wonderful 15-minute interview with Simenon translator Ros Schwartz (who can be seen in action on the 75-minute live interview with Chabrol on the **Cop Au Vin** platter as his translator) talking about the subtleties of Simenon's writing and also about her experiences with Chabrol, who speaks great English most of the time, but still needed a backup for live appearances.

Ellinger supplies another excellent commentary, going over the dynamics of the story, the depiction of alcoholism and addiction in films (interestingly, she suggests that female addicts, as opposed to men, are almost never portrayed sympathetically in such films), the performances, and the various themes that Chabrol was exploring. "[Trintignant's character is only concerned] about herself, but that's not to say the film isn't feminist, because it's often these quietly subversive actions of lone women that become some of the most potent feminist statements, and I find a lot of feminism in the films of Claude Chabrol, which I'm quite sure some people would disagree with that, but just because somebody doesn't have an agenda, and isn't distinctly coming in to make a statement doesn't mean that they can't somehow change conventions or challenge those conventions, and Claude Chabrol, he was deliberately challenging those conventions."

We reviewed Arrow's Blu-ray presentation of Serge Bromberg's 2009 documentary, **Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno**, a reconstruction of Henri-Georges Clouzot's unfinished 1964 *Inferno*, in Apr 19. We made note at the time that although the supplementary features on the disc were very elaborate, there was not a single mention of Chabrol's 1994 adaptation of Clouzot's script, *Torment*, also entitled *L'Enfer*, not even an 'oh, by the way.' Chabrol explains how he became involved in the project in the 75-minute interview on **Cop Au Vin** and actually talks about the film extensively—it appears to have been screened before the talk. The story is about the owner of a hotel who starts to have an emotional breakdown, poisoning both his perceptions and actions, and thinks that his wife is being unfaithful. Running 102 minutes, the film is brutal. Clouzot intended to use an abstract counterpoint near the climax that would have been brilliant cinema, but Chabrol provides no such escape. François Cluzet and Emmanuelle Béart star, and their attractiveness and charisma at the film's opening just makes the gradual decline of their relationship all the more painful. Even when you know what is going to happen, the drama can be hard to take, but the performances are superb, the staging is adept and the film's lesson, while perhaps not as entertaining as what some of Chabrol's other films have to offer, can still be highly compelling. It is a descent into madness that offers no escape.

The sound is nominally stereophonic, although the only effect is a slightly heightened presence of the music and a few other noises in comparison to the monophonic films. The image quality is solid and fresh. Chabrol talks about Clouzot and obtaining the script from his widow in a 12-minute interview, and explains more specifically why he shied away from the direction Clouzot had been intent upon following and specifically how he structured the passage of time within the film. That is separate from the 39 minutes of scene deconstruction that he also provides with his standard comments. Among other things, he explains that the way the ending is put together, it could be a never-ending emotional loop. Also featured is a lovely 26-minute interview with Karmitz about their collaborations and how he acted as gatekeeper so Chabrol could concentrate on churning out films without distractions.

Australian film critics Alexandra Heller-Nicholas and Josh Nelson supply an excellent commentary, thoroughly comparing the film to Bromberg's documentary and comparing it to what Clouzot's film probably would have been. They also dissect the individual scenes and the dynamics of the film as they discuss the conflicts that many writers have simply in approaching the film, placing blame on Béart's character for the madness of Cluzet's character, and they have a very interesting talk about accepting films that have evil protagonists, going over the difference between alignment and allegiance in how the viewer relates to the characters.

The first platter on **Twisting the Knife** is the delightful (and a substantial relief after *Torment*) 1997 adventures of a pair of con artists, **The Swindle**. Also known as *Rien Ne Va Plus*, Huppert and Michel Serrault crisscross Europe, never taking too much from their marks so that no one knows a crime has been committed. Cluzet and Jean-François Balmer co-star. Running 106 minutes, the film has a simple structure. There is an initial interlude so that the viewer sees how the pair operates, and then the rest of the film is taken up by a more elaborate scam that places them at odds with one another and laboring under much higher stakes. The image is smooth and glossy. With gorgeous scenery and elegant hotels as a backdrop, and a lovely two-channel stereo soundtrack that encompasses one's viewing room with background noises and music, you willingly sit back and give your heart over to the actors, to be taken however they wish to take you. (Cohen Media also released three of the films—**Betty**, **Torment** and **The Swindle**—in a single three-platter Blu-ray set we reviewed in Mar 17, but on all three, the image on Arrow's releases has fresher colors and less grain.)

Chabrol's comments run 24 minutes. He describes how he staged scenes in the film based upon musical pieces that had already been chosen for the background, and points out some of the film's sleights of hand. Also featured are a 15-minute analysis of the film's themes and tricks; an 8-minute promotional featurette; and a 26-minute interview with Huppert from 2020 that is mostly

about the characters she played in several of his films. Finally, there is a 38-minute interview with Chabrol's stepdaughter, Cécile Maistre-Chabrol, who worked as an assistant director on a number of his films (and also wrote the script for one of our favorite Chabrol features, **A Girl Cut in Two**). Next to the Chabrol commentaries, her talk is the most valuable supplement in the collections, not only illuminating the dynamics of the filmmaking from behind the scenes, but also sharing an in-depth memorial of Chabrol's life. Basically, all he wanted to do, besides eating (it is said he would choose his locations based upon their proximity to three-star restaurants), was to be with his family and friends, and make movies, and the joy he felt living his life rubbed off on many of the people around him.

British film experts Barry Forshaw and Sean Hogan supply a commentary track going over the film's basic narrative and Chabrol's career as a whole ("This is a more indulgent film. It's still kind of typical Chabrol in the fact that everyone in this is dishonest to a degree. They're all sort of sinners. They may not be terrible people, but they're at the very least [sinners], but I think he's more indulgent with his characters here. I think he likes them, or most of them."), as well as the legacies of the performers and the nature of con artist movies in general. While they pay no attention to a lovely sequence depicting the performance of a woman dancing with swirling fabric extended from her arms, which evokes one of the earliest silent film pieces of Loie Fuller and her 'serpentine dances' (Chabrol acknowledges the allusion in his talk), they are attuned to the film's many nuances and in fact lament the trend in popular film to shy away from nuance. Indeed, they also lament the advent of generations in film students who are losing touch with the past despite all of these wonderful Blu-ray boxed sets. "Cinema starts with Martin Scorsese. Young film students now are not that interested in anything before that, not even Alfred Hitchcock."

After the confectionary high of **The Swindle** you are more than ready for the much more grounded and penetrating 1998 **The Color of Lies** (Jul 14). Also known as *Au Coeur du Mensonge*, Jacques Gamblin is an emotionally fragile artist who lives on the coast of a harbor in Brittany with his wife, played by Sandrine Bonnaire. A child that he had been giving art lessons to is raped and murdered on her way home from one of the lessons, and he is a suspect, which stresses him out to no end. A famous author who lives nearby is putting the moves on his wife, and this stresses him out even more. Running 113 minutes, the film's atmosphere and textures are exquisite. The weather changes constantly. Chabrol is in no hurry to solve the crime, but it is eventually resolved, although another death occurs near the end that is a bit more ambiguous in its resolution. No matter. You are swept up entirely by the inner lives of the characters. Spending time with them and how they live is an enormously satisfying experience, enhanced significantly by the stresses confronting them. In all probability because of the setting and atmosphere as much as anything, it is our favorite of all of the films within the two collections.

The cinematography has an enhanced graininess that is for the most part justified by the mood and the painting motif. However, the disc's picture does not have the confidence that the image in **Madame Bovary** conveyed, and even though the colors are fresh, there is a feeling that the image could be a touch stronger than it is. The stereo sound does not have the aggressive mix that was part of the playfulness in **The Swindle**, but it still has a dimensional presence. The buoy bells and foghorns sound terrific.

Chabrol's comments run 20 minutes and are consistently enlightening as he explains why he has set up the scenes and shots to emphasize the interiors of the characters. In addition to the standard 3-minute introduction, there is a vaguely summarizing 14-minute introduction to the film that contains more clips than comments, and a terrific 26-minute promotional documentary with lots of behind-the-scenes footage and interviews.

Forshaw and Hogan provide a generalized commentary that does present an insightful understanding of the film, but focuses more on Chabrol's career and manner as a filmmaker, and how that relates to other filmmakers. They compare his output to Woody Allen and surmise that Chabrol's later works do not drop off as precipitously in quality (it is surprising they don't mention Eric Rohmer). But the generality of their talk trips them up at times. No sooner do they finish talking about the obscurity of Jean-Luc Godard's films, and how they feel that Chabrol's films are a great deal more entertaining, than they segue into a discussion about the level of sophistication in Chabrol's films without an awareness of the attendant irony in the way they could just as readily be talking about Godard. "He doesn't make films in a fashion that would assume the audience is stupid. This perhaps affected him commercially, but you look at the way these films are put together, the way they are constructed and the way they withhold information and don't give you easy answers and let you make up your own mind, and you sort of think, 'That's going to be frustrating for a mass audience.'"

At this point in time, if you see that Huppert is in a Chabrol film, you go diving behind the couch whenever she appears on the screen. She's that scary. Huppert is the CEO of a Swiss chocolate factory who is marrying a famous pianist played by Jacques Dutronc in the opening shot of **Nightcap** (Jan 15), a 2000 film better known by it's original title, which we prefer, **Merci Pour le Chocolat**. Seems the pianist's previous wife died in an unfortunate car accident. The film is especially wonderful within the context of the collections, because it is not so much a thriller as it is simply a snapshot of an uncomfortable situation. Running 101 minutes, the film feels like a prelude, and the climax seems more like the story has barely entered its second act, but the characters are vividly presented—the pianist agrees to teach a young woman from the nearby town who is studying for a major competition—and you settle back as the tensions rise, and cringe whenever Huppert's character smiles at someone. The image has a tolerable level of grain, and is otherwise solid and fresh. The stereo sound gives the music a basic dimensionality.

The 44-minute talk by Chabrol includes a substantial rumination upon pacing the film to the music and monitoring the emphasis on each of the individual characters. "I like this shot. I noticed the reflection of the ceiling on the piano lid and I felt it created a sort of false maze. I don't know, it seemed to be a cross between a maze and bars of chocolate. So I wanted to start with that. But the difficulty came in respecting the tempo of the Liszt. It was quite complicated, but I think it just about works."

Also featured is 11 minutes of interesting audition footage with co-star Anna Mouglalis; a decent 11-minute overview of the film's primary themes and conflicts; a great 7-minute interview with Huppert about her character and working with Chabrol, including behind-the-scenes footage of Chabrol giving her direction for a key scene; a 32-minute interview with Dutronc about how nice it is working with Chabrol, who put him at ease, and otherwise reflects upon the film, his character, and making movies and music; and 26 minutes of satisfying behind-the-scenes footage including some scattered interviews with the cast about their characters (the Dutronc footage is the same as in the 32-minute interview) but mostly featuring actual conversations about setting up shots and so on.

The commentary features film expert Justine Smith, who focuses on interpreting the individual scenes and acknowledging the many ambiguities in the narrative, essentially explaining that the ambiguities are the entertainment. You are supposed to ponder the actions of Huppert's character rather than understand them, or even understand what she has and has not done.

One of Chabrol's continuing themes is family, and as much as **Merci Pour le Chocolat** embraces that theme, it is not nearly as pronounced as it is in the 2003 **The Flower of Evil** (Apr 07), also known as *Le Fleur du Mal*. To go into detail about the family and its history would undercut much of what the film wants to present, but there is a woman who is running for mayor, her husband, who owns a pharmacy, a young man who has returned after being gone for several years, a young woman who is still in college, and an elderly woman, all in the same house. They are all related by either blood or marriage, and on the surface, they are all as cheerful as a garden full of fresh blooms. Running 105 minutes, the film is about not just the gradual deterioration of that façade, but also about its strength and resilience. At this point in his career, Chabrol had such a command of his medium that the narrative was truly less important that the characters, their relationships and their environments. The story may not seem to amount to much—although there is a murder near the end—but the cast, including Nathalie Baye, Suzanne Flon, Mélanie Doutey, Benoît Magimel and Bernard Le Coq, is appealing, every shot is intriguingly framed, and every scene is engrossing. The stereo sound has a slight dimensionality.

Chabrol shares his unused takes on several shots to explain why he chose the one that he chose as part of the 49-minute commentary. He also shares a shot that was run in reverse in the film itself, so that you can see the actor pretending he has been hit on the head with a blunt object by 'acting backwards' as the object is pulled away from his head. Chabrol also explains how he is using the blocking and camera angles to subliminally influence what we should feel about the characters, and he reveals a number of other tricks he is using, as well, to influence the way characters are perceived. "The accumulation of details like that isn't intended to be completely grasped by viewers. The intention is that they will grasp some of it and feel a strange sensation, which is what usually happens, but not always."

Also featured is an excellent 15-minute survey of Chabrol's entire career; a 25-minute talk by screenwriter Catherine Eliachett, explaining the use of 'threes' in the film's structure and deconstructing the complexity of the various relationships; and another terrific 26-minute promotional piece combining behind-the-scenes footage, cast interviews and Chabrol's elucidations.

Film critic Farran Smith Nehme provides a decent commentary track, comparing the film to Chabrol's other movies, particularly in how it approaches family relations and the bourgeoisie. She also points out and elaborates upon individual details, such as the amount of blood that would actually be spilled by a blow to the head and how lampreys are prepared as a dish. Fun stuff.

Chabrol made other movies with Karmitz during the same period of time, and one of them, Chabrol's 1995 **La Cérémonie** (Apr 07), has been released on Blu-ray by MK2 and The Criterion Collection (UPC#71551528-9719, $40). Bonnaire plays a newly hired housekeeper who hides her illiteracy from her employers, played by Jacqueline Bisset and Jean-Pierre Cassel, and makes friends with an undisciplined postal worker played by Huppert. Based upon a novel by Ruth Rendell, the 111-minute film concludes in violence, but it gets there gradually, with the sublimated pasts of both Bonnaire and Huppert's characters presented in bits and pieces that the viewer excitedly puts together whenever another informational crumb is revealed. Meanwhile, the film settles into the remotely located house, following Bonnaire as she does the chores she is good at and struggles to interpret written instructions left for her without disclosing her handicap, and gradually succumbing to the spell that Huppert's character casts upon her, so that the film ends up playing like a radicalized Sixties affront to the establishment, along the lines of **If….** The performances are all super—not only is Huppert really different from the characters she plays in the other films, but Bisset leaves one thinking she ought to have pursued her career in France rather than Hollywood. As with many of Chabrol's films, the

feature, as it goes along, can seem eccentric and uneventful if approached on its own, but in the context, familiarity and freshness of his other features, and particularly if you watch it immediately after **Flower of Evil**, it becomes a captivating showcase of wonderfully present characters who have conflicted psychologies but are eager to make their way in the world—and would probably be better off if they hadn't bumped into one another.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The color transfer is stronger and more solid than the grainiest of the Arrow releases, and hues are very fresh. The two-channel DTS sound has a viable dimensionality at appropriate moments, and the film is in French with optional English subtitles. The film picks up where it left off if playback is terminated, but the supplementary features do not. Along with a trailer, there is another commentary by Chabrol, running 29-minutes, in which he focuses on the general symbolism of various scenes and deconstructs his camera moves to explain what is being emphasized; another 19-minute promotional documentary combining interviews and great behind-the-scenes footage; a nice 22-minute promotional piece about Huppert's body of work with Chabrol, with each one talking a lot about the other; a good 13-minute interview with Bonnaire, talking a little bit about working with Chabrol and a lot about the nature of her character; a 9-minute interview with screenwriter Caroline Eliacheff about how she took components from various true crime stories about women gone astray and blended them together; a 13-minute talk by Bong Joon Ho, who points out the similarities between the film and **Parasite**; and a 9-minute piece that awkwardly mixes a treatise upon sounds that emanate from offscreen in movies with an appreciation of the film.

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If most of Chabrol's films are an acquired taste, some require even more acquisition than others. Almost all adaptations of the enduring tale about a man who kills his wives for profit are comedies, but Chabrol's 1963 **Bluebeard** (*Landru*), released on Blu-ray by StudioCanal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC#738329255381, $25), is a comedy so droll and circumspect that few viewers will embrace it immediately, although it does have its charms. Set in Paris during World War I, Charles Denner plays the title character, sporting a bald plate and grotesque beard, but somehow capable of sweet talking the ladies. He also has a family to support, including a wife, although he keeps them on a very tight budget. He maintains a house in the country where he entertains and romances a series of women, their demises occurring off screen, with a running gag that an elderly British couple who live next door are disturbed by the fumes emanating from his incinerator. Running 119 minutes, the final quarter or so of the film is a trial sequence, even though its resolution is fait accompli. The appeal of the film is in the period décor and in its diverse cast. Denner must be tolerated, but Audran, Danielle Darrieux, Michèle Morgan, Hildegard Knef and Juliette Mayniel are also featured, and Jean-Pierre Melville and surrealist novelist Raymond Queneau have cameo parts. The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Chabrol is such a compelling filmmaker that you essentially look forward to each edit, to see how the next shot will be composed, an effect that is enhanced because of the period setting and what the actors are up to. Nevertheless, the film will leave most viewers cold.

Colors are reasonably fresh, but the image is soft at times, although some of that can be ascribed to the cinematography. In a couple of shots during the courtroom sequence, the camera is as far back as it can be, and Denner is on the extreme right side. Even though he has dialog, he is out of focus while the middle of the image is not. The monophonic sound is reasonably strong, and the film is in French with optional English subtitles.

Ellinger provides an excellent commentary track, using most of it to talk about the film's problematic artistry and Chabrol's earnest accuracy in depicting what is known about the historical figure depicted in the film, Henri Désiré Landru. She, too, is earnest in praising Chabrol's intentions and achievements, even as she is skeptical about the film's effectiveness. "What the hell did these women see in this guy? What you get in the way Chabrol uses this—it's almost apathetic—detached view of this guy who was somehow able to entrap these women, but we see no evidence of that on the screen, whatsoever." She compares Chabrol's interpretation of events to a couple of films, including Charles Chaplin's **Monsieur Verdoux**, but for some reason she never broaches the original Bluebeard folktale (she consistently refers to the film by Chabrol's title, *Landru*) and its inspirations for Ernst Lubitsch's **Bluebeard's Eighth Wife**, or the wonderful Béla Bartók opera, *Bluebeard's Castle*. While she also discusses Chabrol's career at length, and his testy relationship with his former New Wave associates, she confines profiles of the cast members other than Denner to the final minutes of her talk.

During an elaborate and superb digression on his commentary for *The Death Ray of Dr. Mabuse* in the **Mabuse Lives!** boxed set (May 25), David Kalat talks about Chabrol being a diehard Mabuse fanboy and explains, "The hot take on Chabrol that the critical establishment has been peddling since 1968 or so is that he uses the genre of crime thrillers as a framework by which to indict the moral bankruptcy of the French bourgeoisie, but that the purity of his aesthetic vision was occasionally compromised by the need to act as a director for hire. And the thing is, this isn't wholly wrong, it's just woefully incomplete and it justifies ignoring or even disrespecting huge swaths of his output, including films that are among his most personal statements. Once you've got this version of Chabrol's cinema in your head, it can lead you to treat each film as an analytical gate-keeping test, accepting those that fit the pattern and discarding those that don't. Part of the problem is that while pretty much every Chabrol film is in some way a crime thriller about a murder, that is not to say that they conform to any of the accepted clichés or genre expectations that fans of those films go in expecting. Chabrol hates clichés, and so his films omit aspects that audiences tend to expect."

During the Sixties in a period that Ellinger describes as Chabrol's 'Dark Ages,' he made a number spy films inspired by the Mabuse stories and the general James Bond spy craze of the times, and one of his gems, the 1965 *Marie Chantal contre Dr. Kha*, has been released by StudioCanal and Kino as another *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray, appropriately titled **Blue Panther** (UPC#73832925-5404, $25). From the opening out-of-focus credits, the film contains many allusions to **The Pink Panther**, as well as to a number of other pertinent cinematic works. Set on a train and then in Switzerland, followed by Morocco, every shot in the film is not just a giddy delight, it has the feel of Chabrol giggling to himself and slapping his thigh each time he looked through the viewfinder. Marie Laforêt plays one of the passengers on the train, traveling with her cousin. In the dining car, the man who has just stolen a jeweled broach in the shape of a panther's head asks her to hold it for him and is then murdered, so that for the remainder of the 110-minute film, as she travels to the other exotic locations, agents of different nationalities try to retrieve it from her, leaving plenty of corpses in their wakes. Yes, you have to be on Chabrol's wavelength, because the quote above is absolutely correct, he's not interested in the clichés, but in working around them with industrious wit. While the narrative might initially seem crazy and silly, it is purposely constructed as an unconfined, globetrotting farce, and the action is too much fun to dismiss. The drama is ridiculous, but the characters take it with a deathly seriousness, and the film has momentum, intrigue and, in its own way, flair. In the context of the spy spoof craze, it is a wacky masterpiece, and because it was created by one of cinema's great artists, it has not lost an iota of its brilliance in the ensuing years.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. While the cinematography seems to have been constrained in spots by the budget, the colors are very fresh and there are many invigorating location shots. The monophonic sound is fine and the Pierre Jansen and Gregorio García Segura musical score is wonderful. The film is in French with optional English subtitles, but be sure to listen closely, because there are gags that don't survive the translation ("'Qui?' 'Kha.'"). The film's most laugh aloud moments, however, come from an element of farce that is usually quite tiresome, gags involving the reactions of the characters to crossdressing. Audran is one of the costars, with Denner, Akim Tamiroff, Francisco Rabal, Serge Reggiani and Roger Hanin.

Sixties film enthusiasts Howard S. Berger, Steve Mitchell and Nathaniel Thompson provide a thoughtful commentary track, examining how the film represented the end of a phase in Chabrol's career—his next movie would be evocatively titled **Line of Demarcation** (Oct 20)—and its various meta components—is 'Dr. Kha,' symbolically, Chabrol himself? They do talk about the cast members and so on, and particularly how unique Laforêt is as the heroine (who is styled at times like Audrey Hepburn, but far more proactive), but they mostly discuss how readily the film can be interpreted in multiple ways and how engaging it can be once you see past its distractions.

"This movie now, 60 years, 70 years, 80 years, it's going to be rediscovered and understood with a different perspective and different clarity each time from each person who sees it. And no one's going to be wrong about it. Anything you could notice about it will be correct because it exists on so many different planes of explanation at the same time, which is why, ultimately, someone like Claude Chabrol is fascinating, in total. I don't think of things in terms of 'lesser Chabrol,' 'more successful Chabrol.' Successful to what? Meeting my criteria that I enjoyed in several of his films? Whatever a director is trying to get across and if he has collaborators who understand that and who agree with that, they pull it off. It completely overshadows and transcends, simultaneously, the genre that it is actually commercially successful in, because it made money. It's just remarkable."

Maurice Pialat

Three Gaumont productions by Maurice Pialat are gathered on the Cohen Media Group and eOne Entertainment *Cohen Film Collection Classics of French Cinema The Films of Maurice Pialat Volume 1* three-platter Blu-ray release, **Loulou / The Mouth Agape / Graduate First** (UPC#741952816492, $40). Each film has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. On all three, the monophonic sound is fairly strong, conveying the details of the recordings and, here and there, their shortcomings. Each film is in French with optional English subtitles. Contrary to the title, the 1974 *The Mouth Agape* (*La gueule ouverte*) and the 1978 *Graduate First* (*Passe ton bac d'abord*) appear together on the first platter, with the 1980 **Loulou** on the second platter and supplementary features for the first two films on the third platter, along with a profile of Pialat.

Monique Melinand delivers a disturbingly good performance in *The Mouth Agape*, her character gradually dying during the course of the 87-minute film. In the first scenes, she is visiting a doctor's office with her son, played by Philippe Léotard, but by the film's halfway point, she is bedridden with limited functionality, so that her husband, played by Hubert Deschamps, who owns the store below their apartment in Auvergne, must feed her and tend to her between visits from a nurse. Nathalie Baye plays the son's wife, the two of them traveling back and forth between their home in Paris and Auvergne. The son, however, tends to take after his father, who is a womanizer, the latter pawing every customer who comes into his store (nevertheless, it is profitable), and so while the throughline of the plot is the deterioration of Melinand's character, the

coloring comes from the conflicts and resentments caused by blatant infidelities. All of that is fairly standard, and well played by the cast, but what sets the movie apart is how precise and studied Melinand's performance is, from the first hints of her weaknesses to the final hints that she still has thoughts and feelings behind her blank stare and noisy breathing. Her presence, even as a corpse, is riveting, and it brings a remarkable life to the film. The final shot is of Deschamps in his store, straightening up, but immediately before that, the camera is placed on the rear of the car facing backwards as Léotard and Baye's characters drive out of town, and it eerily feels like the spirit of Melinand's character, departing.

While Pialat can opt at times for long, stationary takes, the camera always seems to jiggle a little bit and is never entirely steady. The Nestor Almendros cinematography has a pronounced grain, and hues are naturally lightened at times, but the transfer appears to be carefully handled, and fleshtones are accurate. The third platter contains 12 minutes of silent outtakes from a deleted scene, featuring the chubby French star, Jacques Villeret, who otherwise does not appear in the film. Depicting a pleasant summer afternoon family reunion, the sequence would clearly not fit in with the rest of the movie, but is still a rewarding look at the cast members in character having a good time. The scene would have to have appeared early on because of how functional Melinand's character is, but emotionally it would be more appropriate for later, as a flashback, except the film doesn't have flashbacks. Hence, its ideal position is in the home video supplement. The segment has a running commentary by costar Jean-François Balmer, who describes what happened during the shoot and so on. Also featured on the third platter are two trailers for the film; a 12-minute interview with Pialat's wife, Micheline, who was the model for Baye in the film, talking about her hectic and eventually platonic relationship with Pialat; and a nice 8-minute interview with Baye, sharing her memories of the shoot and how proud she is of the film.

A look at teenagers at the end of their school term in a small mining town, *Graduate First* has an appealing ensemble cast and weaves back and forth between the stories of each character. Not realizing yet that they need to differentiate lust from love, the 85-minute film is ostensibly about their various hookups and breakups, although because of how the narrative is spread out among the characters, it gradually becomes apparent that the film is actually examining the limited career and life choices confronting the kids and what they will do to either circumvent them or embrace them. As a standalone film it may seem inconsequential, but as another episode in the world Pialat has constructed on film, it is wholly satisfying.

The picture has a strong documentary-style look, but colors are accurate and when the lighting is good, the image is sharp. Along with two trailers, the third platter contains a decent 11-minute interview with assistant director Patrick Grandperret and screenwriter and editor Arlette Langmann, who describe the haphazard way in which the film was conceived and executed.

The two biggest French stars of the late Twentieth Century, Gérard Depardieu and Isabelle Huppert, were paired in Pialat's 1980 **Loulou**, a film similar in tone to *Graduate First* but more focused on its primary characters, who start up a relationship that has its ups and downs. Depardieu's character is unemployed and Huppert's character is married to someone else, but they begin hanging out together and can't get enough of each other—the film has plenty of nudity although the way Pialat shoots it, it isn't particularly erotic. Running 105 minutes, the film sort of compiles scenes where they are socializing or causing trouble with different sets of friends, and sort of charts the way in which they still settle for each other after the initial thrill wears off. In the same way that *Graduate First* explored the psychologies of kids just leaving high school, **Loulou**, which is said to have autobiographical elements, sort of picks up on the ones who are still drifting a decade later, living in a metropolis and reacting to each day as it occurs. The film's star power is a deft compensation for the lack of an ensemble group (although there are still plenty of supporting players as their friends, families and acquaintances), and the film remains compelling even though very little actually happens, entirely because watching Depardieu and Huppert inhabit their characters so thoroughly is a treat in itself.

The approach is not as documentary-like as *Graduate First*, but the image still has a verité feeling to it. Colors and fleshtones are accurate and the image is reasonably smooth most of the time. Also featured on the platter is a terrific 14-minute interview with Huppert about what it was like to make the film and work with Pialat; a great 20-minute interview with film journalist Dominique Maillet, talking about his run-ins with Pialat, Pialat's many insecurities, and some of Pialat's infamous bad behaviors; an excellent 28-minute interview with Grandperret about his experiences working with Pialat ("He was great and he was a pain in the neck. He was both a genius and a lazy guy."); cinematographer Pierre-William Glenn sharing horror stories about how Pialat behaved on the set and terrorized the kids in *Graduate First* to get the performances he wanted ("Every time we had an interview on television, it was great, it was as if we were all friends, as if everything was great. Ninety-five percent of the time, it was not the case. It's a lie. They forget that the image on the screen replaces the feelings they had during the shooting. They forget they suffered.") in a 32-minute talk; an interesting 13-minute interview with editor Yann Dedet, who talks about sequencing shots in films, which could be challenging, because Pialat does not use clapboards; and two trailers.

The third platter also holds an excellent 85-minute profile of Pialat's life and career from 2007, *Maurice Pialat L'Amour Existe…*, featuring clips from his films, behind-the-scenes footage and thoughtful interviews about what he wanted to accomplish. Before he found his way into filmmaking, Pialat had tried for several years to be a painter, and brought that perspective to his work. "As a painter, I learned something. Filmmaking is too vain to be a profession. It's a little like painting a canvas, I mean classical paintings, but today, the principles haven't changed. There's the construction and the stroke. The stroke comes last, but it is always better when the construction is good."

Shifting gears, Depardieu plays a country priest in Pialat's wonderfully mysterious melodramatic allegory, the 1987 **Under the Sun of Satan**, a two-platter Cohen eOne *Classics of French Cinema The Films of Maurice Pialat Volume 2* DVD release (UPC#741952817093, $45). Pialat himself has a major role in the 98-minute film, adding yet another layer to its metaphysical intricacies by playing the superior of Depardieu's character, who sends him out on 'assignments,' and Sandrine Bonnaire costars. The film has a dreamlike logic to its narrative, so it is difficult to say what is real in it and what is not, but it appears that the Devil gives Depardieu's character the power to heal, causing quite the spiritual and moral quandary within him. His performance and Pialat's performance are outstanding. Bonnaire is supposedly sixteen in the film, but she was twenty when she made it and looks even older than that. She also gives a theatrical performance, which is fine for the amount of dialog she has to deliver, but at odds with the far more organic way that Depardieu and Pialat handle their chunks of epistemological conversation. And this is one of those movies where the content of the dialog holds its own rewards, as well as advancing the plot. In any case, Bonnaire's character is pregnant, and gets away with murdering the father, an aristocrat, but becomes suicidal because she is already a bit crazy and the pregnancy doesn't help. Hence, when she meets Depardieu's character, they may be the two most internally confused humans on the face of the earth. Loudly booed when it won the Palme d'Or at Cannes (seemingly to Pialat's delight), the film would make a terrific double feature with **A Pure Formality** (Jun 20), in that both films are intellectually challenging allegories with Depardieu in the lead, but it is the better of the two, an exceptionally transfixing and stimulating drama worthy of many multiple viewings.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Colors are somewhat drab, but that is mostly conceptual, and there is an extended sequence set outdoors at night that is conveyed with a viable clarity. The monophonic sound is clear and the film is in French with optional English subtitles.

The most significant program on the second platter is a 57-minute collection of deleted and alternate scenes, cutting to a discussion of each scene—on a couch—by Dedet, assistant editor Cédric Kahn and screenwriter Sylvie Pialat. Not only do the scenes, which were sensibly left out, let you re-explore aspects of the drama, but the illuminations provided by the production team go beyond simply explaining why the takes weren't used to discussing the film's performances, lighting and other details. Also featured is a terrific 11-minute interview with Depardieu, who shares his love and admiration for Pialat and intriguingly compares his character's ability to revive the dead with the adaptation of literature to film—not just the glory of it, but the incompleteness that comes with resurrection; an interesting 17-minute piece on cinematographer Willy Kurant, who was thrown into the production when the initial cinematographer was fired and quickly realized that Pialat thrived on chaos, and therefore just ignored everything but what was needed for the film; a 28-minute talk by production designer Katia Wyszkop, who was a rookie at her job and got dropped into the maelstrom in a trial-by-fire challenge that she somehow managed to finesse, quite effectively; an interesting 15 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage; and two trailers.

Pialat's first feature film, **L'Enfance Nue**, a Criterion Collection DVD (UPC#715515061612, $30), which was produced in part by François Truffaut in 1968, is in some ways an anti-**400 Blows**. Partially scripted, partially improvised and partially utilizing documentary techniques, the film is about a child in foster care, played by a young actor with a devilish smile, Michel Terrazon. At the beginning of the 83-minute feature, one family is handing him back to Social Services because they cannot deal with how he treats the young girl also living with them (among other things, he kills her cat), and then the documentary-style film follows as he, in a company of genuinely abandoned kids, is taken out of Paris to a center in the countryside and then assigned to another family. For a while, his delinquencies are manageable and he takes a liking to the elderly woman who is also living with the couple that are caring for him, but eventually his troublemaking surges again. The film is neither charming nor in any way uplifting, but it has the same appeal that watching a car wreck can have, provided you are a safe distance from the carnage. Terrazon's character seems to be beyond rage or anger, matter-of-factly going about his business without regard for the rules or morals that everyone around him is following, but it is understandable as to why this is so. It is the prevention of him from continuing his ways that Pialat presents as a challenge likely lost before it is even attempted, but regardless, should not be ignored.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The colors are clearly fresh and fleshtones are accurate, but the image is soft and the quality of the cinematography was of secondary importance to capturing the activities of the performers with the least discomfort possible. The monophonic sound is adequate and the film is in French with optional English subtitles. Also featured is a 16-minute interview with Pialat from 1973 talking about why people go or don't go to the movies, why **L'Enfance Nue** failed at the boxoffice, and sharing horror stories about the fates of the kids that he left out of the film; a very good 6-minute interview from 2003 with Langmann and Grandperret, who point out, among other things, that

Pialat was never interested in transition shots—he would just leap from one scene to the next; an incisive 11-minute overview of the film's artistry; and a good 52-minute documentary about the film from 1969 that includes interviews with Pialat, several of the people who were in the film, and several others who served as the basis for some of the characters, as well as examining how the government looks after such children and what the effects have been on them as adults. Finally, there is a lovely 20-minute black-and-white short that Pialat made in 1960, *L'Amour Existe*, a narrated 'city symphony' piece about the supposed spiritual emptiness of the Parisian suburbs, with music from Georges Delerue. It is a comprehensive and thoughtful portrait, dense enough that one can admire Pialat's mastery of montage even if one takes issue with his opinions about what he is choosing to see.

A brilliantly composed and innovative tale about two people who can't live with one another and can't live without one another, Pialat's 1972 **We Won't Grow Old Together** (*Nous ne Vieillirons pas Ensemble*), is available from The Film Desk, Gaumont and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *Kino Classics* DVD (UPC#738329134723, $30). Jean Yanne is some sort of cameraman or filmmaker and Marlène Jobert works in temp jobs that she never holds down for very long. Yanne's character is also married to someone else. Nevertheless, he and Jobert's characters have a relationship that has gone on for several years. He is abusive, but not horrendously so if there are measures of abuse, and she keeps coming back to him or dismissing his outbursts as aberrations. When he is not carrying on, he is very sweet and even demure. In some ways, he could be the adult form of Terrazon's character in **L'Enfance Nue**, genuinely unable to anchor himself because he has never learned how. In any case, what makes the 106-minute film so intriguing is that Pialat constructs it mostly with scenes of the two of them together, interspersed with a few scenes where they are with others (her parents, his friends, his wife and so on) talking about one another. Since this is a romance that has been going on for quite some time, you never know at what point in the arc of that relationship you are seeing, although the scenes do appear to advance chronologically. Again and again, a scene will end with the two of them swearing that it is over and they will never see one another again, and the next cut will show of them together, happy go lucky, as if nothing had happened. It can be disconcerting or disorienting at first, but as the scenes compile and it becomes apparent that this is the perspective Pialat is utilizing, the film becomes utterly transfixing, and you start to search for clues in the costumes and settings in an attempt to create your own anchors to their story, and to understand.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks great, with accurate fleshtones and carefully defined textures. The monophonic sound is clear and the film's sound design is wonderful—more clues in the offscreen noises. The film is in French with optional English subtitles and comes with a trailer, an excellent and succinct 4-minute appreciation of Pialat's artistry and the film's accomplishments, and a great 20-minute interview with Jobert who delves into how closely Pialat associated himself with Yanne's character and how the production sometimes mirrored the state of the relationship between the characters.

Vincente Minnelli, Robert Altman, Akira Kurosawa and others made movies about Vincent Van Gogh, as did Pialat, whose 1991 Sony Pictures Classics film, **Van Gogh**, available on DVD from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (UPC#043396173590, $25), is an impressionistic portrait of the final year in the artist's life. Paul Dutronc gives an appealing performance as the painter—as an example of how impressionistic the film is, his ear is fully intact, although there is a single, vague reference in the dialog to it having previously been cut—spending time in a bucolic rural town in what is now, essentially, a suburb of Paris. Ostensibly, he is there to see a doctor about pains in his head, although the doctor is also an enthusiastic art collector and fan. The doctor's virginal daughter also takes a liking to him. The film runs a substantial 159 minutes, and is as interested or maybe more interested in the setting and period environment than in biographical details, which are parceled out over the course of the film, but in a very leisurely and offhand manner. Pialat's identification with the film's protagonist is pervasive, however, and goes beyond his choice of vocation. You have to trust Pialat that the parts of the film that leave the strongest impression—the day-to-day life in the village, the occasional rows Dutronc's character has with his brother, and the nightlife in Paris when he pops in for a visit—are accurate, while the connective sexual flings, the painter's own emotional instability (although rude to his hosts, he nevertheless seems happier more often than he is not), and his occasional swatting of a brush at a canvas are held to the spirit of the truth.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The colors are reasonably strong and fleshtones are accurate. The monophonic sound is okay and the film is in French with optional English subtitles, accompanied by a trailer and 33 minutes of terrific deleted scenes that are mostly too flawed or inconsequential to have been left in the film, but are often of great humor and expand the background of the drama at key moments.

Pialat brings his unique staging and editing to a crime film format in his 1985 Gaumont production, **Police**, an Olive Films DVD (UPC#8870903-3008) starring Depardieu and Sophie Marceau. For a while, the 113-minute film is everything one could hope for. Depardieu is a cop leading a drug investigation that wants to bust up a ring of Tunisian traffickers. They pull in a small fish, hassle him in interrogations and try to work their way up the chain. They also pull in his girlfriend, played by Marceau, and to make a long story short, she and Depardieu's character eventually hit it off, so to speak. By turning the film into a romance, even though it is a doomed one, Pialat and his screenwriters lose sight of what was really appealing about the 113-minute film, which is why the viewer has to sort through the confusion, not unlike the cops themselves, to figure out the relationships between the characters and what sort of crimes are being committed. Since everybody lies, it is not easy. At the same time, the way that the male cops treat the female cops—even their superiors or future superiors—is almost as bad as the way they treat their suspects when no one important is looking. The film has a lot going for it, and plenty of star power—Bonnaire has a brief but captivating supporting part as a hooker—so fans may still find it appealing, but it cops out, so to speak, allowing the fantasy or incompleteness of its relationship narrative to overwhelm the realities of the human interactions it was so carefully documenting.

The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Hues are reasonably bright, but details are lost in darker areas of the screen at times and the image is a little soft. While a logo on the end credit scroll proclaims that the film is stereophonic, the sound is centered. The film is in French with permanent English subtitles.

Olivier Assayas

Maggie Chung stars as herself in Olivier Assayas's confused but enjoyable comedy about moviemaking, **Irma Vep**, released as a two-platter Blu-ray by MK2 and The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515258111, $40). Jean-Pierre Léaud gives a wonderful performance as the burnt-out director who is attempting remake Louis Feuillade's famous 1915 silent serial, **Les Vampires** (Jun 04), with Chung's character as the villainous lead, sneaking about in a black bodysuit. The actress arrives at the production office, which is in a relentless state of pandemonium. Assistants snipe at other assistants while they all try to figure out what it is exactly that Léaud's character wants. Running 99 minutes, the narrative jumps ahead from time to time and is more of an expressionistic snapshot of what can go wrong on a movie set than an organized story. Some of the humor comes from the ellipsis—there is a scene in which the costume designer agonizes over what sort of leather mask Chung's character should wear (with a zipper mouth, or without?), but when they actually start shooting, the mask is made of cloth (which has its own problems). Cheery and reserved, Chung's character kind of floats through the chaos of costume fittings, coworkers hitting on her, and the director's vague intentions for her performance, while the viewer follows along, bemused. The film can be disappointing because the potential it presents at the beginning—everything from its chosen topic to casting Chung—is so grand that no matter what it does it isn't going to live up to it. What Assayas accomplishes instead is to provide a little mix of personal experiences in the industry and a tribute to Feuillade, blended with enough humor that the story is coherent even though the details are garbled and unclear, which is a sufficient entertainment if your expectations are not overly stimulated by all the black leather.

Nathalie Richard, Bulle Ogier and Lou Castel costar. The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. We reviewed a Fox Lorber DVD in Jun 98, which was somewhat grainy, and while the grain is still present, the Blu-ray stabilizes the images effectively. Colors are fresh and fleshtones are accurate. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has a modest dimensionality and is reasonably smooth, bringing out the pleasures of the pop songs on the soundtrack. The film is mostly in French, but there is a lot of business with Chung only speaking English, and there are optional English subtitles for just the French or for both. Also featured on the first platter is a 29-minute interview with Assayas in which he admits the film was shot on the fly and also talks about the source, about movies depicting moviemaking (he admires **Beware of a Holy Whore** and claims, "**Day for Night** didn't even cross my mind.") and what he wanted to accomplish with the project (as is sometimes the case with rushed, unplanned productions, the film was a hit); a knowledgeable 34-minute talk by Assayas on the joys of Hong Kong films, his first meeting with Chung, and how nobody knew what he was talking about when he first broached the importance of Hong Kong cinema (and how we still don't know everything—"In France there's this idea that Hong Kong cinema was 'discovered' much later, but its Golden Age was never discovered. The great directors are still unknown. It's like loving Peckinpah without having seen John Ford's films."); a nice 17-minute conversation with Chung and Richard about their experiences making the film and working together; and 30 minutes of behind the scenes footage that are slightly less hectic than what is depicted in the film (interestingly, Chung's presence is magnetic even when she is not the center of attention).

The second platter contains the 59-minute *Chapter Six* of the 1915 **Les Vampires**, which is the chapter that the filmmakers are attempting to imitate. While it contains some action, it is mostly the plotting that moves the story, with digressions to subplots, and it is, in effect, a complete movie in itself, about the theft of a large bankroll, which is then used as ransom, although the ending is open ended and the Irma Vep character is under the control of an evil hypnotist. The actress who played Irma Vep, known as Musidora, had a fascinating life and career, beginning as a Follies Bergère showgirl before becoming an actress and the toast of the Surrealists (in particular, André Breton). She then advanced to directing several well respected features, moved to Spain where she made more movies and had a serious fling with a famous bullfighter, was hailed with a parade in her honor in Paris, and later, as her fame faded, she became an archivist for Henri Langlois, interviewing her former collaborators. Eventually, as her films were rediscovered, she became a feminist icon. All of this is covered in a

terrific 68-minute documentary on the platter, which includes many archival photos, some terrific film clips, newsreels, reminiscences from family and friends, and other footage.

Assayas presents a breathless 46-minute theory of film in another segment. Some viewers will feel is it just word salad, but after extensively exploring the social and political parameters of filmmaking, he dives into the very heart of why and how films are created and what they represent. "Psychoanalysis enlightens us in two different forms. The first—broadly Freudian—form reminds us that auteurs are never entirely aware of what they are doing in their apprehension of characters and their acts, because their unconscious is at work. The other dimension, according to which psychoanalysis defines cinema, I would like to call, broadly, 'Jungian,' in the sense that cinema in its entirety, even in its most conventional and simplistic form, can be regarded as a collective unconscious. The world of images, the fantastic, the imaginary, wherever it may lead us, often in the most disappointing or banal ways, is the dream of our society, and it informs us, often without knowing." Although he does not take either video games or TikTok (the natural commercialization of experimental film) into account, he talks about streaming at length and considers what the future holds for features. He also offers a marvelous take on **Star Trek**, suggesting that it is about working in an office—after all, they are riding around on 'the Enterprise.'

Also featured is 5 minutes of silent footage shot by Assayas showing Chung applying and removing face cream, with a lot of artistic effects, intended as an 'artistic' short, and 4 minutes of silent black-and-white outtake footage featuring Chung in costume bopping about that is a great deal more effective in that regard.

Pierre Étaix

The entire cinematic output of French music hall comedian, Pierre Étaix, was three short films and five features he made during the Sixties in collaboration with screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, and they have all been collected in a two-platter Criterion Collection Blu-ray release, **Pierre Etaix** (UPC#715515105118, $60). Very similar to the early films of Jacques Tati (Étaix actually worked as a gagman for Tati on **Mon Oncle** and appeared in the film), with perhaps a slightly greater infusion of mime and physical business that has been honed on the stage, the films are effervescently humorous and best sampled not in a marathon viewing of the completed works, but more as a dabbling when the need for some dependable, lighthearted clowning arises. All of the films are monophonic, with clean and forceful audio tracks that add to the glory of Étaix's meticulously constructed sound effects. What dialog there is is in French with optional English subtitles. The first two shorts are in a squared full screen format, while the remaining films have an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. All of them are in black and white, except where noted, and all of them have impeccable transfers with vivid crispness and detail. In one film, the image is so sharp that you can see the whisker stubs on the upper lip of the female singer Étaix's character is infatuated with, during an extreme close-up. It is difficult to say whether that is intended to be a gag—the French do have their peculiarities—or just a result of the transfer's clarity, but either way it is a certification that care and diligence have been taken in the image restoration. The films are accompanied by introductions from Étaix that run 30 minutes in total.

The first short, from 1961, *Rupture*, runs 13 minutes and depicts Étaix's character battling the accoutrements of his writing desk as he attempts to respond to a break up letter he has received. He puts a tip on a pen, for example, dips the pen into the ink and when he pulls it out, the tip is not there. Co-directed by Carrière, the piece has plenty of amusing little gags like that, and no matter how often you expect one, you do not expect the next.

The second short, *Happy Anniversary* (*Heureux Anniversaire*) from 1962, which won an Oscar, runs 14 minutes and is filled with gags about rush hour traffic in Paris, with Étaix's character attempting to pick up some last minute items—flowers, champagne—before going home for a special meal. There are jokes about traffic being so heavy that people are doing other things in their cars while waiting, jokes about being stuck in tight parking spaces and jokes about trying to find parking spaces. The piece is well paced and imaginative, mixing tiny doses of anxiety with much more compelling and inventive distractions.

Étaix's initial feature, also from 1963, *The Suitor* (*Le Soupirant*), runs 85 minutes and has one segment that is set in the backstage of a music hall, as if Étaix were anchoring his risky venture upon something he trusted or felt comfortable with. His character is the spoiled adult son of a well-to-do couple, who is being urged to find a wife. At the beginning of the film, his room is decorated with images of outer space. Later, when he fixates upon a singing star, the space stuff comes down and her images are plastered everywhere. When his emotionally adolescent journey is complete, the room is cleaned up and he is ready for his adult responsibilities. Embellishing the pattern of adolescent progress, the two major sequences in the film are first, his encounter with a woman who fixates upon him, so much so that he attempts to avoid her or duck out on her advances, and then second, the infatuation with the singer—which includes the backstage business. Étaix's friendship with Jerry Lewis is described in the disc's supplementary materials, but you also get an anticipation, in his antics, of Paul Reubens's Pee-Wee Herman. In any case, Étaix's challenge was to fill a full-length feature film with the sorts of gags that succeeded in his shorts (just as Tati did in his first feature), and indeed, it is the steady reliability of comedy or attempts at comedy—everybody laughs at different things; our favorite was when he accidentally picks up a lipstick applicator, mistaking it for a cigarette lighter in a crowded bar—that makes the film so enjoyable, while the narrative arc is not just adequately assembled, but has such a lovely and lyrical conclusion that you come away from the entire film feeling relaxed and uplifted.

Étaix's masterpiece, the lovely 1965 *Yoyo*, is a beautiful blend of short comedic sequences that are strung together as a compelling generational tale about a wealthy man, played by Étaix, who runs off with a circus, and his subsequent stepson, also played by Étaix, who becomes a famous and successful clown. The 98-minute film is cleverly told in a progression of formats, so that its first segment plays like a silent film, advancing to sound and then ending as a television show. Meanwhile, the film explores the conflicts between romance and success, the surreal nature of the circus (he also slips in a cute allusion to **La Strada**, and mentions **8½** in his introduction, referencing it a couple of times in the film, as well), and the absurdities of extravagance. The humor is ever present, but the characters are also developed with care and attention, while the continual change of venue and circumstance sustains the freshness of the material. It is a unique, memorable and touching creation.

Also featured on the first platter is a 61-minute profile of Étaix compiled by his wife, Odile Étaix, in 2011 (he passed away in 2016). It includes a lot more footage of Étaix performing in the circus and on stage, meeting Lewis, contemporary shots of him and Carrière coming up with routines together (and laughing at their inventions), and extensive interviews with both of them, as well with other former collaborators. Since the program includes explanations of how gags in some of his other films were achieved, it is best to wait until after you've seen all of the movies to visit the program.

A blending of four comedic shorts, *As Long As You've Got Your Health* (*Tant Qu'on a la Santé*) was originally released in 1966 as another collection of gags linked by a narrative. Étaix was not happy, however, so he had one segment removed, put in a different one that he had made in 1962, and presented the four unblended shorts in a 1971 anthology with the same title. That is the 68-minute version presented on the disc, followed by the removed short, *En Pleine Forme* (*Feeling Good*), which runs 15 minutes and is presented separately. The first piece in the anthology, entitled *Insomnie* (*Insomnia*), has Étaix's character reading a vampire novel because he cannot sleep. The film alternates between gags involving reading in bed and being frightened by the book, and a depiction of the story, about a vampire lurking in a dark castle and threatening its inhabitants. The book reading segment is in color, while the vampire story is in black-and-white. The combination of the genre evocation with inspired bits of humor is fairly pleasing.

The remaining pieces are in black-and-white. *La Cinématographie* (*The Movies*) begins with a collection of gags about trying to get and keep a seat in a crowded movie theater, and then concludes with a series of lampoons of commercials shown before the main feature.

Étaix goes back to more gags about crowded traffic in the title segment, *Tant Qu'on a la Santé*, as well as gags about crowded sidewalks, moving on to gags about going to the doctor and then concluding with an amusing segment in a crowded restaurant, where Étaix's character is trying to take his elaborate prescription with his lunch.

The final piece, *Nous N'Irons Plus Au Bois* (*Into the Woods No More*), which has a slight sepia tint, has four characters, a farmer wearing a Buster Keaton hat who is trying to repair and build a wire fence around his field, a middle aged couple who are searching for a nice spot to have a picnic, and Étaix as a hunter with a shotgun, pointing it at everything that moves. There is a good amount of slapstick in the segment, including many of the film's funniest gags—Étaix's character accidentally shoots a utility pole so that an electric line drops on the fence. The woman turns on a radio for her picnic and further away, the farmer, touching the fence wire, begins spasmodically shaking as if he is dancing to the music.

The removed segment that is presented—and likely plays better—as a separate short, *Feeling Good*, is the most Tati-like of the pieces, a spoof on over crowded camping sites. It begins with gags about Étaix's character trying to make coffee in a campfire, but then expands to the jam-packed trailer park, where a variety of people attempt to relax or make their homes in an impossible environment. It is steadily amusing and imaginative.

The 1969 color feature, *Le Grand Amour*, presents scenes from a marriage and was created a couple of years after Gene Kelly's similar *A Guide for the Married Man*. It contains one inspired segment, a dream sequence in which people are riding on beds, as if they were cars, down rural roads, but is otherwise and unfortunately predictable. Étaix's character's marries a lovely girl, is given a significant position in her father's company, and they move into an apartment in the same building that her parents live. They begin in peaceful harmony, but midlife crises and a new secretary send things downhill, and despite the scattered comedic moments, the 87-minute film becomes less and less charming as it proceeds, ending with a continental punchline that may be accurate in its assessment of marriage, but not in its assessment of what viewers invested in the characters would like to see happen.

The final film, *The Land of Milk and Honey* (*Pays de Cocagne*), from 1971, which Carrière was not involved with, is a documentary shot mostly in the summer of 1968 and 1969 at a beach town. The fictional trailer park in *Feeling Good* is a paradise compared to the real one Étaix explores as part of the film. His emphasis is the desperate-looking entertainment the lower middle class seeks out on holiday, and the crowding, whether it is in the park, on the beach or on the town's streets, just magnifies how much a sensible person would want to be

somewhere else. The voiceover audio track features random interviews from the same locales, asking social questions, from attitudes about sex to the recent moon landing. The footage is in color, intercut with black-and-white footage from a local amateur singing contest that pulls no punches when it comes to the lack of talent among the singers. The 77-minute film has been extensively edited—Étaix opens the movie with staged gags about attempting to corral the footage in the editing room—and absolutely captures the tone and sense of the era for at least that vacation environment. There was one cut that made us laugh aloud, but otherwise, the more likely reaction is one of snobbish bemusement at the follies and unappetizing nature of other people's lives.

Albert Lamorisse

Four of the five Albert Lamorisse films on the two-platter Criterion Collection Blu-ray release, **The Red Balloon and Other Stories** (UPC#715515-290616, $80), have child protagonists (who undergo wincing physical challenges in each film), and the films could be said to be children's films, although obviously their entertainments are universal and not restricted to a specific age group. They are also, entirely through osmosis, incredibly educational, exposing viewers to animal behavior, world culture, geography, architecture, physics and so on as they go about their narratives. Four of the films have minimal and mostly voiceover dialog, in French with optional English subtitles, with additional options where noted, and all have decent monophonic audio tracks. The formula for returning to where you left off if playback on one of the movies is terminated on either platter is confusing and annoying.

The flagship program, **The Red Balloon** (*Le ballon rouge*), which is also available on DVD from Criterion's Janus Films (UPC#715515028820, $15), runs just 34 minutes, but it is Lamorisse's best known and most indelible work. The 1956 film, shot in Paris around the 20th arrondissement, is about a schoolboy who rescues and befriends a large red balloon as if it were a puppy. It follows him to and fro, responds to his bidding, and otherwise becomes his companion, waiting patiently outside the schoolhouse during the day and slipping into his upper floor bedroom window at night. This is not just any balloon, it is the definitive movie balloon. Bright red, it is the size of a microwave and has a short rope instead of a string. As the narrative plays out, the other children, acting out of jealousy, resentment and plain mean-spiritedness, try to steal the balloon and bombard it with projectiles. And while all of this is going on, in the periphery, the viewer is treated to daily life in working class Paris in the Fifties, and how the grungy sidewalks and gutters contrast spiritually with the aerial view of the cityscape.

The squared, full screen color picture on the Blu-ray is pristine and spotless. The picture on the DVD is darker and smearier. In some shots, hues are pleasantly deeper—we liked the wooden doors of the school more on the DVD than on the BD—but that is not sufficient compensation for the overall perfection the BD displays. The DVD is accompanied by a trailer.

The next film in the set, **White Mane** (*Crin blanc*), is also available from Janus on DVD (UPC#715515028929, $15). Anticipating **The Black Stallion**, the 1953 film depicts a young boy living in an isolated shack on a coastal plain who befriends a wild stallion that wranglers have been attempting to capture. Again, as the 40-minute film advances through its increasingly elaborate confrontations and chases (at one point, the hero is dragged through the mud for quite a while by the galloping horse), the film observes animal life in the marsh, the manner of subsistence living there, the mechanics of wrangling and the complex behaviors of the horses, all of it spellbinding.

The spare, incidental narration can also be accessed in English, read by Peter Strauss. The squared full screen black-and-white image again looks spotless and crisp on the BD, while the DVD's image is darker, softer and fuzzier. The sound is also weaker on the DVD, where the movie is accompanied by a trailer.

The final film on the first platter, the 1949 *Bim, the Little Donkey* (*Bim, le petit âne*), is set on a make-believe island that is similar in landscape and culture to French North Africa. The impoverished hero (although his dental work contradicts his outfit) has a cute little donkey as a pet, and a spoiled, wealthy child takes it away to play with it and torture it. The hero sneaks into the palace to steal it back, but eventually robbers take it and both boys must team up to save it. Running 55 minutes—the dialog once again is minimal, but there is a streamlined English dubbed version on the platter that runs 37 minutes, although the longer version never drags—the film has a number of excitements, primarily as the young heroes dangle from heights or get plopped into the ocean. Some of the acting—by the robbers, not the kids—is silent film bad, but there is enough of a narrative to keep a viewer involved while, educationally, the kids climb all over the whitewashed stone buildings, tile shingles and other unique structures, and later maneuver sail boats in a frantic chase.

On both language versions, the squared full screen black-and-white picture is in excellent shape, and the sound is clear. The musical score has a nice Arabian flair. The platter also contains two TV interviews from the late Fifties with Lamorisse running a total of 16 minutes (in the better of the two, he is interviewed by children), and a 23-minute interview with Lamorisse's son, Pascal (the star of **Red Balloon**), about his father's life and the films ("They went through a bunch of tests to find the best way to get the color. They combined an orange balloon inside a red balloon and then they varnished the red balloon.").

The skills that Lamorisse developed in **Red Balloon**, making it appear with hidden wires that objects and people in the air move in purposeful directions, were further developed and put to good use in the two films on the second platter. More of a travelog across France than anything else, the platter opens with a widescreen 1960 feature with a French title, *Le voyage en ballon*, that will help one understand the specifics of the English title, *Stowaway in the Sky*. Running 84 minutes, the presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The colors look lovely, the image is sharp and if there is rear projection involved for certain shots, it is very impressive, as if it was being done in IMAX or something. The alternate English language track is narrated by Jack Lemmon, who also does the voice of one of the characters in some of the few dialog passages.

The premise that sets things up is that a boy and his grandfather are traveling around France in a lighter-than-air balloon that the grandfather has invented. They are dressed in Nineteenth Century Jules Verne-ish outfits and the tech they are using is also antique, including an older automobile, but behind them, modern France carries on as if nothing was happening. They begin in Paris, fly to the northeast, then back and then to the northwest, and then south, making many stops along the way, while a helper with supplies follows them in the antique (and apparently self-steering) car. To keep viewers engaged, there are slapstick sequences, often involving the balloon not responding to its controls or slipping away from its tethers, but the meat of the film are the gorgeous and many faceted aerial views of French scenery, which Lamorisse deftly cuts with different shots of the man and the boy in the balloon's bucket to sustain effectively the illusion that they are the ones seeing what is being seen. How he got those shots is amazing enough (Lamorisse was a pioneer at using helicopter shots, and was tragically killed later in a crash) and you never see wires or shadows to give anything away. Still, not every viewer will be entranced by the finished product. It comes across as kind of a second rate Cinerama feature, but there are plenty of fans who will swear by shows like that, and this is definitely one they will enjoy.

The last film is the closest to a standard theatrical feature, the 1964 *Circus Angel* (*Fifi la plume*), which in some ways anticipates **Brewster McCloud**. While it relies quite a bit on slapstick, it has a legitimate narrative and, at 78 minutes, it is a regular fictional film. Philippe Avron is an athletic thief on the run, who ducks into a circus, runs afoul of the lion tamer, is charmed by a pretty horse rider, and is then given a pair of imbedded wings by a crazy circus inventor. He learns to fly and, using the circus as his base, he goes off on various adventures, mostly involving robberies (he has a penchant for clocks). Sometimes, people mistake him for an angel. In love with the horse rider, the lion tamer is jealous and competitive, often causing a ruckus.

This time you can see the wires now and then, and there is one shot where you can see the tip of the crane on the upper edge of the squared full screen black-and-white image, but the elaborate physical effects remain reasonably impressive and are good enough to carry the story along. The flying points of view are also captivating. Many of the performances are clownish, and some viewers will become impatient with the repetitiveness of the gags within the individual comedy sequences, but there are also a number of cute moments and the film stays fresh by flitting from one situation to the next as it works its way toward its charming romantic finale.

The film has an alternate English dubbed track. The image looks very nice, with no significant flaws. The platter also contains an artistically designed 49-minute portrait of Pascal and his daughter, Lysa, from 2008 as they read journals, look at memorabilia, share home movies, visit **Red Balloon** locations, attend a premiere for a remake (with Juliette Binoche), look at footage from the uncompleted film his father was working on when he died, and share other activities.

Jacques Becker

A bored gangster's moll catches the eye of a capable young ex-con turned carpenter at a dance hall and likes what she sees. The consequence of her preference is an idyllic romantic interlude bookended by murder in Jacques Becker's 1952 **Casque d'Or**, a Criterion Collection DVD (UPC#037429202326, $40). The film has two factors very much in its favor. The first is that it stars Simone Signoret (the title, which could freely be translated as 'Blondie,' refers to her character), who was no longer an ingénue but not yet a matron, reaching the height of her initial popularity and appeal as a French sex symbol and making it completely understandable that every gangster would want her for his own. The second is that the story is set in the Fin de Siècle (as opposed, in tone, to the Belle Époque), with the male characters all dressed like Mack the Knife and riding in carriages on cobblestones. The period dressing makes all the difference, because although there is nothing unpredictable about the story, the setting is so enchanting that every moment in the 98-minute film feels fresh and new. Becker has a precise control of the images, the performances and the action, and his creation transcends its clichés, with panache.

The full screen black-and-white picture is in very nice shape, which also adds to the film's pleasures. There are minor scratches and speckles, but they are nearly invisible most of the time. Contrasts are sharply defined and details are carefully textured. The monophonic sound is okay, and the film is in French with optional English subtitles. An English language track is included, too, where the three principal stars dubbed their own voices, so it isn't bad at all. A 7-minute collection of interesting silent behind-the-scenes footage is included, copiously annotated in a commentary by film expert Philip Kemp. Also featured is a good 27-minute profile of Becker from a French TV program, with memories and praises shared by many figures in the French film industry (Signoret tells a great story about Becker's use of psychology to get her to show up for her

contracted part after she'd changed her mind); a 6-minute interview from 1995 with costar Serge Reggiani; and a great 7-minute interview with Signoret from 1963 about her career.

Film historian Peter Cowie supplies an excellent commentary track, walking the viewer through the narrative ("Again, the high-angled shot, making the yard look like an arena, almost a circus ring. The music is stopped. Instead we have just the harsh panting of the two men, and very faintly in the background, the sound of voices laughing and chanting in the bar. And a dog somewhere, ignorant of this mortal struggle being waged only a few yards away.") with asides on the film's thematic constructs, the backgrounds of the cast and crew, the movie's production history, other odds and ends including a brief history of absinthe, and the difficulties the French film industry found itself in immediately after World War II because the most experienced filmmakers had not stopped working during the Occupation and were therefore politically handicapped.

Mathieu Kassovitz

A Homeric day in the lives of three young men in the aftermath of a riot at the residential projects where they live, Mathieu Kassovitz's impressively styled 1995 feature, **La Haine**, calls forth the blend of reality and drama that **L'Enfance Nue** utilized, but with the daring flair of **Menace II Society**. The three friends played by Saïd Taghmaoui, Hubert Koundé and Vincent Cassel (who would later play one of the villains in **Ocean's Twelve**), are quite pointedly from different racial backgrounds—Arab, Central African and Jewish—but are all in the same boat of poverty, repression and frustration, thus calling to mind **Mean Streets**, as well. Their day begins reacting to the destruction caused by the riot, but later in the afternoon they journey into the center of Paris and then, missing the last commuter train back (the apartments are an hour from the city), try to make their way by morning, giving that portion of the narrative the structure of a classic nighttown odyssey, in contrast to the *Iliad*-like events of the previous night. The performances are superb—in essence, the kids are street punks, but the actors sustain a sympathetic link with the viewer despite their bravado posing and unfiltered tempers. What really raises the 97-minute film's emotional impact, however, is the masterful artistry with which it has been constructed. Shot in black and white, Kassovitz somehow manages to balance the reality of his stolen shots on the streets with vividly lit and framed images that place the characters in ironic or existential surroundings without losing the hiphop tone it is using to hold the film together. His filmmaking is like graffiti, simultaneously art and a certification of decay.

To this end, Janus Films and The Criterion Collection have released the film as a two-platter 4K Blu-ray (UPC#715515294515, $50). The second platter is a standard Blu-ray that is also available separately (UPC#71551509-3712, $40), but it is not as sharp or as clean as the 4K presentation. The film has been made with too much talent not still to be enjoyable, but it is the 4K presentation that makes every shot riveting. Curiously, the standard BD has only a 5.1-channel DTS track, while the 4K presentation defaults to a 2-channel track so that the 5.1 track must be activated separately. The sound mix has a very satisfying dimensional presence, delivering a smooth array of pop tunes and many choice environmental noises. The rumble of the subway is the true rumble of a subway. The film is in French with optional English subtitles, and both platters come with a commentary track featuring Kassovitz, who gives a pretty good running talk in English about the day-to-day shooting challenges. He verifies that one amazing shot, which looks like it was done with a drone except that drones weren't around then, was done with a helicopter, and he explains that the blight and trash surrounding the characters was all real. "We didn't break the windows to make it look bad, we just used it how it was." He also verifies that **Mean Streets** was one of his inspirations, and he speaks about the social dynamics of the housing projects, the difficulties young people have dealing with the police, and other pertinent topics.

The standard BD platter has additional supplementary features, including a very nice 15-minute appreciation of the film by Jodie Foster (her company had invested in it); an excellent 34-minute look at public housing, the social problems it creates and how those problems are reflected in the film; a whopping 83-minute retrospective documentary that goes over how the filmmakers all moved into the projects a month before the shoot so the local residents could get used to them, a few things that went on during the shoot, and a lot of material from award ceremonies that honored the film; a kind of 6-minute blooper reel of jazzed up home movies taken before the shoot; a 7-minute behind-the-scenes piece about shooting a specific sequence (you also get a taste of what the film might have looked like in color); 10 minutes of nice but wisely deleted and extended scenes (also in color) with introductions by Kassovitz; two trailers; and a small collection of captioned production photos in still frame.

Jerome Enrico

Jerome Enrico's fully amusing 2013 Gaumont comedy, **Paulette**, is available on Blu-ray from eOne Entertainment and Cohen Media Group (UPC#741952807193, $35). Bernadette Lafont portrays a struggling pensioner living in the projects (**La Haine** territory) who cannot make ends meet until she talks her way into working for a local drug distributor, eventually drawing upon her experience running a bakery to sell spiked cakes and cookies out of her apartment, with the assistance of her geriatric companions. Running a compact 87 minutes, the film initially attempts to build on the humor of her inherent racism and bitterness, but that soon gives way when success lowers her defensiveness. The performances are good fun, the film has just enough of a success daydream to give it a feel-good vibe without getting out of control, and the ending is quite clever. Meanwhile, Lafont's no-nonsense performance and Enrico's meticulous sense of timing makes for, well, the ideal balance of ingredients.

The film does not start up where it left off if playback is terminated. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer looks fine, with accurate fleshtones and stability in the darker sequences, and there is a passable 5.1-channel DTS audio track that dimensionalizes the environmental noises without otherwise calling attention to itself. The film is in French with optional English subtitles and comes with a trailer and a nice 9-minute collection of sensibly deleted scenes.

Aurélie Saada

A very pleasant, relatively simple film, about an older woman adjusting to widowhood, singer and filmmaker Aurélie Saada's 2021 **Rose**, is available from Cohen Media Group and Kino Lorber as a *Contemporary Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329269553, $30). Françoise Fabian plays the title character, in her late seventies, who is devastated at first by the death of her husband, but gradually pulls herself together and gets on with her life, much to the consternation of her grown children. The narrative is not just predictable, but fairly common (**All That Heaven Allows**/**Ali Fear Eats the Soul**), although that does not prevent the film's charms from providing a satisfying amusement, or enabling its fascinating milieu from sustaining a genuine intrigue—not for the narrative, but for the film's cultural details. Saada's heritage is the Jewish Tunisian community, which still exists in Tunisia, but thrives in Paris, and that is the heritage of the film's characters, so that holiday and event traditions, and cooking, are meticulously covered during the course of the 103-minute film. Indeed, although they don't bother translating it from the film's French with the disc's optional English subtitling, at the very end of the credit scroll are the recipes for several of the dishes shown in the film. Even more captivating, several of Saada's lovely songs made as a recording artist are incorporated in the film's score, which sound especially smooth and velvety, with an enchanting dimensionality, on the 5.1-channel DTS soundtrack.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and is also in excellent condition, with clearly articulated textures and skin tones. Along with a trailer, there is an excellent 43-minute interview with the amazing Saada (she is relatively young, and this was her first film), talking about her inspirations for the movie (much of it coming from what she has witnessed in her own life), the film's feminist lessons (and the double standard with how women and men are treated in society), and how she was inspired by the people she worked with, including Fabian, who was actually a decade older than her character, and Saada's young school-age daughter, who wrote one of her songs.

Paul Vecchiali

The opening shot of the 1986 feature directed by Paul Vecchiali and released on Blu-ray by Radiance films, **Rosa La Rose, Fille Publique** (UPC#760137184355, $40), runs a full 5 minutes. The camera begins on the star, Marianne Basler, swinging around with her hands on hips to answer an unseen customer who has asked how much she costs. The shot continues as the customer comes into view while she walks down the promenade, and she chats for a bit before turning and walking in the other direction where another customer hands her a bright red rose and she takes his arm, the rose an apparent indication that he has paid in advance. The first customer is annoyed as they walk back up to him, and the two customers engage in a brief macho scuffle before she persuades them to calm down, puts her arms around each one's shoulders, and goes off with both them at once. It is quite clear that they are looking more forward to getting together with each other than with her. But the shot doesn't stop there, for as they walk off into the distance, the camera drops down on two other prostitutes, who then converse about how popular Basler's character is and a number of other things as they rise from the bench and go walking themselves, while men come up to them and hand them roses. Thunder is heard in the distance as one of the two goes off with a soldier and the other walks by herself, sniffing the rose, only to have another off screen customer ask her her price. At any moment during that shot, you fully expect an onscreen director to shout 'Coupe!' and the camera to pull back and reveal that the whole sequence is just a movie within a movie, because it is so corny and artificial, it can't possibly be the film itself. After all, the top of Basler's dress is clearly glued to her chest so she won't fall out of it. But it is indeed a real movie about the lives of prostitutes and it continues with its silly poses, flashy camera moves and convoluted emotions for its full 87-minute running time. Basler's character becomes disillusioned with her popularity and decides she wants to get out of the business, while her pimp, played by Jean Sorel, who looks like Robert Wagner, and his hunky assistant pimps, try to keep her in line. **Vivre Sa Vie**, it is not. Heck, **Irma La Douce**, it is not. At one point, the pimps and the other prostitutes hold a birthday party for her, and there is a shot, with Basler in the center of the dining table, that imitates 'The Last Supper,' but **Viridiana**, it isn't, either.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer is fantastic. Hues are vivid and fresh, and the image is crisp with minimal grain, although the clarity only serves to highlight the bad makeup effects. The only thing that gives away the film's age, however, is its monophonic sound, which remains centered even when Basler breaks into song, which she does, thank goodness, only once. The film is in French with optional English subtitles, and comes with a 14-minute overview of the film and Vecchiali's career, such at it is (Jean Rolin is appropriately cited as a kindred

spirit), that desperately attempts to find art where none exists, a 5-minute promotional interview with Vecchiali, and a 4-minute promotional interview with Basler and Sorel, the interviewers making a big thing about the prostitution angle, naturally.

If you ever went to the movies in Paris back in the Seventies or Eighties, you saw trailers for films like this, which make the films look like they are undiscovered masterpieces, full of highly stylized shots, ample nudity (both male and female), and intriguing, enigmatic-looking narratives. But if you got conned and actually went to one of the films, you quickly realized why such movies never got out of Paris, let alone made it to America. They are all self-conscious style and no conscious substance. If you are a connoisseur of bad movies and thrive upon haughty awfulness, then the **Rosa La Rose** Blu-ray should be, enthusiastically, at the top of your purchase list, but otherwise, you are better off investing in cut flowers. Their appeal will last longer.