

THE DVD LASER DISC NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER
2023
Issue #472
\$5.00

PO Box 382, Glen Cove, NY 11542-0382 • (212) 242-3324 • www.DVDLaser.com

4K Heaven

The greatest motion pictures are those that excite you for their use of the medium itself. The shared discovery, between the filmmakers and the viewer, of what occurs when images are combined and juxtaposed, sound and music are applied, emotions of the characters are exposed, ideas are expressed, and thoughts are manifested, because a film has been put together in a specific way, creates a deep emotional response that transcends the film itself, allowing the viewer to grasp the imagination, the beauty and the justification for existence that life itself has to offer. Terrence Malick's 1978 Paramount feature, Days of Heaven, is one such motion picture.

The standard Blu-ray included in the 4K Blu-ray Paramount Criterion Collection release of Days of Heaven (UPC#715515289214, \$50) is identical to the Criterion BD release we reviewed in Apr 10 and is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The 4K presentation, however, is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, eliminating a sliver of picture information from the bottom of the screen. While hues are more subdued on the 4K presentation, the image is more finely detailed. Arguably, the slight subjugation of tone is more appropriate to the drama. Essentially, however, both versions look fantastic and since they both come in the same package, there is no shortcoming to having both variations available.

There is less ambiguity in the 5.1-channel DTS sound, which was drawn from a 4.1-channel magnetic track. As we mentioned in our previous review, there is a rumor that the original 70mm prints had a 6.1-channel audio track, with a more pronounced mix, but this remains an elusive Holy Grail. As for what is at hand, while the sound on the standard BD is terrific, not only are the directional effects more pronounced and better defined on the 4K presentation, but the sound itself is more liquid and more transporting, enveloping the viewer in the film's early Twentieth Century period setting. The musical score, a combination of Ennio Morricone, Leo Kottke, Camille Saint-Saëns and others, serves as a direct highway between the film's fulfilling historical melodrama (it is also, at key moments, enormously funny), its captivating images of nature, people, and machines, and the abstract concepts of beauty and spirit, making the 4K presentation a transcendent experience.

The 4K platter comes with optional English subtitles and the group commentary originally produced for Criterion's DVD (Nov 07). The standard BD comes with a 22-minute interview featuring star Richard Gere, a 13-minute interview with co-star Sam Shepard, a 12-minute interview with co-cinematographer Haskell Wexler, and a 20-minute interview with camera operator John Bailey.

4K Oppenheimer

Amid a flurry of deeply flawed science-fiction films and above average comic book movies, Christopher Nolan made an exceptionally good World War II feature, Dunkirk (Jan 18), which still toyed with temporality in a gimmicky manner but captured the essence of the history Nolan wanted to share. Nolan has now returned to World War II and its aftermath for a serious and astoundingly well-marketed/popular 2023 biographical feature, Oppenheimer, a three-platter 4K UltraHD Blu-ray from Universal and SDS Studio Distribution Services (UPC#191329253120, \$50). The world is at the mercy of the failings of its geniuses. The film depicts how human and how flawed everyone involved in the creation of the atomic bomb was, and how even more flawed those who were not directly involved in the project were, particularly those concerned about security. Hindsight hovers over the film like the bomb itself, as the uncertainty principles of politics enmesh the hero in delusive entanglements.

Cillian Murphy plays J. Robert Oppenheimer, from his days as a college student to receiving post-retirement honors, with much of the 180-minute film looking at his overseeing of the development of the atomic bomb and the problems he encountered after his work was done, because of his liberal political views before the war and his own indecision about how the bomb should be utilized. In a weird way, the film reminded us of Hamlet, creating a profound portrait of human ingenuity and insecurity in the face of crisis, compiled with an elongated string of beguiling obscurities. As with his other movies, Nolan mixes together timelines, but he does so in a fairly traditional manner, and utilizes changes in both the film's aspect ratio and a mix of black-and-white and color footage to effectively differentiate the time periods and points of view of specific, intercut scenes (Nolan is masterful at this compared to the primitive attempt Steven Soderbergh

made in Traffic). It is the intricacy of these storylines and how they blend together that draws a viewer back to the film multiple times and makes owning the disc worthwhile. That Nolan was able to accomplish this sort of attraction without resorting to overt gimmicks in his storytelling is a welcome maturation of his capabilities as an already exceptional filmmaker.

The film's periphery also teases the viewer with audiovisual evocations of quantum mechanics and the theory's bent reflections within the cultural horizons of the Thirties and Forties. When the bomb goes off, there is quite a boom—be sure to tie down your dishes before you start the film—but most of the movie is conversational, with a little bit of sex and some nice-looking locations to keep the delivery of the movie's facts, arguments, deliberations, divergent psychologies and outright backstabbing stimulating. Murphy does not in any way, shape or form make a dashing hero, even with the cool hat he wears, but he still manages to be present in a majority of the film's running time without exhausting either one's patience or one's sympathy.

There are also quite a number of engaging supporting actors, including Matt Damon (who is fine as General Leslie Groves, but pales in comparison to other actors who have filled the role in previous films, notably Brian Dennehy and Paul Newman), Robert Downey Jr. (who is outright chilling in what is probably the film's most unexpected storyline, playing AEC Chairman, Lewis Strauss), Emily Blunt, Florence Pugh (as Oppenheimer's Ophelia, Jean Tatlock), Josh Hartnett, Casey Affleck, Rami Malek, Matthew Modine and Kenneth Branagh. In an eye-opening advance of age for two enjoyable performers, Tom Conti plays Albert Einstein and James Remar is Henry Stimson. Gary Oldman takes a shot at being Harry S. Truman.

Because the jumps back and forth in time require concentration, the better the film's delivery the more involved a viewer becomes in the drama, and to this end, the 4K format is ideal. A standard Blu-ray presentation has also been included in the set, along with a standard BD platter with special features. Those two platters are also available separately (UPC#191329253045, \$40). The standard BD is absolutely terrific, sure, but the particle accelerations that occur when the sights and sounds of the 4K presentation interact with your brain cannot be reproduced with lesser technology. There are fleeting smears in darker areas of the screen on the standard BD that we would normally dismiss, except that the smears are not there on the 4K playback. The film was shot in IMAX and so, being closer to the vividness of its source, the image on the 4K presentation is sharper and hues are more compellingly defined. Rather surprisingly, the sound on the 4K platter (as well as the standard BD) is limited to a 5.1-channel DTS mix, but it still delivers an enveloping and detailed sound field, and again, the audio is slightly richer on the 4K playback. The 4K platter has alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. In addition to those choices, the standard BD platter has an audio track that describes the action ("Under a blue sky, the Oppenheimer's convertible crests the top of the mesa. Following a dirt road, they pass a small white building with a sign that reads, 'Los Alamos Project Main Gate,' on their way into the newly built town.")

The second standard BD platter has five trailers, including a 5-minute teaser and a trailer promoting the film's projection in the IMAX format (with different variations in aspect ratios than appear in the standard presentation) and a rewarding 35-minute 2023 NBC Meet the Press session in front of a live audience, hosted by Chuck Todd, with Nolan, the co-author of the Oppenheimer biography upon which the movie is based, Kai Bird, and a couple of physicists. They talk a lot about the politics depicted in the film, the realities behind the movie's creation and the fact that Oppenheimer's desire, in allowing the bombs to be dropped on Japan to prevent them from ever being used on people again, has worked, as one panelist says, "So far."

A terrific 8-minute segment looks at how the film's cinematography was processed. Despite Nolan's future-oriented filmography, the movie was not made digitally because the digital format has not yet reached the pixel count that IMAX film stock can achieve. Not only was the editing done by hand (concurrently with editing it digitally), but parts of the film were shot on a previously unutilized 65mm black-and-white film stock, which then had to be processed with non-color processing chemicals, challenging all of the youngsters who had never worked with that sort of material before. As part of a great 72-minute collection of production featurettes, there is a segment that goes further into the challenges and achievements of the cinematography, and how one might very well be tempted to watch the 4K presentation simply to absorb those accomplishments, celebrating the dynamic between science and cinema.

Oppenheimer (Continued)

Finally, as an ideal supplement, Universal's NBC News group produced a 2023 documentary about Oppenheimer, essentially covering the same periods of his life that the film covers, and explaining what happened in a more traditional, documentary style. Other than including an insightful interview with Nolan, the promotional links to the feature film are minimal, and running 87 minutes, it is an ideal program to watch first if you know very little about Oppenheimer ahead of time, or to watch afterwards, if you want to sort through the film's dramatic fusions and fissions in a more linear manner.

Ford in 4K

Two films that would have succeeded anyway, but were clearly boosted to blockbuster hits by the presence of Harrison Ford in their lead roles, have now been released in 4K format on Blu-ray. Ford's movie star presence is secondary to the almost fumbling innocence he projects as a hero, imbuing his characters with a pragmatism that forces him to push through desperation and reservation in the search of truth and justice. While his occasional deer-in-the-headlights expressions can be disarming, his performances are subtle and careful, nuances that often got lost on older home video releases of his films, but can be better appreciated in the clarity that 4K provides.

In what was probably Ford's biggest hit in terms of the boxoffice, outside of the sci-fi action spectacles he anchored, he played the wrongly accused protagonist in the outstanding 1993 Andrew Davis thriller from Warner Bros., *The Fugitive*, based upon the popular Sixties TV series, which has now been released as a fantastic WB SDS Studio Distribution Services *4K UltraHD* Blu-ray (UPC#883929813889, \$34). Although many might argue that the film was stolen by second-billed Tommy Lee Jones, playing the United States Marshall heading the search team chasing Ford's character after he escapes incarceration, it is instead the polarity between the two performances—Ford is warm and fuzzy while Jones is cold and efficient (but not above wisecracking)—that fuels the film's continual, unwavering energy. When they finally bond at the film's end, it is an emotionally explosive moment, as compelling as any romance.

During the climax, Ford's character has an extended fight with the villain in a hotel building and at one point the two, rather dazed, are in an elevator. The villain staggers out and the door starts to close, but a single arm suddenly appears in the remaining gap to push the door back open again. Indeed, throughout the film and especially during the harrowing scenes of the hero's initial escape, Davis and Ford worked out that Ford would often use just one arm to do things and leave the other arm relaxed to the side. It isn't always the same arm and he doesn't do it when it is impractical, but it is a wonderful subliminal touch that you only see after you've watched the movie dozens of times. Ford's character is searching for a 'one-armed man,' who murdered his wife, but the subliminal tease is that maybe, after all, he is the one-armed man himself. Of course he isn't, but it is a brilliant bit of direction and acting.

The film is superbly constructed. The stars are a part of it, but so is the script, which has no false moments and has many lovely interludes between the chase scenes, from the joyously witty patter Jones' character exchanges with his 'team' as they look for clues (his unit seems to have been the model for umpteen television shows that followed depicting crime detection groups) to the wonderful moments when Ford's character, a doctor, is unable or unwilling to suppress his urge to heal someone he sees suffering, even when the police are breathing down his neck. Ford's performance may frustrate purists who want more responsiveness from an actor, but he fulfills the part of the wrongly accused innocent with an unprepossessed determination that is far more meticulous than it appears, trusting that Davis and Jones would fill in the rest, and making the 130-minute film the monster hit that it was.

The movie is so tightly realized and so rich in motion picture suspense that the 4K format is ideal for its delivery. Everything—the image, the Dolby Atmos sound—is perfect, so that your attention, already riveted by the story and the performances, is completely locked down by the preciseness of the delivery. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The sound may have a 1993 mix, but it has plenty of power and is crisply defined, making it fully immersive and adding significantly to the effectiveness of James Newton Howard's score. There are alternate French, Spanish, Italian and German audio tracks and fourteen subtitled options, including English. Along with a trailer, there are 60 minutes of excellent retrospective featurettes breaking down every major action sequence in the film, celebrating the cast and going over many details of the movie's long gestation and frantic shoot. (Incidentally, nobody ever mentions Ford's single arm bits in any part of the supplement.)

Davis and Jones supply a rewarding commentary track, accompanied by a mildly confused 2-minute teaser/introduction to the commentary that also includes a quick acknowledgement by Ford. Recorded in 2011, Davis does most of the talking, describing what was happening during the staging of each scene (and offering up trivia—Davis grew up in Chicago and many of the locations were from his own childhood; also, David Janssen's mother has a cameo part as a juror in a courtroom scene), but Jones speaks up at appropriate moments, talking about the contributions of the artists around him and the expectations they had for the film, which were minimal (in one of the featurettes, costar Joe Pantoliano recalls a conversation with Jones before shooting began when they arrived on location and decided to goof off a bit since, 'Let's face it, man. Ain't nobody gonna win an Academy Award on this one.'). Indeed, as Davis and Jones describe it, a lot of the film's marvelous dialog was made up on the set as the actors got the feel for their characters and how they would 'really' talk in various locations and situations. At key points throughout the film, the story was changed, and always for the better. Although he doesn't mention it directly, Davis explains the oddest moment in the film, where Ford's character is

walking down the street late at night and a woman stops to give him a ride. In fact, as Davis does explain, there was an earlier scene in which she was a waitress in a diner, so that she had already met him and wasn't just picking up a strange man in the middle of the night out of the blue. Julianne Moore was just getting started at the time but she had a part as a romantic interest for Ford's character that had to be radically trimmed when they realized during the shoot that Ford's character should still be in love with his dead wife and not have his attentions distracted. Nevertheless, Moore has so much talent that her scenes that were left in the film, as a harried doctor in a hospital, are incredibly powerful because of the level of her performance.

Peter Weir's 1985 *Witness*, a Paramount film that has been released in 4K by Paramount and Arrow Video (UPC#760137135760, \$60) and has also been issued as a standard Blu-ray (UPC# 760137135777, \$50), is pretty much the opposite of the sort of kinetic action thriller that Davis was mastering, but that is precisely why the 4K release of the film, in particular, is so compelling. Looking at America from the outside, Weir explores the Amish community in Pennsylvania where most of the film is set as an almost mystical world, one that is a component of what is, to him as an Australian, an equally mystical America. One of the film's basic themes is that of an outsider's view, and Weir communicates the concept with every choice he makes. The cinematography by John Seale is often soft and the lighting, underscoring the lack of electricity in the community, is subdued, but as a result, the close-ups of Kelly McGillis look like Dutch paintings. Ford's skin tones are grey and almost lifeless in the scenes set in Philadelphia, where he is investigating a murder that the son of McGillis' widowed character has witnessed, but as soon as he enters the Amish environment, even though it is night and even though he is genuinely lingering near death from a bullet wound, his flesh has warmth and you know immediately that McGillis' character will be nursing his character not just back to health, but into life.

From Maurice Jarre's electronic, Eighties score, to Weir's natural inclination for lyricism, where older home video presentations of the 112-minute film were sleepy and lethargic, the 4K presentation is transfixing. Not only are the images compelling, but the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is exquisite, bringing an uplifting or pulse quickening sensory incision with every tone Jarre chooses—the grandest, most rousing use of the bass is not for the shootout at the end, but to introduce the barn raising sequence that has nothing to do with the crime story and everything to do with the soul of the film. There are optional English subtitles.

The standard Blu-ray is a complete duplication of the 4K version, including the supplemental features. While it still presents the film in a manner that should please fans, it does not facilitate the spine-tingling satisfaction that the 4K version enables. The picture on the standard BD is in fact a touch brighter, but it does not convey the painterly texture that the 4K presentation achieves. At times, the sound is not quite as crisp, either.

Danny Glover and Vito Mortensen had parts in the film before they became big stars. Lukas Haas, Josef Sommer, Alexander Godunov and Patti Lupone co-star. Film expert Jarret Gathan supplies an excellent commentary track, providing a thorough history of the film's development and production, and how its different artists were gathered, as well as providing an exceptional level of detail on how the film fared in the boxoffice and around the world, and talking extensively about the 'fish out of water' genre.

Along with a trailer and a passable collection of publicity photos in still frame, there is an outstanding 63-minute retrospective documentary that includes interviews with Weir ("From a film perspective, which is what I immediately reacted to, was that really, within the one film, you had not just two countries, but two time zones, so without it being science fiction, you really had the Nineteenth Century and the Twenty-first Century in the same frame."), Mortensen, Ford (who believes that this was the film which certified his boxoffice appeal as a legitimate actor), McGillis (in a particularly touching reflection) and others; a nice but excruciating 7-minute interview with Ford from 1985 (the interviewer spends more time pestering him with questions about *Star Wars* and Indiana Jones than about the film at hand); a very cute 4-minute deleted scene between McGillis and Lupone that was used to extend the TV broadcast running time but slows up the narrative at a critical juncture; a fine 15-minute analysis of the film's artistry that reiterates some of the highpoints of the commentary and effectively summarizes how the film came to be; a very good 15-minute interview with Seale, who admits that sometimes the shots were out of focus but that Weir chose them because they had captured the best performances, and also explains that the Dutch painting look of the film was deliberate ("The interiors of the Amish house is unashamedly based on [Johannes] Vermeer, the famous Dutch painter. His paintings were on public display in Philadelphia at the time and Peter took us down with heads of department, down to the art gallery and we wandered through, had looked at all the Vermeer paintings, so that when you see, say, the interior of the funeral service, it's basically a Vermeer copy in that the window light, the daylight coming into the windows, was the main light on the interior."); and 16 minutes of older interviews with Weir, Ford and McGillis that generally cover the same material as elsewhere, but with a younger, less practiced perspective.

The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter is published during the first week of every month. Subscription prices are \$47.50 for one year or \$75 for two. Beyond the U.S.: \$70 for one year or \$130 for two. MC, VISA, Disc. & Amex: Provide acct# and expir. date. PAYPAL: DVDlaserdisc@gmail.com. Address all letters: To the Editor, The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter, PO Box 382, Glen Cove NY 11542 or e-mail to dpratt@DVDLaser.com. Letters may be edited for length. All contents are copyright 2023 The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter and may not be copied or reprinted without written consent. ISSN 0749-5250

The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter is edited and published by Douglas Pratt

The definitive Barbarella

Part of the lingering cultural evidence that whole generations went through adolescence in the Sixties, Roger Vadim's 1968 fetishized science-fiction sex comedy, Barbarella, barely functions as a movie, but it is an enduring collectible from an era which had decided to declare to the entire world that it had discovered sex. With its peek-a-boo space suits, love bite dolls and birds, whip-happy latex-ed villainesses, a bubbly 'Mathmos' danger, beds and pleasure machines at every turn, the film was designed as much for its multi-page pictorial spreads in Playboy as it was designed to attract eager young boys and, if available, their tolerant dates. Being a good sport, Jane Fonda stars as the title character, an interstellar agent sent to what passes for a planet on a soundstage to find a lost scientist. Along the way, she meets characters played by Ugo Tognazzi, John Phillip Law, Marcel Marceau, Milo O'Shea and David Hemmings, all of whom have sex with her (except Marceau), some in the traditional manner and some in a more futuristic and artificial process. The stars, and especially Fonda, are talented comedic actors, and it is as a comedy that the movie, based upon a French comic book, justifies its 98-minute running time, since otherwise the plot is loopy (the heroine's arrival and activities instigate a revolution and mass destruction). The designs are imaginative—the spaceship used by Fonda's character, though vaguely phallic, is unlike any spaceship in any other movie and can be commended as such—but are far more concerned with form than with any sort of logical function. During the opening credits, in which Fonda appears to do a striptease in zero gravity, the title song promotes the heroine's world as, 'psychedelia,' and that is why, along with the sex, the film has remained an attraction as the decades have passed. It isn't that its time has gone by, it is that the adolescent within wants to hold onto that time and never let go, and that as new adolescents come along and are exposed to it, they won't want to let go, either. The Sixties were too much fun.

We reviewed a Paramount DVD in Jul 99. Paramount replicated that DVD as a single-platter Blu-ray with the misguided title, Barbarella Queen of the Galaxy (UPC#097361466460, \$30—the bizarre title came from a theatrical re-release after Star Wars). Paramount has now joined forces with Arrow Video to release a two-platter Blu-ray that restores the film's genuine title, Barbarella (UPC#760137139461, \$50), and not only provides an upgraded transfer of the film, but an entire second platter of wonderful supplementary features. That second platter is also included with an even more upgraded 4K UHD Blu-ray (UPC#760137139454, \$60).

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The picture on Queen of the Galaxy looks fine, but the picture on the standard Arrow Blu-ray is nicer, with slightly deeper colors. Queen of the Galaxy is monophonic and is accompanied by alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, optional English, French, Spanish and Portuguese subtitles, and a trailer.

As for the Arrow discs, the 4K presentation is the definitive version, as the image is less grainy than the standard BD while retaining its richer hues. The film is available both with its original mono track and with a Dolby Atmos track. The Dolby Atmos widens the sound and improves the bass response, but otherwise everything remains centered, although it is preferable to the harsher sounding mono track, so fans will definitely want to, as it were, experience the 'Mathmos' in Atmos. Fonda does her own dubbing on the alternate French audio track, including pronouncing the names of the characters with an alternate accent than she uses when pronouncing them in English. On the whole, the French track is quite lyrical and, all things considered, fairly easy to follow. There are optional English subtitles. Another monophonic audio track has just the music cues, in mono. The vaguely electronic score by Bob Crewe and Charles Fox is an artifact of its times, but as such, it is more appealing and addictive now than when it first appeared. A 2-minute alternate opening credit sequence repositions some of the credits and cuts down, just a little bit, on the shots of Fonda's flesh. A minute-long alternate closing credit sequence has a pseudonym for the music credit.

Along with a trailer, a TV commercial, three radio commercials and eighty-five sweet promotional photos and lobby cards in still frame, the second platter contains a universe of satisfying supplementary features.

We have always found the voice of British actress Joan Greenwood to be highly intoxicating, but it took a slap-the-forehead revelation in film critic Glenn Kenny's decent 23-minute extended introduction to realize that it is Greenwood who is voicing the villainess embodied by Anita Pallenberg. Viably suggesting that Barbarella is more of a vibe than a movie—and is certainly not an action movie—Kenny celebrates the film's magnification of Sixties attitudes and presumptions. He claims that Vadim is not a film stylist, to which we would argue that anyone who would be the first to combine a supine Brigitte Bardot and Cinemascope is unquestionably a master of the dynamics of film imagery, and to illustrate a reference to Vadim's La Ronde, a picture flashes on the screen of the poster for Max Ophul's original film and not Vadim's remake, but the talk is a stimulating appetizer that tantalizes one with the film's strengths and charms. Another engrossing 14-minute introduction by Eugenio Ercolani focuses on the accomplished careers of producer Dino Di Laurentiis and the cast, also ruminating upon the glory days of Italian filmmaking and why Di Laurentiis decided to relocate to Hollywood.

A marvelous 15-minute collection of footage shot in 1967 and compiled in 2021 shows Fonda and Vadim's domestic life, as well as offering up oodles of great behind-the-scenes material from the set. An excellent, well researched and thoughtful 31-minute piece by costume historian Elisabeth Castaldo analyzes the film's design and the meanings of the costumes, as well as explaining how credit for the specific pieces became convoluted, and how the film ended up, several decades later, becoming a significant representation of Sixties European design.

A cute 17-minute interview with camera operator Roberto Girometti is included, sharing marvelous anecdotes about his days on the shoot and about working on The Adventurers. Tognazzi's son, Ricky Tognazzi, provides a rewarding 22-minute stream-of-consciousness talk about his father's career and his entire generation of Italian actors born in the early Twenties, who came to maturity during Italy's greatest filmmaking period. Curiously, he does not mention what was probably his father's

greatest international success, La Cage Aux Folles, but he speaks extensively about his father's passion for offbeat roles and interest in doing films that 'no one else would touch,' such as La Grande Bouffe (Nov 15). The great Italian action star, Fabio Testi, worked as a body double for Law in the early part of his career, sharing his experiences on the set and describing his many intersections with the movie business (from a teen stunt person to the lead in Coca-Cola commercials—with Laura Antonelli!) before he finally decided to commit to it full time in a marvelous 24-minute talk.

A 113-minute Internet conversation between genre expert Tim Lucas and European comic book expert Stephen A. Bissette goes over the full history of graphic novels in France and Italy, the history of Jean-Claude Forest's comic book and its dissemination, and what has happened in the industry since the linchpin of Vadim's film adaptation. They also talk about the film's comic book aura ("There was sort of no point in taking acid for Barbarella"), the state of science fiction films at the time (for which 1968 was a seminal year, having also seen the release of 2001: A Space Odyssey—which Bissette suggests was designed for acid trips—and Planet of the Apes), and the legacy of the comic (including a brief insertion near the end of the segment that seems to have a different narrator) and the film, among other things, offering an interesting comparison between the strip teases that open Barbarella and conclude Alien.

Lucas also supplies an exceptionally good commentary track, meticulously detailing the film's production history, the backgrounds of its cast and crew, and the cultural impact it had upon the world at the time and from today's perspective. "When the President signs off by saying, 'Love,' it seems a bit silly today, but it behooves us to remember this film was made at a time when young people often greeted one another with friendly tribal hand gestures, accompanied by the words, 'Peace' and 'Love.' Therefore, where we may see naïveté or silliness today, the film was at least half seriously proposing a possible future to its young adult audiences, wherein 'Love' had become the dominant ethic and philosophy in the universe, and this was enough to propose Barbarella, the character if not the film, as a counterculture icon."

He goes into great detail about the specific biographical and career links between De Laurentiis, Vadim, Fonda and Law, and how their lives not only entwined to create the film but continued to link as the connections unraveled. He also supports and explains more explicitly why Vadim, despite his innovative achievements as a filmmaker, was not as accomplished a stylist as his peers in—and was therefore not considered part of—the French New Wave. And he has a precise grasp of the film's thematic intentions every step of the way. "As Barbarella's gynecological gusto sends the frustrated device up in flames, [O'Shea's character] cries, 'The energy cables are shrinking,' making them sound explicitly phallic. And then he adds the less well-dated line, 'You've turned them into faggots!' Mind you, he was speaking of 'faggots' in terms of combustible fuel, but the double entendre was very much intended. The outrage of [O'Shea's character] in this scene has less to do with the damage done to his machine and everything to do with the damage done to his male pride."

Lucas' research is so amazing, it is as if he is ahead of A.I., seeming to have cataloged every scene in every movie that ever existed. For example, he cites films by Claude Lelouch and Eric Rohmer where characters pause in specific sequences to peruse French graphic novels similar to the one the film is based upon. On the other hand, and very much like A.I., he does make mistakes (or 'hallucinations,' as it is called in the A.I. world), claiming that Hemmings' popularity was due in part to an appearance in Tony Richardson's Tom Jones, a film Hemmings had nothing to do with. Thanks to his error, real A.I. will probably pick it up and carry it as fact, well into the Barbarella future.

Old acquaintance

It is rare for a film to actually replicate the feel of novel—today, that happens more commonly with limited series television adaptations—even though with the proverbial picture telling a thousand words, the math favors the frame count. One such movie that conveys the genuine feel of the narrative experience a novel conveys is the lovely 2022 Belgian Italian adventure, The Eight Mountains, a Sideshow Janus Films Criterion Channel Janus Contemporaries Blu-ray (UPC#71551529-0319, \$25). Directed by Felix Van Groeningen and Charlotte Vandermeersch, the film is set mostly in the Italian Alps as it follows the vacation friendship of two men from their childhood, when they meet during summers, into their adulthood, when they restore a cabin above the tree line and use it as a shared vacation retreat while they otherwise move on with their lives, finding their vocations and starting their own families. Running 147 minutes (unfortunately, the Blu-ray does not start up where it left off when playback is terminated), the maturation and psychological development of both men, played as adults by Luca Marinelli and Alessandro Borghi, is set against the incredible vistas that the Alpine landscapes (and stomach-churning drone shots) provide for breathing room. With its pauses and advances, you absorb the movie the way you would absorb a novel, and its rewards are just as dense and fulfilling. In one amazing sequence, Marinelli's character, returning from a lengthy visit to Nepal, explains to Borghi's character the vaguely Buddhist concept reflected in the film's title, which also coincides with the 'fox and the hedgehog' concept of knowing the eight points on the edge of the circle or knowing just its center. The conversation is soon followed by a jaw dropping shot of the sun rising in the morning over a distant peak, captured by a lens that specifically casts the sun's light in eight distinctive rays.

Presented in a squared full screen format, the image is continually captivating. Movement in one shot during near darkness had a brief tail, but that may have been the cinematography and otherwise the image is solid and smooth. The DTS sound is outstanding, and don't miss the end credit scroll, which continues with the mountain environment sounds in full surround after the music ends. The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles, a trailer and two terrific featurettes about the filmmakers and the shoot, running a total of 35 minutes.

Have a Blu, Blu Blu Blu Elvis

As the Sixties progressed, Elvis Presley stopped trying to act in his movies and just did variations of his easygoing personality, reacting to the turns in the story and flirting with every pretty girl who will pay attention, but otherwise just being 'Elvis,' to the point that, when he did take a stab at really acting again near the end of the Sixties, it was too late. His film persona was too burned into the public's consciousness to accept variations. In the Fifties and the very early Sixties, however, he genuinely tried to be other characters, not to the point that Frank Sinatra achieved in **From Here to Eternity**, but enough to suggest that what he eventually started doing in films was not from a lack of talent, but just from the laziness that he really didn't need to do any more to satisfy the boxoffice.

One of his greatest successes, and indeed, perhaps the one feature film that he is most associated with of all of the movies he made, the 1957 MGM production, **Jailhouse Rock**, released on Blu-ray as an *Elvis* title by Warner Home Entertainment (UPC#012569798434, \$20), is a fine example of Presley genuinely attempting and, for the most part, succeeding, at inhabiting a character. His character is the sort of character who does end up in jail, being unable to control his violent impulses, although he only spends the first third of the 96-minute film incarcerated. After he is let out and rapidly builds a recording career with the help of an enthusiastic record promoter played by Judy Tyler, he still can't entirely control his anger, and you really are on the edge (if you haven't seen the film too often) that he will do something that sends him back to the slammer. That never happens, but the lingering possibility is entirely due to Presley and director Richard Thorpe giving an edge to his presence, a variation that is consistent to every scene in the film, and not just the moments when he does lose his temper. It is hard to think of a more awesome line of dialog from an Elvis movie than when he responds to the claims of Tyler's character that he's coming on too strong. "It ain't tactics honey, it's just the beast in me." It is a performance, and you only wish that he hadn't become so spoiled by his own talent (and misguidedly steered by the film's 'technical consultant,' Col. Tom Parker) he didn't try harder to develop that specific skill.

Mickey Shaughnessy co-stars and Dean Jones is also featured. The film has two certifiable classics within his musical cannon—the title number and *Treat Me Nice*—although it also contains, as was common in his films, several less memorable tunes, including a number that is virtually *Treat Me Nice* with different lyrics, *Baby I Don't Care*. The music has been stereo processed to 5.1-channel Dolby TrueHD, as has some of the film's background sounds, although the mix is sporadic and not all that exciting. The stereo remix in **A Hard Day's Night** is truly thrilling, bursting out of one's speakers as if the tones themselves had discovered adolescence, but the Fifties recordings of Presley's music are just too undeveloped to undergo anything more than an artificial manipulation. At its best, tones are silky smooth, but actual dimensionality is erratic and the bass is thin. There are alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

The black-and-white picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.4:1 and looks immaculate, which also energizes the film at key moments. Along with a trailer, there is an excellent 15-minute retrospective featurette about the title number, including a marvelous interview with composers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller and a deft analysis of the song, the dance number in the film and Presley's performance. It is also suggested that the movie was the first rock 'n roll narrative musical.

Additionally, there is a commentary track by Presley biographer Steve Pond, who supplies a reasonably informative talk, describing the production of the film, sharing a bit about the cast and the crew, and comparing aspects of the film's narrative to reality (including what Presley wears in the film to what Presley was actually wearing at the time) and what was motivating Presley. "He was ready to become a serious actor. It didn't happen because he really didn't assert himself. This isn't the kind of movie he saw himself continuing to make. This was the kind of movie he saw himself making to get a foothold in the movie business on his way to becoming something else. On the other hand, he probably didn't envision that his records would still be selling 10, 20 years after this. Certainly, in 1957, people didn't really know how much longer rock and roll was going to be around. Elvis did not think that rock and roll really was going to occupy the rest of his life. He saw himself moving in other directions to have a lengthy career. At the time, I don't think the movie was taken all that seriously. I don't think anyone saw it as a sign of, 'Wow, rock and roll has real staying power.' It was another sign of, 'Boy, that Elvis sure is popular.'"

By the time **Viva Las Vegas** came along in 1964, the standard movie Elvis and the standard Elvis movie were fully established, but that said, the George Sidney feature may very well be the best of its kind, which is, of course, entirely due not to Presley—although his game is certainly raised by her presence—but to his amazing co-star, Ann-Margret. As she proved in later roles, Margret was a truly talented film actress, but nothing in her filmography prepares you for the magnetic kineticism she brings to the screen in **Viva Las Vegas**. Maybe she was on the top of her game because she was sharing the screen with Presley, but for whatever reason, every muscle in her body is on point, understanding the scene, understanding the music, understanding the lyrics, understanding the dance moves and what every moveable part on her body should be doing at each note and beat, understanding her character's emotions of the moment, understanding her character's real emotions underneath, and understanding her role as Presley's screen partner.

Released as another Warner *Elvis* Blu-ray (UPC#012569798465, \$20), the film ought to be a tiresome grind—Presley is in Las Vegas to drive in the Grand Prix (they make it over the manholes without a hitch), but he loses the money he needs to purchase an engine for his racecar, and so he gets a job at the same hotel where Margret's character works, and they fall for one another as they visit Nevada tourist spots. But even the songs you've never

heard before (or haven't heard since the last time you saw the movie) are fully arresting. Heck, Presley even does *Yellow Rose of Texas* and it is engaging—and then when he gets to Ray Charles' *What'd I Say* with Margret, it is sublime. Running 85 minutes, the film is a genuine musical. Not only are there a few more songs than usual—until the lengthy car race at the film's end—but each song actually advances the narrative, and that is enough to hold a viewer's attention, particularly since Margret is participating in so many of them. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and every corner of it is gorgeous. The fleshtones on Presley and Margret are vividly smooth and alive. The film is a joy, and sharing the exuberance exhibited by its two youthful stars makes you feel young again.

Cesare Denova and William Demarest co-star. The Dolbyfication of the BD's sound is not perfect, but it is much better than on **Jailhouse Rock**. Presley's voice track is still the least present part of the songs, but it is strong enough to hold its own on most numbers, and otherwise the dimensionality and smooth tones are captivating. The racecars zipping off to the left and the right are also a lot of fun. There are alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, a trailer and a really good 21-minute featurette about Presley's various interludes with Las Vegas over the years (including an explanation for his career transition to jumpsuits—to stop his pants from falling down on stage).

Pond supplies another passable commentary track, dissecting the film's strengths and weaknesses and providing interesting background information on the production, the state of Presley's career at the time, and the relationship between Margret and Presley. He explains why, with the exception of this film (and in part, because of it and Margret undercutting Presley's presence), Presley's later films went downhill in terms of artistry. He also points out the scenes where a young Teri Garr is dancing in the background.

A lesser Presley movie, with songs to match the quality of its filmmaking, MGM's 1967 **Double Trouble**, is available on Blu-ray from Warner as a *WB Warner Archive Collection* title (UPC#810134945814, \$22). It takes nearly two thirds of the film to pass before the story finally becomes clear. It is set in 'Europe' on some very nice looking sets (particularly one that pretends to be Bruges, complete with a canal). Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the color transfer is generally gorgeous, especially a carnival scene where there are costumes and confetti of all colors imaginable, each one crisply defined on the BD. Earlier in the film, portions of it are set in 'London' and so there is an overabundance of fog, but it is clear from the editing, which jumps between crisp and hazy, that the transfer is not at fault.

Presley is a singer in a band on tour, meeting an underage but enthusiastic fan, played by Annette Day, who is due to turn eighteen in a couple of days. She follows him across the Channel, and he also keeps bumping into an older and more sophisticated ingénue who seems open to his charms, played by Yvonne Romain. Steadfast British character actor John Williams plays the uncle of Day's character, and a young Michael Murphy pops up as an alternative suitor for her. A number of other comedy actors fill in supporting bits as bungling jewel thieves and inept assassins. Why there are assassins is the story point you have to wait for in the 92-minute feature, although nothing makes any sense or seems the least bit logical until that part of the narrative is finally explained. One of the more memorable songs in the film is *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*, with a few new lyrics added to the original ones. A couple of the numbers have energy, but more of them are just sleepy and repetitive, and not up to the stuff that made Presley a star. Directed by Norman Taurog, the film ultimately holds together, barely, and Presley's grin will be enough to excuse the film's shortcomings for fans, but it will not be enough to win over any new ones.

The monophonic sound is reasonably clean but has a limited range. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer and two Tom and Jerry cartoons produced by Chuck Jones, *Rock 'n' Rodent* from 1966 running 7 minutes in which the mouse is a drummer in a swinging mice nightclub that disturbs the cat's sleep and *Surf-Bored Cat* from 1967 running 6 minutes in which the cat is an enthusiastic surfer who has run-ins with various sea creatures while the mouse looks on from afar, with amusement.

The songs in MGM's 1967 **Spinout**, another Warner *Archive* Blu-ray (UPC#810134942660, \$22), are consistently better, and it makes all the difference, while the plot is also more straightforward and less belabored. Presley's character is a pop star and a racecar driver, and is romantically entwined with three different young ladies, although, at the same time, he wants to avoid the matrimonial desires of each. Like **Viva Las Vegas**, you have to wait through the whole 93-minute movie to get to the car race in the last 15 minutes, but Presley's energized and nicely varied song performances make the wait worth your while.

Directed by Taurog, Shelley Fabares, Diane McBain, Deborah Walley, Jack Mullaney, and Will Hutchins co-star, with Carl Betz and a lovely and elderly Una Merkel. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer is gorgeous and spotless, with vivid fleshtones. The film's Sixties outfits are quite colorful, so the image is always captivating. The monophonic sound is solid and crisp, and worth amplifying. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, and two more marvelously violent 6-minute Jones Tom and Jerry cartoons from 1966, *Catty-Cornered*, in which the mouse plays two cats on different sides of an apartment wall against one another, and *Filet Meow*, in which the mouse protects a sexy goldfish from the cat.

Meet the Beetle

The best music we have heard in a superhero movie in quite a long time opens **Blue Beetle**, a Warner Bros. DC WB SDS Studio Distribution Services *4K UltraHD* Blu-ray (UPC#883929801855, \$50), with an invigorating sense of good will that the 2023 film more than lives up to. Blended with a number of lively Hispanic pop numbers, Bobby Krieger's musical score is pleasing throughout the film, so that its opening promise is still being fulfilled in the end credit scroll. Let's be honest. The music during these monstrously long end credits for big special effects extravaganzas is padding, but with the disc's terrific Dolby Atmos sound, the directional mix and the basic quality of the composition, the audio is so engaging you don't want to turn it off or even speed it up.

The film is just as fun. What is new is that it takes a specific Hispanic-American slant on comic book super hero movies, something akin to what **Wonder Woman** did for female characters and **Black Panther** did for Black characters, but in a much lower key. The story is not about the end of the world, just about the hero, earnestly played by Xolo Maridueña, getting his powers and the villainous CEO, nicely played by Susan Sarandon in search of a little career recharge, trying to steal them. The film is set in a fictional city—much like 'Metropolis' and 'Gotham City'—which is on the lower coast edge of the United States—Miami seems to be a model for it (and much of the film was shot in Puerto Rico)—but the hero's family is specifically Mexican-American, and more like Southern Californian than Texan. If this was a normal film of sorts, then such incongruities might be off-putting, but as a fantasy film it is instead a spirited blend of subcultures and environments (there is also a tropical Xanadu mansion straight out of **Citizen Kane**) that sets the tone for the entire movie to embrace. Maridueña's character, fresh out of college, is at a corporate headquarters to apply for a job when the former CEO's daughter, played by Adriana Barraza, hands him a package she has stolen from the lab and he runs off while she distracts the guards. And then, in the film's definitive scene, he brings it home and opens it in front of his family, when the doodad, which is shaped like a beetle, comes alive in a mechanical sort of way and takes possession of his body, giving him super powers. It is the family dynamic—funny younger sister, crazy uncle, fragile father, determined mother, very determined grandmother—that makes the movie so much fun. Sure, it is loaded with decent special effects and rousing battles, but directed by Ángel Manuel Soto, the humor and affection generated by the responses of the characters are equally embracing, while at the same time holding the film to a level of moderation that is a relief in the face of comic book movie overkill. It may play like a cross between **Iron Man** and **Shazam!**, but both of those movies were great, so why not? Running 127 minutes, the film is not a major event, but it is a fully enjoyable genre effort that succeeds at what it sets out to accomplish.

George Lopez co-stars. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The colors are crisp and solid, and the image is finely detailed, adding to the excitement in the action scenes. Speaking of the action scenes, they have just as much directional and bass activity as the music does, and are just as sonically invigorating. Delivered through the 4K format, the sound is smooth and captivating. There is an audio track that describes the action ("With expert martial arts moves, he dodges a projectile, then delivers a spinning kick that sends Carapax flying. As the soldier lies slumped Jaime rises into the air and points his arms. Blue energy beams drive Carapax onto a road."), alternate French and Spanish language tracks, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, and 64 minutes of informative promotional featurettes.

The roots of America's prudishness

Just as the puritanical Motion Picture Production Code was being put into place in 1934, one group of filmmakers thought they might get around it by embracing a classic American novel about such topics as adultery and children born out of wedlock that the Code sought to erase from the moviegoer consciousness, Nathaniel Hawthorne's **The Scarlet Letter**. Unfortunately, it did not go as planned. Despite a large semi-script 'A' that curves around Colleen Moore's bosom like a wire bra, the film, directed by Robert G. Vignola for Poverty Row studio Majestic Pictures and now issued on a nice *Special Edition* Blu-ray by Film Masters (UPC#760137134183, \$25), is pretty much sexless. Hardie Albright plays the charismatic but chickenhearted reverend and father of her child, and Henry B. Walthall is her long lost husband, who becomes the town doctor without telling anyone his true identity. Running a brisk 71 minutes, the movie has the feel of a stageplay. Augmented by a comedy subplot featuring Alan Hale and William T. Kent, who fumble with one another over the wooing of a widow, the drama is interesting enough to hold a viewer's attention, the period decorations are intriguing and Moore's performance is admirable, but the movie is pretty much as timid as the male protagonist, scraping the story's plot points but not digging very deeply into either the passions that caused the trouble (not to mention, the nature of those passions) or the core conflict between the freedom that America represents and the prudish rules it sought to impose. If you look at the three great novels about adultery in the Nineteenth Century, while the fate of the heroines is largely the same (Hawthorne's heroine actually gets off easier), the two tales from Europe, *Anna Karina* and *Madame Bovary*, are both beloved romances, while Hawthorne's book is a homework assignment for teenage adolescents that serves secondly as a cautionary tale about fooling around. In essence, it explores the vicissitudes of a mindset that has caused America untold problems and heartaches over generations and continues to do so, even today.

The full screen black-and-white picture has a slight softness, but is in very good condition, with no significant flaws. The monophonic sound is raspy but workable if held to a modest volume. There are optional English subtitles and a wonderfully lurid trailer for a 1965 re-release. The promoter of the re-release, Sam Sherman, supplies a 19-minute audio-only (over scenes from the film) reminiscence about his career and how he used the challenge of reissuing the film to learn about the distribution business (he also reads letters he received about the film from Albright and Moore). There is a wonderful 10-minute travelog piece originally compiled in the Eighties by Sherman and then finalized in 2020, narrated (though not all that well) by John Carradine, about Hawthorne's legacy in Salem, MA. Another 15-minute piece about film adaptations of Hawthorne's work contains plenty of great clips and provides a fairly good overview of the attempts that have been made to bring his stories to the screen and why they haven't generally fared all that well, but it fails to mention one of the best realizations of Hawthorne's explorations of

America's edges, Donald Fox's 1972 short film, *Young Goodman Brown*.

Also featured is an excellent commentary track by film scholar Jason New, who not only talks about the film's history and the backgrounds of the cast and crew, including coaxing child star Cora Sue Collins into a lengthy interview that is shared on the track about her appearance in the film (playing an illegitimate child genuinely bothered her) and her career (among other things, Collins is frank about the men who started hitting on her when she became a teenager, and how it motivated her to quit the business), and not only comparing the film to Hawthorne's novel, but exploring the attractions of the latter. "A key aspect of Hawthorne's writing that does not carry over into this film is his relentless pursuit of thematic ambiguity that requires active interpretive work on the part of the reader. His stories are still read and puzzled over today because he avoids easy allegory and obvious messaging in favor of a more complex and layered style. While the broad strokes of Hawthorne's story have been carried over into this film, it's the nuances that have been lost, the moments that draw us in and make us wonder what we really know about these characters."

Powell poem

Michael Powell's lyrical 1937 tale of an economically failing community on an island off the coast of Scotland, **The Edge of the World**, has been released on Blu-ray by Milestone Film & Video and Kino Lorber (UPC#738329264147, \$30). We reviewed a DVD release in Feb 04. While the film has a patronizing tone at times, that tone is often overridden by its folk poetic feel, transporting the viewer to the world of memories and myth. Two young men on the island argue about whether one should leave for the mainland, and they agree to resolve the argument by climbing a steep cliff in a race, without safety lines, as pretty much the entire island population looks on. The sequence is pit-in-your-stomach harrowing, and justifies in its excitement the gradual, relaxed exploration of the island's daily life and concern over its collapsing husbandry. Running 75 minutes, Powell made the film before his first collaboration with Emeric Pressburger and it is clearly missing the discipline that a second artist's sensibilities would have provided, but it remains an enduring and haunting work.

The full screen black-and-white picture is substantially improved over the scratch and speckle-ridden, wiggly DVD. The image is still very soft, but its aged look adds to the tone of lost time the film strives to convey. Otherwise, it is free of significant wear and stable in playback. The monophonic sound is a challenge, particularly with the accents and somewhat muffled recordings, and the optional English subtitles often come in handy. The supplementary features that came with the DVD have been carried over, including 7 minutes of silent deleted scenes, an original trailer, and two pieces by Powell, his 5-minute 1941 black-and-white short that is as its title describes, *An Airman's Letter to His Mother*, and the 23-minute 1979 color retrospective, *Return to The Edge of the World*, in which the filmmaker visits the island where the movie was actually shot and discovers that its populace is doing just fine. It is suggested in *Return* that the only reason the island was given phone service is because of the impact the feature film had, but it depicts a society that is much closer to the **Shetland** crime episodes (Jun 16, Jun 17, Aug 19) than it is to Powell's receding-past fantasy. A commentary from the DVD, intercutting reflections by film expert Ian Christie with insights from Powell's wife, Thelma Schoonmaker, and selections from Powell's writings read by Daniel Day-Lewis, is also included. The one new featurette is a 7-minute montage of Powell's home movies shot in 1955 and narrated by Schoonmaker, who talks about the vacations he would take in Scotland to blow off steam between pictures.

Brightly colored ninjas

Opening in the bright Philippine sun, amid light tropical vegetation, a group of ninjas dressed in apple red outfits and one dressed in black hunt a ninja dressed in an outfit that is as white as snow, while the one in white systematically picks off the guys in red. At one point, the guy in white ducks down into the grass while the guys in red pass, practically walking on top of him. But wait a minute. Don't they see the bright white cloth down there on the ground? They are going to wish they had, but at least all of the blood that is spilling blends nicely with the red costumes. Menahem Golan's 1981 action film shot in the Philippines, **Enter the Ninja**, opens auspiciously, as we described, but it actually turns out to be a fully enjoyable indulgence. Franco Nero is the guy in the white outfit, who graduates from ninja class and then goes to hang out with an old army buddy, whose ranch is being terrorized by a wealthy villain that wants the property. The black ninja is played by Shō Kosugi. Alex Courtney co-stars, with Susan George as his wife. Clearly having the time of his life, Christopher George is the effete villain, whose penthouse office is an indoor swimming pool surrounded by desks. We don't care how high the air conditioning is turned up. It's Manila and the office guys are wearing suits, so the humidity in the place has got to be atrocious. Not enough to affect Christopher George's cool, however.

Anyway, the 99-minute Cannon Films production, which has been released on Blu-ray by MGM and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC#738329264543, \$25), has regularly occurring action scenes, Nero kicking butt left, right, up and down, and just enough story to hold everything together. If you can get past wondering how in the world stealthy ninjas can hear anything at all with those hoods they are wearing over their ears, then the film is a great deal of star-powered fun, giving mindless action a good name.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer looks fine, with accurate fleshtones and enough detail to ogle Susan George's slinky outfits. The source material does have a stray scratch now and then, but for the most part it looks terrific. The monophonic sound is strong and smooth, with a near-stereo impact. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer. Genre enthusiasts Mike Leeder and Arne Venema provide a jovial commentary track. There is not much of substance that they can offer about the film, but that doesn't stop them from sharing engaging insights about the movie's presumptions, the exploits of the cast members in this and other movies, and the entire concept of ninja movies, to which, so far as non-Japanese films go, **Enter the Ninja** was a significant step forward, after **You Only Live Twice**.

Pasolini's thirteen feature films

Italy's recovery from World War II lagged behind that of the other Western European nations, largely due to the fragmented political and social structures that had existed before the war, which gave rise, among other things, to a strong Communist party after the War was over. This was indicative of a diminished middle class, and it took a generation—or, at least, a half-generation—for Italy's industrial base to re-establish itself and for its economy to catch up with its neighbors to a point where the middle class could be resuscitated. This was great for films. As the rest of Europe followed America's lead in gorging upon television, Italians after the War had to do what Americans had been doing before the War, which was to attend movie theaters for their entertainment on a weekly or twice-weekly basis at a minimum. Immediately after the War, general Italian cinema embraced the sort of melodramas, romances and crime films that were popular in nearly all local film industries, but as the Sixties approached and economic recovery began to take hold, because of the lack of television, there was an incredible explosion of exploitation genre features that Italian moviegoers, who finally had some money to spend, could embrace—sword and sandal costume action films, horror films, westerns (for crying out loud), murder thrillers, police action movies, a smattering of science-fiction films and even documentaries—films pushing the envelopes of exploitation that could also penetrate foreign markets where TV was inhibiting that sort of growth. At the same time, art films thrived. Born amid the production poverty that the War had created, Italian filmmakers utilized their own poverty and the poverty around them to create dramas that teetered so closely upon reality the films were christened 'neorealism.' As widespread poverty began to subside, filmmakers such as Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Luchino Visconti turned their attentions to the ennui of the wealthy, so that while other Italian filmmakers felt the call of exploitation genres, an opening arose for an artistically-minded director who understood and could explore the lingering struggles of those who had not yet been able to extract benefits from the delayed and erratic post-War boom. . .

The bad boy of classic Italian cinema, Pier Paolo Pasolini began his career in the Sixties by making edgy neorealist features that rebelled against the genre's undercurrent of a 'nobility' in the impoverished, but found his greatest artistic success later on, and quite improbably, by adapting some of the most renowned works of western literature with a pointedly humanistic approach that drew upon those same neorealist traditions. We reviewed a number of Pasolini features on Image Entertainment LDs, but the films have been less forthcoming on DVD, a shortcoming that has now been relieved by the hefty nine-platter Criterion Collection Blu-ray release, **Pasolini 101** (UPC#715515284417, \$250). Presented in a box jacket in book form, with damnably tight sleeves for the platters (impossible to remove without getting your fingerprints all over them), nine movies spanning most of Pasolini's all too short career (like the similarly talented, triple-named Rainer Werner Fassbinder—who also rode the delayed post-War motion picture resurgence of his country to make films for just a decade and a half—his life ended in violence) have been given consistently gorgeous image transfers (substantially nicer than the LDs), refreshingly solid monophonic audio tracks and are accompanied by appropriately extensive supplements. The films are in Italian with optional English subtitles.

Pasolini's first feature, the 1961 **Accattone** (Aug 92), is about a young unemployed pimp played by Franco Citti who spends his days hanging out with his friends and lamenting not having enough to eat. The most prominent arc of the 117-minute feature follows his efforts to recruit and train a naive blonde from the hinterlands, but most of the film is simply about his struggles to find enough money for a meal, and then to find it again the next day. Subversively peppered with homoerotic images amid the macho posturing and scuffles of his pals, there should be no sensible reason to enjoy the film, which is thematically and almost relentlessly bleak, but the bright summer sun and the inherent youthfulness of even the actors who have bad teeth, combined with the narrative's inherent vignette structure (and the ironic music of J.S. Bach), make the film compulsively watchable and even appealing. Italy's economic turnaround is always on view in the background, with buildings rising in the distance, but the characters remain confined to the damaged and decayed communities on its periphery. The hero's conscience urges him to do the right thing, to find a viable job and leave crime behind, and so the ultimate tragedy of the film is that if the hero had just been a little more patient, things might have become rosier. When you are hungry, however, the future doesn't mean anything.

The full screen black-and-white picture is sharp and spotless, which adds to the crispness of the faces and the intensity of the drama. Along with a trailer, there is an insightful 29-minute reading of Pasolini's reflections on all of the films contained in the set over images and clips from the film, and an extensive 98-minute interview with Pasolini and those who worked with him (including Totò and a very young Bernardo Bertolucci) from 1966 on French television in black and white (excerpts from the same interview appear in some of the collection's other supplements), talking about all of his films up to that point (and beyond, actually), his life before he started making films (he was in his forties when he made **Accattone**), what he wanted to accomplish with them and his filmmaking strategies.

International film expert Tony Rayns provides a generally informative commentary track, deconstructing the various factors at work in the film and going over Pasolini's life and career, and his sometimes outspoken artistic attitudes. Rayns does err when he suggests that the Forties were the first time that Italians had influenced world cinema—they had actually made quite a splash in the earliest days of silent features before D.W. Griffith took such extravaganzas to the next step—but for the most part his talk is both highly informative and illuminating. "[The hero's] own attitude toward work, that it is a mistake to undertake it, precisely mirrors Pasolini's

own analysis, which is that work is a social deformation caused by capitalism and that pushing people into the situation of working in a bourgeois society is by definition to demean them and to crush their spirit. This, of course, is a contentious point. It's very hard to sustain, I would think, for a film director who, after all, employs a crew, many of whom are exactly doing laboring jobs, so there's already a large contradiction here. A man who managed, in his contrary way, to reconcile interests in Catholicism and Marxism, with a strong backbeat of homosexuality, and a dawning desire to assert homosexuality publicly, is not going to be fazed by a little contradiction like this."

The themes and situations of **Accattone** appear to advance no more than a half step in Pasolini's next feature, the 1962 **Mamma Roma**. Anna Magnani stars as the title character, a produce street vendor who moonlights as a streetwalker, with Ettore Garofolo playing her teenaged son. Again, the film is set with buildings going up in the distance while the characters walk along unpopulated roadways past empty lots and endlessly broken concrete. Speaking of walking, Pasolini stages a number of demarcative scenes in the film as lengthy, uninterrupted conversational walks down those long, straight roadways, sometimes having characters come in and out of frame to make or continue conversations with Magnani's character. One such scene occurs in darkness, while the rest are in light. Tonally identical to **Accattone**, the film's plot actually follows Garofolo's character, who goes from being a naive virgin from the sticks to a street savvy hustler, cutting between his experiences and his mother's partial but painful observations of them. With Anton Vivaldi's music used for the score, the film takes on a somewhat operatic and melodramatic attitude. Clearly, by giving Magnani's character such a specific name, Pasolini is evoking an absence of social and governmental responsibility, which has victimized all of the characters, but such abstract concepts, like the otherworldly walking sequences, are effectively balanced by the vivid emotional reality of Magnani's performance and the desperation her character feels to protect her son from life's cruelties.

We reviewed a Criterion DVD in Apr 06, but the BD presentation is substantially improved, with another smooth and spotless transfer, eliminating any and all of the shortcomings the DVD's presentation had. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, the quality of the picture once again adds to the precision of Magnani's performance and the conveyance of emotion that is facilitated by her work.

Pasolini's next effort, using several of the supporting actors who appeared in the first two films, plus Orson Welles, was his contribution to the 1962 omnibus feature, *Ro.Go.Pa.G., La ricotta*, which is included, as it was on Criterion's DVD, in the **Mamma Roma** supplement (we lament, as we did before, not having access to the entire feature). Running 35 minutes, it is a delightful comedy about a film crew trying to shoot a movie about the Crucifixion on an empty hillside near a populated city, and specifically about an extra, played by Marcello Morante, who is desperate to get some food between scenes, but is always interrupted or otherwise frustrated. Welles plays the director, impishly. The 'scenes' being shot are in color, while the film itself is in black-and-white, and once again, the transfer, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, is a distinct improvement over the version on the DVD. It looks gorgeous. Although Magnani's character has a pronounced sense of humor in **Mamma Roma**, one would never have guessed from those first two features how amusing Pasolini himself could be. The humor in the short ranges from primitive slapstick to sophisticated satire, and the entire effort is delightful.

Also featured on the supplement and carried over from the DVD is a lovely 7-minute reminiscence from 2003 by Bertolucci (who worked closely with Pasolini not only on Pasolini's first features, but also on his own debut film, **The Grim Reaper**) about Pasolini and the importance of his films, as well as a trailer, a 1995 profile of Pasolini's life and career running 58 minutes, a 9-minute interview with cinematographer Tonino Delli Colli from 2003, and another 9-minute interview from 2003, with Pasolini expert Enzo Siciliano.

Pasolini shifted gears with his next film, a 1964 documentary in which he traveled up and down Italy (and even to Sicily) to interview Italians about sex, **Love Meetings** (Aug 92). He strives to capture a cross-section of the populace (and their varying accents), coaxing willing talkers on the street to open up about their attitudes and experiences. This was at a point of monumental transition in Italian society, as Pasolini appears to sense, so that while he rarely elicits an unexpected opinion—let alone a valuable insight—he does a superb job in gathering a group portrait of the Italian mindset regarding the roles of men and women in society. Sure, the folks in Sicily are a little more protective of feminine virtues than those in Milan, but what he encounters generally is a guarded and apprehensive populace who understand in principle that women have the same right to independence that men have, but are less enthusiastic about supporting that right in anything but the abstract. He summarizes the film on a discouraging note, stating that, "We've found this in the Italy of the economic miracle, while naively hoping to find the signs of a simultaneous cultural and spiritual miracle. The spirit of a materially wealthy Italy is tragically refuted by these real Italians," but of course this flies in the face of what was actually happening in Italian culture, if films—and not just Pasolini's own movies—are any indication of Italy's cultural and spiritual advancements. And while there is quite a bit of discussion of sex, romantic love is rarely broached upon, especially in something other than the abstract. Indeed, the film's closing moments, depicting what appears to have been at least a partially staged wedding, is unnervingly lacking in passion, romantic or otherwise.

Running 93 minutes, there are also two other interesting points to be discovered in the film. As a sort of guest expert, Pasolini cuts back a number of times to novelist Alberto Moravia whose use of the word, 'conformist'—he wrote the novel that Bertolucci's film, **The Conformist**, was based upon—has a stronger sexual connotation, at least as a component of its meanings, that it has in English, which brings an added shading to the meanings of Bertolucci's feature. Secondly, Pasolini saved the most fascinating discussion for the final act of the film, when he brings up the topic of Italy's brothels being shut down after the War had ended. Here, in contrast to the close-minded attitudes that most of the speakers have about everything else, everyone is remarkably progressive in their judgment that closing the brothels was wrong and had contributed to widespread malaise not only on the streets, but in conjugal bedrooms.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Since it is a documentary, the image is naturally grainy, but there is no added damage or wear to the presentation, and Pasolini's secondary purpose, to capture the faces of Italy, is unhindered. Since the film is entirely talk, the subtitling becomes quite a marathon, and the white lettering on partially white backgrounds can impede smooth reading in places (although it is nowhere near as difficult as it was on the LD). In any case, for one reason or another, one is more apt to be hitting the Pause button at times to finish a phrase before going on to the next set. Elvis Presley and Ludwig Beethoven are the most prominent figures on the incidental musical score. Along with a trailer, there is a sweet 4-minute color interview clip from 1967 that was uncovered too late to include in Criterion's massive **The Complete Films of Agnes Varda** (Apr 23) but is included here, which has her talking with Pasolini about film as they walk around Times Square, and a 13-minute clip from a 1967 black-and-white interview in which Pasolini contemplates the idea that cinema is a language and deconstructs his stylistic choices in this regard, specifically citing the marriage sequence at the end of **Love Meetings**.

And then, Pasolini's next film was astonishing. In 1964, having anchored his features not just in contemporary times, but in a conscious striving to capture the reality of life in those times, he turned to creating **The Gospel According to St. Matthew**. Beautifully rendered in its simplicity, the 138-minute film was shot in Italy and recreates the highlights of the life of Jesus Christ that were spelled out in the text recorded later by his disciple. This was the same filmmaker who not only lampooned the crucifixion the previous year in *La ricotta*, but recast the actor who is the butt of that film, Morante, as Joseph, Mary's husband. Enrique Irazoqui plays Jesus, with Margherita Caruso, Susanna Pasolini and Otello Sestili. The film requires a basic knowledge of the *New Testament* to sustain its coherency as it jumps from one incident to the next, but flying in the face of what had been a pair of big-budget Hollywood extravaganzas on the same subject during the previous few years, the film brought a heartening neorealistic aesthetic not just to its staging, but to underscore why Christianity was created in the first place. In every way, shape and form, it was brilliant filmmaking, and signified that Pasolini was a genius to be reckoned with.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Shot under less controlled conditions than his first two features, the image is not as crisp, but it is consistently clean, with finely detailed contrasts and clear textures. The music uses a number of classic sources, augmented by orchestrations from Luis Bacalov. We reviewed an Image DVD in Sep 99. In 1963, Pasolini visited the Middle East on a location scout and shot substantial footage, which he put together in 1965 to create the platter's one supplementary feature, a 54-minute travelog documentary (with an additional, worthwhile 3-minute deleted scene) entitled *Scouting in Palestine*. Basically, he went to Israel and Jordan, but found that their post-War boom was substantially more advanced than Italy's. Indeed, while the entire show is quite enjoyable, the highlight is Pasolini's first reveal, after a substantial build up, of Nazareth, which is anything but the quaint little collection of mud huts he had imagined. A clergyman accompanied him on his tour, and they often recorded their conversations with live sound, although there is also substantial voiceover narration. Not only is the program an acute rumination on the Biblical environment, it is also a very fine snapshot of the clearly unhindered state of progress Israel was achieving at the time.

Pasolini then turned to the popular Italian comedic actor, Totò, for his 1966 feature, **The Hawks and the Sparrows** (Aug 92), with Ninetto Davoli as his younger sidekick. The movie's best part, far and away, is its immediate opening credit sequence, which is sung (the text also appears on the screen), in verse, to a delectable musical score by Ennio Morricone. The film's narrative is bookended by adventures the two characters have on a mostly empty ring road around the outskirts of a city, joined for much of their journey by a talking crow. They meet a beautiful woman, a circus troupe, a man who owes them money, a man they owe money to, and so on. There is also documentary footage depicting the funeral for an Italian Communist Party leader, which they react to as if they are there. Taking up about half the movie in its center, however, the two portray Franciscan monks (Totò losing his mustache for the second role) who have been instructed to convert hawks and sparrows to Christianity, which they manage to do over the course of a couple of years (although this does not stop the hawks from feasting on the sparrows). Yes, Pasolini has returned to spoofing the church, but gently, and most of the film is good humored, with clownish comedy that will translate into some cultures more readily than others. Running 90 minutes (with an Intermission halfway through the monk story), the film is farcical to appease Totò's fans with his expressions and disjointed physical undulations, and it has underlying tensions exploring the dynamics and conflicts between rural and urban Italy, to appease Pasolini's critics. On the whole, it is a unique endeavor, periodically amusing regardless of one's cultural background, symbolically potent and diverse enough in its creativity to avoid feeling tiresome, at least for any extended period of time, and especially since you don't have to wait long for a passage of Morricone's music to kick in.

The black-and-white picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about

1.85:1, and again, the transfer is spotless. Additionally, the monophonic sound has plenty of power and tonal detail, presenting the music in its full glory. Along with a trailer and a nice 29-minute interview with Davoli (who had appeared in almost all of Pasolini's early films) from 1997 in color, in which he reminisces about Pasolini and his lust for life, there is a 7-minute deleted scene from the film set in a circus, in which Totò talks to animals and pontificates about religion and politics. The segment is silent, but is supported by subtitles that transcribe its copious dialog, and is definitely out of step with the rest of the film, despite its clowning.

First and foremost, Pasolini's 1967 adaptation of Sophocles' **Oedipus Rex** (Dec 92) is an enormously fun movie. You cannot help but feel anything but sheer glee for its entire 105 minutes as its familiar story unfolds before you in such a delightfully inspired, inventive and masterful manner. The movie, which is in color, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1—and looks absolutely gorgeous—begins as if it were a Visconti costume drama, set sometime previous to the War in the lush landscape of northern Italy (the end is also set in the same location, in the 'present day' Sixties). It opens on a lovely woman breastfeeding her child, and the explicit eroticism of the scene is deliberate since, after all, this is the story of Oedipus. When the father of the baby boy, annoyed at the attention it is receiving, instructs a servant to dispose of the child, the servant takes it to an arid, foreign landscape, but instead of killing it, the servant simply abandons the infant. Pasolini then chose to shoot this portion of the movie in an exotic location, Morocco, using the local architecture and culture to gradually blend it with costumes that evoke ancient Greece, thus underscoring the universality and timelessness of the story as it shifts to its more primitive—or, more accurately, less historically compounded—roots. From there, the story unfolds in its expected manner (one gripe—the hero is not confronted with the classic riddle by the Sphinx), with energy and flair. Not only would it make a terrific double bill with **Fellini Satyricon**, but it would be the more coherent of the two features. Citti stars, with Silvana Mangano, Alida Valli, Julian Beck and others. In the same way that he embraced **Gospel According to St. Matthew**, Pasolini took another canonical literary achievement and transferred it to cinema not just conveying the work's essence, but in its modest construction, communicating the very atmosphere of the tale's original conception while at the same time casting its reflection upon the inherently tragic flaws of the modern industrial state.

Okay, we saw one little scratch flash by at one point, but that was the only blemish on the picture from beginning to end. The image looks super, with rich fleshtones. The sound is strong and the music has viable 'primitive' motifs to match the setting. Included with the film, along with a trailer, is a 34-minute documentary compiled in 1968 and shot in India, entitled *Notes for a Film on India*, where Pasolini was once again scouting a film project, although in this case an unrealized one. He comes across a bit snarky, making a big deal about communicating with 'Untouchables' and confronting holy men with a folk tale about a holy man who sacrifices himself to feed a baby tiger, asking them if they would do such a thing, but the piece, which is also seeking to draw parallels between Italy's industrial resurgence and India's growing economy, is readily watchable and intriguing. The worn, black-and-white picture is in full screen format and has not been restored in the manner that most of the programs in the set have been restored. What has been restored is Pasolini's 11-minute color segment entitled *The Sequence of the Paper Flower* from the 1969 anthology feature, **Love and Anger**, which we reviewed in Mar 06. It is an off-the-cuff sequence that just has Davoli strolling down the busy sidewalks of an Italian city in midday, sometimes with a large paper flower. He interacts with a few of the people on the street and generally conducts himself with a happy, devil-may-care attitude. At the same time, black-and-white images of war and Leftist protest are superimposed now and then over the image, which, we suppose, represents the 'anger' portion of the piece. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the picture quality is nicer than the DVD. Although the film was shot like a documentary, with makeshift lighting, colors are more accurate and better detailed than they were on the DVD, and the image is smoother and cleaner.

We reviewed the Criterion Blu-ray release of Pasolini's next feature, **Teorema**, in Apr 21. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, the transfer was lovely, and Criterion has essentially taken that BD and altered the menu and the platter art to fit the format of the **101** collection without making any other changes. Seen in the context of the collection, the 1968 film is rather surprising, and it is more understandable as to why critics were so excited about it. Although it has a distinctive supernatural component, it is, essentially, the first contemporary drama that Pasolini had made since those initial two films in the early Sixties. Both he and Italy had prospered substantially in the interim, and while the film retains a proletariat attitude, it is way closer to Elio Petri in spirit than to Vittorio De Sica. It is also not a film that we particularly care for—Pasolini remained a much stronger filmmaker when he was grounded in a literary source (until he crashed and burned in his final feature)—since, very much like one of the protagonists at the end of the 99-minute movie, its artistry is a proverbial case of the emperor having no clothing. The film has a complex story structure that is mostly skewering the values of an upper middle class family in Milan, with Terence Stamp playing a visitor who acts as a catalyst with each character and then disappears well before the end of the tale as the resonances of his visit continue to play out. Interestingly, in the French TV interview on the **Accatone** platter, Pasolini was contemplating the script for **Teorama** that he was only just beginning at the time, but he states directly that the character which would eventually be embodied by Stamp is 'God' and thus, after he disappears, the other characters are psychologically altered from having been 'touched by God.'

Pasolini (Continued)

The presentation, which also has an alternate English track, is accompanied by a commentary from Pasolini expert Robert S. C. Gordon (who never directly mentions the 'God' interpretation), a 3-minute black-and-white blurb from Pasolini in 1969 about the film, a 17-minute artistic appreciation of the movie, and a fantastic 33-minute interview with Stamp from 2007 talking about his filmmaking adventures in Italy.

Despite its faults, **Teorema** is a legitimate work of cinematic artistry. Pasolini's next film, however, the 1969 **Porcile** (Sep 94), is, as its title implies, pure hogwash. In a 5-minute clip from a 1969 French TV interview that is included on the platter, Pasolini describes the film as, 'an allegory,' which is sometimes what you say when you have no other way to justify what is going on. Running 99 minutes, the film has two storylines and jumps back and forth between them in a desperate effort to keep boredom from seeping in. In one of the stories, set in Germany, Alberto Lionelli is an industrialist who is negotiating a partnership with an investor played by Ugo Tognazzi. Both men are apparently former Nazis and speak elliptically about the pork slaughterhouses they operate and about Jews. Jean-Pierre Leaud plays the son of Lionelli's character, wandering around his estate in a bit of a funk. In the other story, Pierre Clémenti is in what appears to be Sixteenth or Fifteenth Century garb, traversing a volcanic mountain landscape (an elaboration upon the same location seen at the beginning and end of **Teorema**). He finds the bodies of a dead military unit, dons their armor, and continues to walk, eventually coming into contact with others wearing similar armor, who fall into battle, some on his side and some on the other side. They also feed on those they have killed, since there are no grocery stores nearby, or vegetation of any sort. There is a character played Davoli, who slips in and out of both stories. It is all readily ridiculous, and while Tognazzi is quite appealing and Davoli is his usual, obliviously cheery self, none of the other performers manage to work the material to their advantage. There are plenty of discussions about politics, post-War economics, love and other topics, but none of it is all that interesting. The volcanic vistas are striking, particularly with the lovely transfer and the letterboxing, which has an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and rather vividly drops you into the locations, but an air of creative desperation hangs over the feature and readily dampens anything that could be taken away from it. A trailer is also included.

Pasolini returned to form, however, with his magnificent 1969 adaptation of Euripides' **Medea**, with none other than Maria Callas in the title role. The film is even more of an ultra headtrip than **Oedipus Rex**. Shot on some amazing locations in Turkey, Syria and elsewhere, the film has an otherworldly feel that a larger budgeted production could never achieve, since it is the realism of the simplicities in his staging that make its surrealism so compelling. Running 111 minutes, the narrative is less distinctively expressed than the narrative in **Oedipus Rex**, and dialog is even sparser, but the gist of the story is still conveyed. Jason, played by Giuseppe Gentile, is a prince who has been usurped by his uncle, and is sent to retrieve the Golden Fleece to reestablish his stature in court. He accomplishes his quest by seducing Callas' character, who runs away with him, taking the Fleece with her. Back in court, however, things go downhill, and Jason's plans to marry his cousin and get his throne back are thwarted by the fatal jealousies of Callas' character. Like **Oedipus Rex**, the musical score, conceived by Elsa Morante, has a mesmerizing aura of antiquity, while the costumes and set designs are spectacular in their simplistic folk artistry. And in the center of it all, Callas is utterly captivating, so that whatever bizarre turns Pasolini chooses to take (he deliberately messes with the continuity at a couple of points to blend dreams with what stands for reality, and lets the passage of years occur with barely an acknowledgement) are readily accepted in the sleight-of-hand that has you focusing instead upon her extraordinary presence.

We reviewed a Vanguard DVD in Nov 05, but the new transfer is so much better, the entire film is improved by it. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, Callas no longer seems out of place because the exquisite detail in the designs and Ennio Guarnieri's cinematography blend more readily with her own stellar presence. Along with a trailer, there is a terrific black-and-white French interview with Callas from 1969 about the film running, 4 minutes (it also has a smattering of behind-the-scenes footage), and a wonderful 2004 retrospective documentary running 30 minutes that includes interviews with several of the artists who worked on the film (including Gentile, an Olympic athlete—it was his only movie) and a lot more behind-the-scenes materials.

Pasolini's next film was, in relative terms, his blockbuster, **The Decameron**, and the 1971 film did so well that he was encouraged by the distributor, United Artists, to follow up with two additional features based upon classic literary anthologies, **The Canterbury Tales** in 1972 and **Arabian Nights** in 1974. We reviewed each film individually on DVD from Image, but MGM and The Criterion Collection have released the three films in a three-platter Blu-ray bundle entitled **Pier Paolo Pasolini's Trilogy of Life** (UPC#71551509-9912, \$80). Each color film is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, and each is in Italian with optional English subtitles. On all three, the color transfers are not as solidly stunning as the transfers of **Oedipus Rex** and **Medea**, but they are substantially improved over the DVDs. Despite some minor displacement effects, colors are very fresh, fleshtones are accurate and finely detailed, and the image is free of wear (although **Canterbury Tales** has a prominent vertical line running through the image for a moderate duration in the middle of the film). The monophonic sound is also clear and strong.

Several of Roberto Rossellini's films had, rather brilliantly, approached period settings, and specifically the Middle Ages, in a neorealistic format, which dovetailed quite brilliantly with an entire academic movement that was just getting started at the time to study 'ordinary people' of the past. Pasolini embraced that essential concept for his films, but added a couple of things that Rossellini didn't include, namely humor and sex.

Especially sex, which somehow erupts from each film (two of them, as the back of the jacket reminds us, were rated 'NC-17,' and **The Decameron** is what is known as a 'hard R') without ever seeming like that is the film's purpose or exploitation. Instead, in each case, that was the purpose of the literary source that Pasolini is embracing. Sex was on the minds of our forefather's forefathers, in the jokes that they told and the cautionary stories that they shared, and the original authors of the works were simply and memorably compiling what had most delighted or captivated them. Both Citti and Davoli (who has a Chaplinesque turn in **Canterbury Tales**) have central parts in all three films, which weave the movies closer together as a Pasolini triptych. Yes, the cast occasionally sports a bikini tan line or a vaccination scar, but the dirt-under-the-fingernails vision of the past, normally verboten in lavish Hollywood features, is meticulously explored and makes the movies all the more relatable to the present (after all, we will undoubtedly appear just as uncouth to future generations).

As Pasolini demonstrated in his other features, he was more comfortable as a filmmaker with shorter narratives, which he would then weave with dexterity into a longer work, something that came to the fore with the three anthologies. **The Decameron** is the first among equals, not just because it was Pasolini's initial effort, but because it comes from one of the most famous Italian prose works of the Renaissance. Hence, within, Pasolini celebrates Italian culture and legacy as enthusiastically as he is weaving together the stories and vignettes that comprise the 111-minute feature. Like **Short Cuts**, the film places most of the tales in the same general locale and suggests at times that characters seen in one story are in the backgrounds of others. Except when a story is shared (and visualized) as narration, they are set in a town with a busy economy, a bustling market, and the usual collection of churches and monasteries. This was the Fourteenth Century, so the stories do not all have O. Henry endings (although a couple of them are delightfully succinct in their conclusions), but they do always have a pleasing or intriguing texture and the sense of a moral as they explore the hypocrisies and challenges of their times. Pasolini himself has an interesting 'meta' part, portraying a master painter who is creating a fresco in a church and commenting upon his 'art' in a way that can be doubly interpreted as the creation of the film at hand.

Also featured is a fascinating 45-minute documentary from 2005 about a sequence that was dropped from the film in part because it pushed the running time too far ahead, but also in part because its radical change in location didn't mesh with the film's general European setting. The sequence no longer exists, but there is a lengthy discussion about it that also goes into the film's general structure and its purposes, and is then followed by a game reconstruction of the piece using title cards and stills. Set in the Middle East (it was shot in Yemen), the story about a princess who goes searching the desert for enlightenment is wrapped around a glorious metaphor—a woman's genitals are 'Hell' and a man's genitals are 'the Devil,' a young holy man explains to her, encouraging her to 'send the Devil back to Hell.' In many ways, the piece would have been the key to understanding the rest of the film, and even in this fragmented format, it is a satisfying enlightenment.

Along with a pair of trailers, the film is accompanied as well by a 27-minute montage of interviews with Pasolini (including clips from the French TV piece appearing in **Pasolini 101**, along with some nice behind-the-scenes footage from **The Hawks and the Sparrows**) summarizing his attitudes about life and filmmaking (and ending with an original news report about his murder), and an excellent 25-minute appreciation of the film and Pasolini's artistry, explaining in detail his use of Italian dialects in the film and deftly deconstructing the film's designs (Pasolini also imitates several famous artworks) and intentions. It seems that no matter how one approaches the movie, however, or even if one just comes into the center of it, the characters and their desires are immediately accessible, and the joy of youth and life permeates even the movie's darkest tales.

At the same time that Boccaccio was compiling his stories for **The Decameron**, Geoffrey Chaucer was doing the same thing in England for **The Canterbury Tales**. Who would not argue that England was a cruder and harsher place to reside than Italy, then or now? The film's one drawback is that the stories, although they have their cute moments, are generally darker and leave more of a sour feeling. It is not as forgiving of youth as **Decameron** is. This time, Pasolini plays Chaucer himself, but without the symbolic weight of an artist pondering his creativity that he brought to the previous film. While there is talk of it, the pilgrimage is not depicted, which also undercuts, slightly, the dynamic of hypocrisy as an intrinsic function of society that hangs over the collection as a whole.

But what spoils the film is also what makes it, at least as an acquired taste, so marvelous. It was shot in Britain, and while some of the players are Italian, others are British. In fact, the film begins with the actor who, a decade earlier, had established definitively that people in the past were unholy slobs, Hugh Griffith. The mere presence of Griffith is entertaining, and sets the tone for the film's subversive Britishness. The movie has two audio tracks, its Italian track, and an English track that Pasolini supervised. Although a handful of text inserts remain in Italian (they are presented in English, with Chaucer's spellings, in a minute-long supplement, but why they are not supported in the film by subtitles is curious), the English dialog is not generic dubbing but is colored entirely by deliberate lower class accents (Griffith also does his own voice, of course). They don't speak in Middle English, but the voices have that same effect, anchoring the film in its slovenly past. Tom Baker, Josephine Chaplin, and Robin Asquith are also featured. Running 111 minutes, the movie's episodes are energetic and grungy (although the Dante Ferretti production designs are fairly elaborate and the costumes, as in **Decameron**, are accomplished enough to differentiate wealthy characters from poorer characters), and while the individual narratives are often dispiriting, the expectation of 'people behaving badly,' combined with the saucy clip of the English dialog, can be addictive.

Along with a trio of lengthy trailers, there is a lovely 9-minute interview with Morricone, who participated in all three films; a good 18-minute interview with Ferretti, who also worked on all three films and describes the strategies he followed on each, with some nice anecdotes as well; a decent 14-minute analysis of the film, which also suggests that much of Pasolini's work is inspired by burlesque; and a worthwhile 48-minute summary of what was filmed but then cut out as Pasolini trimmed as much as a third of the film for the final version. He completely removed the pilgrimage scenes because he felt they were redundant in terms of film grammar, and rearranged the order of the stories several times. It might have been a stronger film, but since the footage has since been lost we'll never really know.

Peter O'Toole's character in **Lawrence of Arabia** says that he is attracted to the desert because, "It's clean." An older anthology of stories from even older civilizations wound their way into **Arabian Nights**, which is blissfully free of excrement gags and a refreshing ray of sunshine, as it were, after **The Canterbury Tales**. Running a hefty 130 minutes, the film plays much more like a serial cliffhanger than an amalgam of jokes and pranks, and the specter of hypocrisy is no longer a core tenet of society. The main story is about two young lovers who are separated and search for one another, with digressions as they listen to the romantic tales of the people they meet along the way. Shot mostly in the drier parts of Asia, the exotic locales are supplemented by equally exotic costumes and production designs to create a distinctive shift from the previous films, so that what is, on one level, the same concept, does not wear out its welcome. Sex and nudity in the film are abundant, but they are representative of how sex and nudity ought to be used in films and almost never are—frank and human in depiction, and always in service of the narrative. While the film does not have the concentrated exuberance that **The Decameron** could manage by keeping everything in one relatively localized setting, it is a lovely and captivating adventure with touches of fantasy and a cheerful celebration of the optimism of youth.

Two complete deleted scenes running a total of 21 minutes have been included in the supplement, as both were wisely removed from the film itself. Presented with music and some sound effects, and again with the unheard dialog provided through subtitles, one scene would have come from the very beginning of the film and set an entirely different and darker tone upon the proceedings, while the other would have come near the end and, involving a secondary pair of characters, is essentially redundant to what happens to the central characters (there are repetitions of themes and experiences throughout the film, but this one was a little too on the money).

Included as well are three trailers, a collection of interviews with Pasolini running a total of 3 minutes in which he explains his intentions regarding the film, an excellent 25-minute analysis of the film and its relation not just with the two other films but with all of Pasolini's work, and an excellent 17-minute interview with Pasolini on the architecture of the different locations he employed, how those sites are endangered, and how Italy's own architectural heritage is under siege.

When we reviewed Pasolini's thirteenth and final film, **Salò, or The 120 Days of Sodom** on a Criterion DVD in Sep 98, we swore we would never watch the film again, but here we are, feeling compelled to complete Pasolini's all too brief filmography now that all of the movies are available on Blu-ray and Criterion had dutifully issued it on Blu-ray, as well (UPC#715515087414, \$40). The abject opposite of **Arabian Nights**, the film seems to seethe with resentment toward youth. The first part of the title is a reference to a town in Northern Italy nestled on its largest lake where the film takes place, which had served as a fascist capitol—although it is also a silly, bilingual pun—and the second part of the title references the writings of the Marquis de Sade. Adapting a work of genuine literary merit would be in keeping with Pasolini's strengths as a filmmaker, but in this case he became too distracted by content and his own cleverness, and De Sade's writings are best left to someone who doesn't think as much, such as Jess Franco. Set during the waning days of WWII in a large manor house, four fascist leaders corral a selection of teenaged boys and girls and have their way with them in various rituals that, following an aspect of Dante Alighieri's writings, progress from just sex, to going potty on each other, and then to physical harm. At best, the progression and action in the 117-minute film is a rather accurate metaphor for what Fascists do to the populace they have been entrusted to govern, but despite the elegant set and costume designs from Ferretti, the accomplished Tonino Delli Colli cinematography and a reclining musical score overseen by Morricone, an unremitting bitterness toward youth, sex (if **Arabian Nights** demonstrates why realistic sex and nudity ought to be in movies, **Salò** reminds us why it can't) and life overwhelms everything else on the screen. There is no character development, only debasement, and it is so pervading the filmmakers themselves cannot escape it.

A number of scenes take place in the evening as the characters gather in a salon where one woman plays a piano and another shares pornographic tales as if they were personal experiences. The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles, but there is also a competent English dubbed track which makes those dialog-heavy sequences easier to navigate, unless one is grateful for the visual distraction the subtitling provides. A trailer that tells you everything you pretty much need to know or see is included, along with an 11-minute interview with Ferretti sharing a brief summary of his career, his work with Pasolini and his recollections of the film, which he hasn't watched since it was completed; a 33-minute collection of behind-the-scenes footage and interviews, including a lengthy talk with Pasolini about what he wants to accomplish, retrospective talks with a couple of the performers who bought into it at the time ("On the set, paradoxically, the mood was jovial and immature. I wondered how we'd made something so awful without realizing it."), and with a talk with Davoli, who is not in the film; a 23-minute piece that twists itself into pretzels trying to justify the film's attempt at art (no, the movie isn't pornographic, it just has pornography within it), which includes a lengthy contemplation on the film by Bertolucci and ends up suggesting that it is a satire about consumerism; another

27-minute exploration of the film's value that isn't any more persuasive than the other one was; and 40 minutes of interviews with various people who worked on the film, sharing their memories, describing scenes that didn't make the final cut, and recalling the circumstances surrounding Pasolini's murder, which happened shortly after the film was completed.

Abel Ferrara's films are rarely any good and his 2014 **Pasolini** from Kino Lorber (UPC#738329239787, \$30), a depiction of the filmmaker's final days, is fairly bland, but it works fine as a supplement to the other discs we just reviewed. Not only does it open with shots from the completed **Salò**, but it includes staged passages from a novel and from a film that Pasolini was subsequently working on (Ferrara even coaxed Davoli to appear in the movie piece, which has pointed echoes to **The Hawks and the Sparrows**), while Willem Dafoe, playing Pasolini (all you really need to portray Pasolini is the correct eyeglasses and everything else fall right into place), recites in stilted English the actual responses Pasolini gave to several different interviews conducted at the time. The rest of the 84-minute film (which has endless opening logos and a lengthy end credit scroll) simply depicts his daily routine, dining and writing, and then his final and fatal night of cruising. If a viewer had no knowledge of Pasolini, the film would be an excruciating bore, but with enough context under one's belt, so to speak, it becomes an illuminating survey of his thought process and creative pathways. You come away from screening **Salò** thinking that it is the end of everything, the proverbial nail in the coffin, but as **Pasolini** demonstrates, that wasn't really the case, and but for a couple of wrong choices, Pier Paolo's art would have continued to grow.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The cinematography is smooth and accurately replicated, and darker sequences are stable. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a workable dimensionality (be sure to read the fine print in the song credits—perhaps somebody can work up a scam and get some money from the producers). The film is mostly in English with optional English subtitles, but some of it is in Italian and sometimes the Italian is supported by English subtitling and sometimes it is not, although during the latter sequences, you can usually follow what is intended. Along with a trailer, there is a great 6-minute clip of behind-the-scenes footage and a terrific 22-minute discussion in which Ferrara and Dafoe share their impressions of Pasolini and talk about his life and work.

Schoolgirl crush

Although characters in silent films appeared from time to time with certain tendencies, the 1931 German movie, **Mädchen in Uniform**, released by Kino Lorber Kino Classics on Blu-ray (UPC#738329247676, \$30), is considered to be the earliest feature film to embrace Lesbianism as its central topic. Squeamish critics then and now, however, say that it really isn't. It is a boarding school movie, and having more in common with Harry Potter than it does with Sister George. But that is a result of myopia and a failure to acknowledge context. At the time, in the midst of Weimar social enthusiasm, the expressions of affection and desire in the film are guarded enough to allow an alternate interpretation, but also explicit enough to communicate an alternative understanding, to anyone cognizant of its symbiotics, about what is really going on behind the hand holding, the friendly hugs and the seemingly innocent crushes.

Directed by a woman, Leontine Sagan, Hertha Thiele plays a teenaged girl who has lost her mother and whose father sends her off to an all-girls school. Already emotionally vulnerable, she fixates upon a young, friendly teacher who is less beholden to school's militaristic structures than the rest of the faculty and staff. The other girls in the school are, surprisingly, less mean than such characters would become as the boarding school genre progressed, although there is some teasing. Thiele's character fits in well enough, and the bulk of the 89-minute film is simply about life in the school, with tension rising from the moderately authoritarian impulses displayed by the school's staff (the film is and is not about Nazism the same way it is and is not about Lesbianism—it is all in the eye of the beholder), until the tale climaxes in an emotional crisis. That said, the drama is well organized. The filmmakers imbosom the concept that they are showing a life that hadn't really been seen on film before (girls' boarding school movies were just as rare as Lesbian films), and they don't shy away from admitting that hormonal advances are making teenagers both curious and confused. It is a stimulating and intriguing movie, even if it isn't the lurid exhibition both its promoters and its detractors believe it should be.

The squared, full screen black-and-white picture has been elaborately restored as befits an infamous classic, so that the image is smooth and contrasts are effectively detailed. The monophonic sound is scratchy, but that is to be expected. The film is in German, with optional English subtitles, and is accompanied by good commentary track by gay films historian Jenni Olson, who describes the political context that existed when the film was made, goes over the reasons why some wanted to interpret the film as not having a purposeful gay component, and summarizes the backgrounds of the cast, the crew and the story itself, which was remade several times subsequently. She deftly deconstructs each major scene, demonstrating how the movie can be interpreted one way, or the other. "You can see through the whole film that it plays with these tensions between eroticism and innocent affection. Look at the way they look at each other. There are scenes where you can watch it and say that really, it's just that she misses the love of her mother and that this affection is perfectly innocent. And then there are scenes that clearly play up the more eroticized Lesbian interpretation."

Nuns can be scary

Under the smart assumption that guys will tag along for the thrills, the rollercoaster scare movie, **The Nun II**, a New Line Entertainment 2023 production released by Warner Bros. WB and SDS Studio Distribution Services as a 4K UltraHD Blu-ray (UPC#883929806836, \$45), is almost entirely about girls and women placed in danger by a vicious demon. There's a scare, then you breathe for a moment, and then there's another scare. Set rather invitingly in France during the Fifties (it was shot in Aix-en-Provence), the production designs are wonderful, blending perfectly with the locations, and the cinematography. Effectively supported by the solid 4K delivery, hues are subdued in a unique manner, to give everything a kind of grey-green and olive tint, as if the soul of every object and every person was already halfway gone. One need know nothing about the previous film or the other movies that it has been spun off from to understand everything that happens in the movie (except for the end credit epilog) and be involved in the excitement from the get go, while it is its status as a sequel/prequel that enables the wonderful and normally boxoffice-shy period setting. Despite running 110 minutes, narrative ellipses are plentiful, but even that doesn't prevent a viewer from sympathizing with the characters or getting frightened at the right moments. A young nun with experience in these matters, played by Taissa Farmiga, is assigned to track down a demon that has inadvertently been released, and her novice pal, played by Storm Reid, tags along because actual nun training is a drag. Anyway, directed by Michael Chaves, the film cuts between their investigations and a girls' boarding school in a large building that used to be a church, where the girls play pranks on one another and the other heroine, played by Katelyn Rose Downey, is shown to be especially sensitive. And then the demon, who often appears as the sort of nun you do not want to encounter in a dark alley, arrives and starts to play havoc. All sorts of icky things happen, from bugs to severed heads, and if the editing generally does not care about the logic of characters getting from one place to the next, that does not matter because each place is a new scream. Between the film's image designs, steadfast period dressing, personable performances and its frights, there is plenty to entertain anyone looking for thrills, and if the plan is to watch it on a date, so much the better.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The Dolby Atmos sound is also terrific, with plenty of distinctive directional effects and a decent, 4K-energized bass. There is an audio track that describes the action ("The shrouded figure leans forward in its alcove. As Sophie stares at it, it begins to move toward her, resembling a person with a cloth draped over them. Sophie retreats in terror. The shroud is pulled back, revealing a split-second glimpse of the demon nun before a statue of a woman topples to the floor, breaking at Sophie's feet."), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, and 12 minutes of good promotional featurettes.

Artsy horror

An artsy horror film from 1973, **Messiah of Evil**, a Radiance Blu-ray (UPC#760137140184, \$40), has two things going for it. It is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and the widescreen cinematography is consistently impressive. There is, for example, a shot of a movie marquee that stretches from one side of the screen to the other. The second asset is tied into the first, and that is the film's Seventies style and décor. Marianna Hill is the daughter of an artist who arrives in a small seaside town (it's California, but the movie still has an H. P. Lovecraft feel to it) one night to search for him after his letters stopped coming. The town is virtually empty, and the only other 'normal' people she can find are a hipster played by Michael Greer and his two girlfriends, played by Joy Bang and Anita Ford, who are staying at a local motel. She goes on and breaks into her father's studio beach house, and later, after more weird things happen, the trio joins her. Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz, who would both next work with George Lucas on **American Graffiti**, directed, and the film's design presence does in some other ways bring to mind **THX-1138**.

Steeped in film school, Huyck and Katz named Hill's character, Arletty, after the leading actress in **Children of Paradise**, and the film is highly influenced by the European cinema of the previous decade, which is what makes it so compelling and so easy to excuse the occasional shortcomings. The father's studio has these fantastic murals depicting a shopping mall, and with the widescreen framing, the characters are dwarfed by the paintings. It turns out that many of the townspeople, due to an elaborate backstory involving a legend, have become flesh-eating zombies, and unfortunately, Huyck and Katz have no feel for what would eventually develop as 'the shock cut.' Hence, the film's excitements are more of a slow burn than a quick ignition. It is impossible to buy into the relationship that establishes all too quickly between Hill and Greer's characters, but the superficiality of their attraction to one another has existential foundations that harmonize with the designs and absurd events in a way that is very different from how a normal romance would fit with everything. The film also has a **Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** finale, which was tacked on by the investors after Huyck and Katz left, although like **Dr. Caligari** itself, such a conclusion adds another layer of meaning to the movie just as readily as it excuses the fantasy.

Elisha Cook, Jr. and Royal Dano have supporting parts, and future filmmakers Walter Hill and Bill Norton also have brief parts. The film did not get much distribution at the time of its initial release (although it does pop up on a theater marquee in **Annie Hall**). However, it makes a great Blu-ray. Despite its shortcomings, the cinematography is mesmerizing, and if the early Seventies arouse within you any sort of strong nostalgic pull, then you'll want to go back to the film again and again. The colors are not slick and glossy, but the transfer is solid and hues are accurate, and the film's color design is often transfixing. The monophonic sound is passable, and there are optional English subtitles.

The special features accompanying the film are all highly rewarding and double the pleasure the disc has to offer. To begin with, there is a fantastic 38-minute audio only interview with Huyck, presented with a blank screen, in which he talks all about the formative years he and his wife, Katz, had with Lucas and other members of that Southern California film school circle. In fact, you can't really feel bad about him

not getting much money from **Messiah**, since he still has points in **Star Wars** (Lucas sold his own off a while ago). He talks a lot about **Howard the Duck** and draws many links between the various films he worked on directly and the ones he was involved in peripherally, as well as giving his take on what he wanted to see happen in **Messiah of Evil** and what occurred after the production ran out of money and was shut down.

The next segment is an excellent 57-minute discussion of the film by several different film critics that includes many clips and references to the different movies that influenced Huyck and Katz, including the Sixties features by Michelangelo Antonioni, and the rise in the Seventies after budding filmmakers such as Huyck and Katz were able to start making their own offbeat horror movies. There are comparisons to **Night of the Living Dead**, **The Velvet Vampire** and, well, where else are you going to see hefty clips from both **L'Eclisse** and **Carnival of Souls** in the same hour?

That is followed by a specific 22-minute segment, with many more terrific clips and photos, by feminist film enthusiast Kat Ellinger, who goes over the entire history of Gothic literature and then shows how it gradually led to the outburst of exploitation films in the Seventies. "One of the reasons Seventies genre films can be considered such a highpoint to feminist film writers like myself is exactly because of films like **Messiah of Evil**, where female protagonists will come to appear more frequently in these roles in films, which mine the previously neglected area of female gothic, with its recurring themes of gaslighting, madness, sexual violence and domestic terror. As such, there was a mini explosion of this kind of cinema, pictures which weren't particularly commercially successful in their own time but nevertheless have proven critics and audiences of their era wrong in terms of their lasting legacy and downright stubborn longevity."

Finally, there is a terrific commentary by one of our favorite commentary teams, genre experts Kim Newman and Stephen Thrower, who provide their history of the film's production, go over the backgrounds of the cast and crew, including the artist that painted all of those fantastic murals, and provide their own theories on the different thematic forces that came together at the time the film was gestating. "It can be tempting sometimes to try to create a sort of timeline, and then to assume that people are all merrily influencing each other along that timeline, but that's not really the case. It's just similar influences are feeding into the culture at the same time and certain artistic sensibilities are picking up on them and sometimes sharing their response and other times diverging wildly, and that's just the way it works."

Come for the murder, stay for the comedy

If we could split ourselves in two, the other us would spend every waking day watching MHz Choice programs. The label specializes in European television, and most of the series they put out are crime shows. We could watch them forever and ever, but then we would never have time to watch anything else. Hence, for the most part, we just look at the lists of their latest releases and salivate, longingly, until a title comes shows up that looks absolutely so compelling we just can't stand it anymore. MHz's latest siren's song, if you will pardon the clever pun, is a French cop series, **Agatha Christie's Criminal Games The '70s** (*Les Petits Meurtres d'Agatha Christie*), a five-platter MHz Choice DVD Kino Lorber release (UPC#738329264321, \$50). With each episode playing the length of a feature film, ten episodes first broadcast between 2020 and 2022 are spread across five platters, two to a platter (there is no 'Play All' option).

The show uses Christie's actual stories for two of its templates, and looser derivations of her structural tricks for the others—and we would note right off the bat that in addition to murder mysteries, Christie's stories are often enriched by romantic entanglements. The first episode in the collection, for example, **Endless Night** (*La Nuit Qui Ne Finit Pas*), is taken directly from Christie's story, which was also the basis for the very enjoyable 1972 Sidney Gilliat film, **Endless Night** (Apr 01). The second episode, **The Darkroom** (*La Cambre Noire*), on the other hand, is simply, 'inspired by Agatha Christie's writings.' Nevertheless, it has an equal number of enjoyable twists and romances.

The program is comical and is driven by the personalities of its three protagonists as much as it is by the plotting, and it is set, with a comedic indulgence, in the Seventies. Indeed, the same five cars, including an unmissable bright red Mustang and bright dark blue VW, appear in the background of every street scene. The filmmakers also employ period-inspired split screens at now and then, to delightful effect. Designs, hair styles, costumes and attitudes are emphasized, and there is a great feel for the fact that the Fifties and Sixties bled into the Seventies—in one conversation, a character accuses a group of people of not just being 'hippies' but 'beatniks.' The pop songs that come up from time to time are filtered through France's inability to understand rock music, so it is difficult to say how accurately they reflect the era, but some of them are catchy.

Emilie Gavois-Kahn stars as a newly installed police captain—the first female to earn such a rank—in charge of homicides in a city north of Paris. Chloé Chaudoye is a spoiled rich girl who has a passion and a knack for psychotherapy, and ends up working for the police, and Arthur Dupont is the only cop on the force who is smart enough to recognize the talents of Gavois-Kahn's character (although he can be a doofus at times) and is willing to work for her. For all of the show's lip service to feminist awakenings, however, Dupont has top billing, and the comedy scenes involving his character are initially the weakest part of the series, although, just barely, his character remains appealing and definitely improves in attraction as the show progresses (like most modern TV series, even though the show is ostensibly episodic, the narratives surrounding the personal lives of the characters advance in each episode). Some characters are made up to look like Seventies icons—there is another police detective who is channeling Burt Reynolds—and the character names are often evocative of famous crime shows from the era. Dupont's character named is 'Beretta,' Gavois-Kahn's is 'Greco' (the character played by Telly Savalas in **Kojak** was of Greek heritage) and Chaudoye's is 'Bellacour' (as in **Hart to Hart**).

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks nice and has great fun with all of the bright Seventies hues. Scenes that are bathed in colored lights and darker sequences, however, tend to come across a bit hazy or grainy. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has some good directional effects and a steady dimensionality. The show is in French and has permanent English subtitles. There are no special features, but bloopers play during the end credits on many of the episodes.

In *Endless Night*, an actor is murdered on the set of a film after an argument with the lead actress, who is about to be married. At one point, a character is struck on the head with a *Palme d'Or* statuette. The 91-minute episode also introduces the characters and sets up their dynamics. A series of fashion models working for the same magazine are strangled in *The Darkroom*, which runs 92 minutes, and Gavoy-Kahn's character is taken off the case when a flashy detective from Paris steps in to work on it.

The Hollow (Le Vallon) is based upon a Christie novel of the same name, and is complicated because the mother of Chaudoye's character is one of the suspects. A plastic surgeon is murdered and his partner is the principal suspect until he, too, meets the wrong end of a bullet. The episode runs 89 minutes. We've come across this phenomenon a couple of times before (we still recall it quite vividly watching the first seasons of *Stargate SG-1*). A TV series will be going along and we will be enjoying it well enough, but then an episode appears that not only lifts the quality of the series to a new plateau, but seems to up the game of the filmmakers involved, as well, so that subsequent episodes, while maybe not to level of the episode at hand, remain at that generally higher level of satisfaction. That is what occurs with the show's fourth episode, *When the Mice Play (Quand Les Souris Dansent)*. Not based upon a specific Christie story, it is nevertheless in total keeping with the twisting murder mystery format the other stories have had. At the same time, the premise—the madam of a very fancy brothel is murdered—is quite delightful (with more than one laugh aloud moment), but on the top of all of that, the emotional growth of each of the three heroes is significantly advanced during the course of the episode. Running 89 minutes, the episode is really as perfect as you can hope it could be, and hence, we will say no more about it, so as not to spoil things. The punchline in the end, however, is hysterical, not so much for the gag itself, but for the perfect reaction to it by each of the three leads.

The character-based comedy remains at a high level on the subsequent episodes. In *Murder on Stage (Mourir Sur Scene)*, someone appears to be trying to kill a singer in a pop band, and when the lead guitarist is murdered instead, Dupont's character is recruited to take his place, becoming tempted by the rockstar lifestyle while he doubles his efforts as a bodyguard for the singer. From a production standpoint, the 92-minute show quite cleverly uses a single auditorium where the group is scheduled for a week of performances, thus keeping all of the action to a single set of dressing rooms and rehearsal space while allowing time for the crimes to unfold. There is also a poignant but witty dialog exchange when it is proposed that the killer could be an obsessed fan. "What a bunch of nonsense. They can't love him and want him dead, as if a Beatles fan would kill John Lennon. How ridiculous!" In an enormously amusing episode, the 89-minute *Till Death Do Us Part (Jusqu'a ce que la Mort Nous Separe)*, two women who have utilized a matchmaking service are killed in an identical manner, and so the heroes start trying out the dating service themselves to find leads. The solutions to the crimes are clever, and the humor in the cast's reactions to one another's predicaments and situations is glorious.

A TV UFO expert is found dead in the middle of a crop circle in the 89-minute *Murders of the Third Kind (Meurtres du 3^{ème} Type)*. It is impressive that with just a handful of suspects at the TV station, the story can twist so much, but as amusing as it is, it could be considered overly cute and one of the weaker entries in the series. On the other hand, *With the Snap of a Finger (En Un Claquement de Doigt)* is a brilliant episode that gets to the very heart of the series' appeal when an audience volunteer at a psychic's stage show is hypnotized, and then, upon returning to her table, stabs an apparently random victim. Running 90 minutes, not only is the mystery enjoyably complex, with wonderfully inscrutable characters, but each of the three heroes have secrets of their own exposed through the psychic's 'powers,' and also have hallucinations as they attempt to swat away their psychic cobwebs and solve the crime.

The first 20 minutes or so of the 87-minute *Fatal Karma (Mortel Karma)* are outright hysterical and although one of the narrative lines later in the episode relies on an overused comedy trope involving amnesia, it is handled well enough that it does not spoil the general amusement the story has to offer. The mystery is also well conceived, as there is clearly a least likely suspect, except that it seems impossible that the suspect could be the killer. Anyway, the show begins in the mansion of a wealthy CEO who has recently dropped out of the corporate business and taken up transcendental meditation. Among the spaced out trio staying at his mansion (much to the consternation of his very spoiled daughter) is one of the series' recurring characters, a stoner hotel desk clerk played by Nicolas Lumberras, whose comedic timing is impeccable. After the CEO is murdered and the heroes arrive to interrogate the suspects, the tripped out byplay is riotous, and the humor lingers throughout the episode whenever Lumberras shows up. The last episode, *Boarding School Murders (Meurtres Au Pensionnat)*, has a weaker mystery that is not really up to the clever constructs of the others, but the 88-minute effort is still entertaining, as Chaudoye's character is invited to the boarding school she attended as a teenager to give a talk on psychology and is then accused of murdering her teenage rival, who is now a teacher at the school. There are flashbacks, but they do not take advantage of the early Sixties time setting, and on the whole, the creators were not working at full steam to close out the set.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: Raoul Walsh's classic gangster feature, *The Roaring Twenties*, is being issued in 4K by The Criterion Collection with an excerpt from a 1973 interview with Walsh; a commentary with film historian Lincoln Hurst; and an interview with critic Gary Giddins. Robert Altman's

McCabe and Mrs. Miller will be in 4K format and will feature a commentary from 2002 with Altman and producer David Foster; a making-of documentary, featuring members of the cast and crew; a conversation about the film and Altman's career between film historians Cari Beauchamp and Rick Jewell; a featurette from the film's 1970 production; an Art Directors Guild Film Society Q&A from 1999 with production designer Leon Erickson; excerpts from archival interviews with cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond; a gallery of stills from the set by photographer Steve Schapiro; and excerpts from two 1971 episodes of *The Dick Cavett Show* featuring Altman and Pauline Kael.

Erich Rohmer's Tales of Four Seasons—*A Tale of Springtime, A Tale of Winter, A Tale of Summer, and A Tale of Autumn*—will include an interview program recorded at Rohmer's house in Tulle, France, featuring Baratier, producer Françoise Etchegaray, sound engineer Pascal Ribier, and editor Mary Stephen; excerpts of radio interviews with Rohmer conducted by film critics Michel Ciment and Serge Daney; a documentary from 2005 on the making of *A Tale of Summer*, by Etchegaray and Jean-André Fieschi; and two short films directed by Rohmer, *A Farmer in Montfaucon* from 1968 and *The Kreutzer Sonata* from 1956. A 4K double bill of Johnnie To's **Heroic Trio and Executioners** will come with an interview with actor Anthony Wong and an interview with film critic Samm Deighan. Michael Roemer's 1964 **Nothing But a Man** will have *An Introduction to Michael Roemer*, an interview program featuring Roemer; a conversation from 2004 between Roemer and co-producer and cinematographer Robert M. Young; and a program featuring archival interviews with Ivan Dixon, Abbey Lincoln, and Julius Harris.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray—*Mind Melters V.19, Mind Melters V.20 (Acid Bath); The Godmonster of Indian Flats (AGFA); Sound of Freedom (Angel); Detective Chinatown, The Gangster's Daughter, Lacuna (Bayview); Voices of the Amazon (Blue Water); Audition Tape 13, Dome House Six, Mutt, One Another (Bounty); The Mean One (Bridgestone); A Haunting in Venice, Wandavision Complete Series (Buena Vista); Uncut Vinnie's, Vantastic Rock and Roll Adventure (Burning Bulb); Astrakan, Dr. Caligari, Hard Gore, Portraits of Andrea Palmer, Rabid Grammes, Shadow of Death, The Sinister Dr. Orloff (CAV); Farscape Complete Series, Head Count, Shaky Shivers, The Sonny Chiba Collection V.2, Spirited Away Live on Stage, Surviving the Game (Cinedigm); World of Giants (Classicflix); The Eight Mountains, Godland, Jackie Chan Emergence of a Superstar, La Cérémonie, Mean Streets, Tori and Lokita (Criterion); Cat City (Deaf Crocodile); It Lives Inside (Decal); The Taking (Dekanalog); The Touch of Her Flesh/The Curse of Her Flesh/The Kiss of Her Flesh (Distribrix); Mister Organ (Drafthouse); The Jester (Epic); Pretending I'm a Superman The Tony Hawk Video Game Story (ETR); Happer's Comet (Factory 25); La Guerre Est Finie (Film Desk); The Scarlet Letter (Film Masters); French Revelations: Fanfare D'Amour Fanfare of Love / Mauvaise Grain Bad Seed (Flicker Alley); The Eurocine Collection V.1 (Full Moon); T.R. Baskin (Fun City); The Gift Of Acadia/Maine: America's Coast, Katahdin Mountain of the People/The Life of L.L. Bean, Light Spirit: Lighthouses Of The Maine Coast/Lighthouses Of Maine: A Journey Through Time, A Sense Of Place A Sense Of Time/Summer Colony (Gemini); When Time Got Louder (Giant); Deep Fear. Wintertide (Gravitas); 13 Miles (Habethy); The Rising Light (Hollinsworth); Bone Tomahawk, Color Out of Space, I Kill Giants, The Man Who Killed Hitler and Then the Bigfoot, Sympathy for the Devil (Image); Bang Bang Betty Valerie's Revenge (Indie Rights); The Aviator's Wife, Babes in Toyland, Boyfriends and Girlfriends, The Buster Keaton Collection Volume 5, The Carpetbaggers, Computer Chess, The Emerald Forest, Four Adventures of Reimette and Mirabelle, Gator, The Last Tycoon, Monk Season 1, The Monster Squad, Neon City, The Perfume of the Lady in Black, Running Scared, Scrapper, Stalag 17, 2 Days in the Valley, Valmont, White Lightning (Kino); Sleepless Nights (Leomark); Blue Steel, Desperation Road, Expend4bles, Saw X (Lionsgate); The Bad Pack (Massacre); The Blind, Lords of Dogtown, Ultraseven Anthology 55th Anniversary (Mill Creek); The Elderly, Marfa Girl 1 & 2, Saturn Bowling, Werewolves Within (MPI); The Unknown Country (Music Box); The Admiral, Barbarella, Blackhat, A Bullet for Sandoval, Count Dracula, Cuadecuc, Vampir/Umbracle; Full Body Massage, The Gamblers, Inside the Mind of Coffin Joe, Le Combat Dans L'Ile, Lion-Girl, Messiah of Evil, Tremors 2 Aftershock, Witness (MVD); The Astrid Experience (Noblehooks); The American Buffalo, South Park The Streaming Wars (Paramount); The Criminal Acts of Tom August (Powerhouse); Joy (Quality X); The Journey: A Music Special From Andrea Bocelli (Samuel Goldwyn); Hayride Slaughter/Halloween Horrors (Saturn's Core); Sequel: Cruel Summer Part II, 13 Slays Till X-mas (Scream Team); The Equalizer 3, The Fog of War, For All Mankind Season 1, Gran Turismo, Guarding Tess, Justified City Primeval Season 1, The Miracle Club, Short Circuit 2 (Sony); Route 69 The Bible Highway (TBN); In of the Damned/Night of Fear (Umbrella); Lifechanger (Uncork'd); Animal Cracker, The Coconuts, Duck Soup, The Expanse Complete Series, Horse Feathers, Leave It to Beaver Complete Series, Love Actually, Monkey Business, Oppenheimer, Violent Night (Universal); Squaring the Circle (Utopia); Psycho Paul's Film Festival (VHShitfest); Bikini Beach, Game Night, In Love and War, The Nun II, Rapa-Nui, The Sandman Season 1, Tag, Teen Titans Go to the Movies, We're the Millers (Warner); Eye for an Eye The Blind Swordsman, Warhorse One (Well Go); Scream Queen, The Wrong Door (Wild Eye); Ashkal The Tunisian Invasion (Yellowveil); Alien Contactee, Monster in the Woods, Trap (Zapruderflix).*

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently issued in 4K format—*Wandavision Complete Series (Buena Vista); Eastend Hustle (Canadian); Bloodsucking Freaks, Mark of the Devil, Mother's Day (CAV); Death Wish, Fargo, Tales from the Darkside (Cinedigm); The Last Picture Show (Criterion); Color Out of Space, The Man Who Killed Hitler and Then the Bigfoot, Sympathy for the Devil (Image); The Monster Squad, Stalag 17 (Kino); Expend4bles, Saw X (Lionsgate); Barbarella, Blackhat, Count Dracula, Doctor Butcher MD/Zombie Holocaust, Tremors 2 Aftershock, Witness (MVD); The Naked Gun, Scrooged, Terms of Endearment, Trading Places (Paramount); Black Hawk Down, The Equalizer 3, Gran Turismo, The Guns of Navarone, Rudy (Sony); American Graffiti, Casino, Duel, Oppenheimer, Violent Night (Universal); Batman The Long Halloween, The Fugitive, The Nun II, The Sandman Season 1 (Warner); Train to Busan/Peninsula (Well Go)*

An index to the reviews contained in this issue

BDs	(The Decameron) p8	(The Hawks and the Sparrows)	Oppenheimer 4K p1	Spinout p4
(Accatone) p6	Double Trouble p4	p7	Pasolini 101 p6	(Teorama) p7
(Arabian Nights) p8	The Edge of the World p5	(Love Meetings) p6	Pier Paolo Pasolini's Trilogy of	Viva Las Vegas p4
Barebella 4K p3	The Eight Mountains p3	Mädchen in Uniform p9	Life p8	Witness 4K p2
Barebella Queen of the	Enter the Ninja p5	(Medea) p8	(Porcile) p8	
Galaxy p3	The Fugitive 4K p2	Messiah of Evil p10	Salò, or The 120 Days of	
Blue Beetle 4K p5	(The Gospel According to St.	(Momma II) 4K p10	Sodom p9	
(The Canterbury Tales) p8	Matthew) p7	The Nun II Roma p6	The Scarlet Letter p5	
Days of Heaven 4K p1	Jailhouse Rock p4	(Oedipus Rex) p7	(Scouting in Palestine) p7	

DVDs
 Agatha Christie's Criminal Games The '70s p10
 Pasolini p9

Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time:

- The Admirer (MVD)
- Alien Intervention (Vision)*
- All Fun and Games (Vertical)
- Allegation of Powers (Uncork'd)
- The American Buffalo (Paramount)
- Among Wolves (Cinedigm)
- Ancient Aliens Season 18 (Lionsgate)
- Ancient Bible Destininations of Greece (Vision)
- An Angelic Christmas (Mill Creek)
- Animal Security (Dreamscape)
- Annikka Season 2 (Paramount)
- Arizona (Image)
- Ashkal The Tunisian Invasion (Yellow Veil)
- Astrakan (CAV)
- The Astrid Experience (Noblehooks)*
- Audition Tape 13 (Bounty)
- Baby in a Manger (Dreamscape)
- Bang Bang Betty Valerie's Revenge (Indie Rights)*
- Besetment (Uncork'd)
- Best Birthday Ever (Freestyle)
- Betrayal (Cheesy Flicks)
- The Bigamist (DigicomTV)*
- Bikini Beach (Warner)*
- The Blind (Mill Creek)
- Blindside (Uncork'd)
- Blood Brothers (Uncork'd)
- Blue My Mind (Uncork'd)
- A Bocelli Family Christmas (Samuel Goldwyn)*
- Bolivar (Freestyle)
- Bone Tomahawk (Image)*
- A Bullet for Sandoval (MVD)
- Bunnyman Vengeance (Uncork'd)
- Caralique (Vision)*
- Catholics (Cheesy Flicks)
- The Chelsea Detective Season 2 (AMID)
- Christmas Lucky Charm (Dreamscape)
- Christmas on 5th Avenue (Dreamscape)
- Christmas on the Slopes (Dreamscape)
- The Christmas Project Reunion (Vision)
- Christmas Recipe for Romance (Dreamscape)
- Cinderella (Samuel Goldwyn)
- Closer to God (Uncork'd)
- Cocaine Crabs from Outer Space (SRS)
- A Cold Case Based on True Jack Boyz Stories (Filmhub)*
- Collection Hunters (Dreamscape)
- Color out of Space (Image)
- The Corpse Vanishes (DigicomTV)*
- Coven (Uncork'd)
- Crappy Mother's Day (Uncork'd)
- Crocodile Island (Well Go)
- Crossbreed (Uncork'd)
- Dance Hall Days (Big Day)
- Dead Sound (Uncork'd)
- Deep Fear (Gravitas)
- Deep in the Wood (Uncork'd)
- Deliver Us (Uncork'd)
- Detours (Filmhub)*
- Disorder (Freestyle)

- Doc Martin Last Christmas in Portwenn (AMID)
- Domestic House Six (Bounty)
- Don't Look Away (Level 33)
- The Dovekeepers (Paramount)
- Down Low (Sony)*
- Dream for an Insomniac (Filmhub)
- Eco Girl (Dreamscape)
- The Eight Mountains (Criterion)
- The Elderly (MPI)*
- Elves (Uncork'd)
- Entanglement (Uncork'd)
- The Equalizer 3 (Sony)
- Estuaries (Ariztali)
- Evangelina (Uncork'd)
- The Expanse Complete Series (Universal)
- The Expendables (Lionsgate)
- Experiences New Mexico (Parable)*
- Extant Complete Series (Paramount)*
- Eye for an Eye The Blind Swordsman (Well Go)
- A Feeling of Home (Cinedigm)*
- Fetus (CAV)
- 57 Seconds (Paramount)
- 5000 Space Aliens (Freestyle)
- Flesh Contagium (CAV)
- Forever Young (Vision)*
- The Love Destination: Breathe for Anxiety (Dreamscape)
- The Love Destination: Confidence (Dreamscape)
- Meditations (Dreamscape)
- The Love Destination: Loving Kindness Meditations (Dreamscape)
- The Love Destination: Visualization Meditations (Dreamscape)
- Luther vs. Rome (Vision)
- Magellan Complete Series (Kino)
- Man at the Door (MVD)
- The Man from Rome (Universal)*
- The Man Who Killed Hitler and Then the Bigfoot (Image)*
- Mansplained (SRS)
- Mary Berry's Ultimate Christmas (Paramount)
- The Mean One (Bridgestone)
- Metalface (Uncork'd)
- Method Sampling How to Build the Future Together (Cinema Libre)
- Mind Melters V.19 (Acid Bath)
- Mind Melters V.20 (Acid Bath)
- Minutes to Midnight (Uncork'd)
- The Miracle Club (Sony)
- Mister Organ (Dithouse)
- Mistletoe Ranch (Breaking Glass)*
- Mongeville Complete Series (Kino)
- Monsternado (Uncork'd)
- More Than Ever (Strand)
- Mother of Normandy (The Vision)
- The Mostly Serious History of Wine (Gravitas)
- Mrs. Brown's Boys Holly Jolly Jingles (Universal)
- Murder in Big Horn (Paramount)
- Mutt (Bounty)
- Muzzle (Image)
- My Dear Secretary (DigicomTV)*
- Nancy Drew Complete Series (Paramount)
- Nancy Drew Final Season (Paramount)
- National Science

- Foundation: The Year In Science 2023 (Wonderscape)*
- Neon Detroit Knights (Filmhub)
- Never Give Up Dr. Kat! Kariko and the Race for the Future of Vaccines (Dreamscape)
- Never Too Late for Love (Filmhub)
- A New Spirit (Vision)
- Nocturnal The Collection (Breaking Glass)
- Noise Matters (Filmhub)
- Norm Geister (No)
- Qualified (Vision)
- The Notorious Guys (Filmhub)*
- The Nun II (Warner)
- Once Upon...My Story (Dreamscape)
- One, Another (Bounty)
- Open (Kino)
- Operation Napoleon (Magnolia)
- Oppenheimer (Universal)
- The Outside Circle A Movie of the Modern West (Big Day)
- Paranoid Garden (CAV)
- Paul's Road to Damascus (Vision)
- The Penitent Man (Filmhub)
- A Perfect Host (Uncork'd)
- Plan 75 (Kino)
- Private Private (MVD)*
- Raising Flagg (Filmhub)
- The Red Shoes Next Step (4Digital)
- Relative (Gravitas)
- Reset (Freestyle)*
- Return to Dust (Film Movement)
- Ride with Norman Reedus Season 6 (AMID)
- Riverdale Complete Series (Warner)
- Riverdale Season 7 (Warner)
- Roise & Frank (MVD)
- Route 60 The Biblical Highway (TBM)
- Running Scared (Kino)
- The Sandman Season 1 (Warner)
- Santia's Got Style (Dreamscape)*
- Sars-29 (Filmhub)*
- Samum Bowling (MPI)*
- Saw X (Lionsgate)
- Scared to Death (DigicomTV)*
- The Scarlet Letter (Film Masters)
- Scraper (Kino)
- Season of Light Christmas with the Tabernacle Choir (Intellectual Reserve)
- Sequence Break (Uncork'd)
- Shaan the Sheep The Flight before Christmas (Cinedigm)
- Shooting Stars (Universal)
- Shoulder Dance (Breaking Glass)*
- Silent Night in Algona (Bridgestone)
- Sound of Freedom (Angel)
- South Park Season 26 (Paramount)
- South Park The Streaming Wars (Paramount)
- Space Kids: New Missions To The Moon And Beyond (Wonderscape)*
- Spin Complete Series (Kino)
- Stars of the Night The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport (Dreamscape)
- Still a Black Star (Freestyle)
- Stranger in the Night (Filmhub)
- Surprised by Oxford (Samuel Goldwyn)*
- Sympathy for the Devil

- (Image)*
- T.R. Baskin (Fun City)
- Tasmanian Tiger (Filmhub)
- Teen Titans Go! vs. Teen Titans (Warner)*
- There Goes the Neighborhood (Indiepop)
- 13 Miles (Haltethey)
- Three Came Home (DigicomTV)*
- Three Wise Men and a Baby (Cinedigm)
- Time for Him to Come Home for Christmas (Cinedigm)
- Times Square in HD (360)
- Times Square in 3D (360)
- Tom and Jerry Tricks and Treats (Warner)*
- Tori and Lokita (Criterion)
- Transformation (Vision)
- Trap (Zapruderfix)*
- Travis A Soldier's Story and The Luckiest Man (Vision)
- Treasure Lies (Bridgestone)*
- The Truth (Filmhub)*
- The 12th Victim (Paramount)*
- 20 Days in Maniupol (Paramount)
- Two Straight Girls at a Queer Fest (Dreamscape)
- Two Tickets to Paradise (Filmhub)
- Unout (Burning Bulb)*
- The Unknown Country (Music Box)
- Unrest (Kino)
- Vinnie's Vantastic Rock and Roll Adventure (Burning Bulb)*
- Violent Night (Universal)*
- Voice of the Amazon (Blue Water)*
- Warhorse One (Well Go)
- A Wave of Kindness (Bridgestone)
- The Wedding Trip (Filmhub)
- What Other Couples Do (Filmhub)*
- When Time Got Louder (Giant)*
- The White Lotus Season 2 (Warner)
- Wintertide (Gravitas)
- World of Giants Complete Series (ClassicFix)
- World on Fire Season 2 (Paramount)
- WWF Fastlane 2023 (Cinedigm)
- Yoshi's Big Swim (Dreamscape)

- Harry Wild Season 2
- War Movie The American Battle in Cinema
- Blue Water: Sacramento at Current Speed
- BMG: A Taste of Praise
- The Subdivision
- Bounty: Foresight Killer Instinct Quest for Steel
- Puppetry of the Penis
- Some Happy Day
- Scam
- Brain Power: Far Haven
- Buena Vista: Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny
- The Creator
- CAV: S&M Hunter Begins
- Cheesy Flicks: Queen of the Amazons Werewolf Woman Panic
- Mysteries from Beyond Earth
- Mad Dog Killer
- Cinedigm: Sri Asih The Warrior WWF Crown Jewel 2023
- WWE Survivor Series 2023
- Love in Glacier National/ The Dog Lover's Guide to Dating
- A Royal Christmas Crush/Take Me Back for Christmas
- The Kill Room
- Weird The AI Yankovic Story
- Showdown at the Grand
- A Maple Valley Christmas
- Haul Out the Holly
- The Gift of Peace
- Five More Minutes
- Morning Show
- Mysteries
- The Dirty South
- On Fire
- The Wedding Cottage
- Welcome to Valentine/ A Picture of Her
- The Dancing Detective
- A Deadly Tango
- Provo
- Killer
- Grasshopper: De Humani Corporis Fabrica
- Gravitas: Fireline
- Greenfield: Megalodon The Frenzy
- The Exorcists
- Image: Suitable Flesh
- Indican: Landfill
- The Eden Theory
- Indiepix: The Fifth Thoracic Vertebra
- Ever, Réve, Helene Cixous
- Token Taverns
- Sisters (Mázas)
- Invincible: Hail Caesar
- Kappa: I Can
- Kino: Cinema's First Nasty Women
- Radical Wolfe
- Passengers of the Night
- Story Ave
- The Exiles
- Far from the Apple Tree
- A Towering Task: The Story of the Peace Corps
- Subject

- Ever Deadly
- Pianoforte
- Four Daughters
- Witness for the Prosecution
- Fireworks
- Desperately Seeking Susan
- Smoke Sauna Sisterhood
- Leomark: Back in the No
- Inheritance
- Lacrimosa
- Magnolia: Deliver Us
- Joan Baez I Am Noise
- Invisible Beauty
- Mill Creek: Eddie Griffin Stand-Up Spotlight
- Alonzo Bodden Stand-Up Spotlight
- Divine Influencer
- Moonbug: Blippi's Curiosity Calls
- MPI: Broadway
- The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet Complete Series (50 platters)
- Breakin' 2 Electric Boogaloo
- Abigail
- Mubi: Passages
- Music Box: Fremont
- My Sailor My Love The Road Dance
- MVD: Jailhouse Wardress Horrors of the Black Museum
- August Underground's Penance
- Mondo New York Apple Seed
- Mickey Spillane's Encore for Murder Strange Diary Skymaster Down A Message to the Stars Follow the Money
- Route 66 The Untold Story of Women on the Mother Road
- I'm a Creepy Crawly I'm a Fish
- Sabotage
- That Girl Complete Series (17 platters)
- The Dick Van Dyke Show Complete Series (20 platters)
- Cutting Glass
- The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald
- Nexus: Cats of Malta
- Out of Florida: Daddy Daughter Trip
- Paramount: Star Trek Season New Worlds Season 2
- The Patrick Star Show Season 1 V.2
- SpongeBob SquarePants Season 13
- Kamp Koral SpongeBob's Under Years Season 1 V.2
- Little Bird
- Evolution Earth
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Mutant Mayhem
- Baby Animals Top 10 The War on Disco Under the Boardwalk Groundbreakers
- Scorpion Complete Series (24 platters)
- Rubble & Crew
- Paw Patrol The Mighty Movie
- Magnum P.I. Final Season
- Magnum P.I. Complete Series (24 platters)
- Native America

- Season 2
- American Outdoor with Barature Thurston Season 2
- PBS Kids Book Buddies
- Billions Final Season
- Billions Complete Season (28 platters)
- Pet Sematary Bloodlines
- Special Ops Lioness Season 1
- Rainbow: A Spectrum of Theatre The Story of Carl Clay
- Random: An American Ballet Story
- ReelClassic: The Phantom of the Opera 1925/1930
- Retro: Boggy Creek The Series
- Samuel Goldwyn: Bitch Slap
- Sandpiper: Thunder Road
- Blacula
- Breakin'
- Breakin' 2 Electric Boogaloo
- High Spirits
- Invaders from Mars
- Sony: Dumb Money
- The Persian Version
- SRS: Galaxy Warriors
- Yule Log
- Synergetic: The Hand
- Uncork'd: The Curse of Willow Song
- The Hanged Girl
- Three Blind Mice
- Universal: The Bell Keeper
- Monsters of California
- Five Nights at Freddy's
- Vertical: The Retirement Plan
- Warner Bros.: AmericanEast
- Black Mama, White Mama
- The Cutting Edge Going for the Gold
- De-Lovely
- Earth
- Eureka
- Ghosts Season 4
- Respect
- Pajama Party
- Scream Blacula Scream
- Spy in the Ocean
- The Winchesters Season 1
- Well Go: Mercy Road
- The Ghost Station
- Wild Eye: Meathook Massacre
- Meathook Massacre 2
- Meathook Massacre 3
- Meathook Massacre 4
- Wonderscape: Space Kids from Hubble to the James Webb Telescope
- Social-Emotional Learning My Well-Being Making Good Decisions
- Wownow: Treasure Hunting and the Pirates of the Caribbean
- Legal Ladies Pioneers of Law
- Legal Ladies Pioneers of Law 2
- Mermaids
- The Galaxy
- Fast Speed
- Zapruderfix: I Want to Believe
- The Town That Loved Bigfoot

Coming Attractions

The following select DVD titles are promised for the near future. How many of them will show up is never a certainty. Logical subdivisions appear unmarked within each division. Titles which did not appear on last month's list are marked with an arrow (→) and are added to the bottom of subdivisions so that the longest awaited titles appear at the top within each grouping:

→MIND MELTERS 21

→AMID: Mrs Sidhu Investigates Elevator Game

Doc Martin Complete Series (27 platters)

Bad Things

→Creepsong Season 4