

Bernstein, opens with a curtain rising on an intimate dinner with old friends and colleagues Pierre (Pierre Arditi) and Marcel (André Dussollier), both concert violinists, and Pierre's vivacious young wife Romaine (Resnais's longtime partner and muse Sabine Azéma). It's like a filmed stage performance on an artificial set (complete with painted backdrop) and Resnais shoots the initial sequence in long takes with slow camerawork, drawing the audience into the performances. Resnais continues in this manner through subsequent scenes, as Marcel and Romaine begin an affair. The theatrical style both foregrounds the artifice—not just the sets and settings but also the dramatic structure and literary dialogue—while also drawing the viewer in with the intensity of the performances (both Azéma and Arditi won César Awards). Fanny Ardant costars as Romaine's cousin, who arrives to care for Pierre when he falls ill and Romaine runs off. As the title suggests, this is a grand melodrama that can only end in tragedy, but it plays out as an intimate work focused on the complex relationships between the characters as they struggle with their feelings and loyalties. Extras include a video essay by critic Jonathan Romney, and brief archival interviews with the cast and crew. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

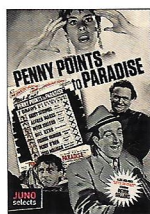


### Penny Points to Paradise

★★★

MVD Visual, 77 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

The 1950s radio show *The Goon Show* is only known to devoted fans of British comedy in the U.S. but in England it is a classic that influenced *A Hard Day's Night*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, and many other comedy classics. *Penny Points to Paradise* would be an otherwise forgettable 1951 British comedy if it were not for the fact that it's the first film featuring all three stars of *The Goon Show*: Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan, and Harry Secombe. Secombe takes top billing and the leading role as Harry Flakers, winner of a sports lottery who moves back into his old boarding house with his roommate (Milligan), where they are targeted by a gold-digging blonde (Paddie O'Neil), a military veteran (Sellers) with dubious investment schemes, and a pair of counterfeiters who plan to swap their fake currency for Harry's suitcase full of bills. It's basically just a setting on which to hang a series of otherwise unconnected skits that play like acts in a variety show. Secombe performs a pantomime as a nervous surgeon, O'Neil does impressions of Bette Davis and Gloria Swanson, Sellers appears in a second role as a fast-talking salesman, and they all end up running around a wax museum in and out of costumes. Sellers

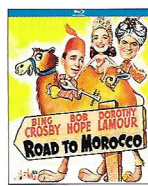


gives the standout performance while the rest of the cast mugs through tired comedy bits typical of low-rent music hall burlesque. Extras include the bonus short film "Let's Go Crazy" (1951), featuring Sellers and Milligan. Optional. (S. Axmaker)

### Road to Morocco ★★★

Kino Lorber, 82 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$24.95

This third *Road* movie comedy starring Bing Crosby and Bob Hope is, arguably their best, a nonsensical farce that spoofs Hollywood's exotic Arabian adventures and desert epics. While their names change from film to film, Hope and Crosby essentially play the same characters, ostensibly buddies and traveling companions who stumble into crazy adventures and constantly double cross one another. In *Road to Morocco* (1942), Crosby sells Hope into slavery and then returns to rescue him, only to find that he is betrothed to a beautiful princess (series costar Dorothy Lamour). The threadbare plot involves a prophecy, a desert warlord (Anthony Quinn), and Crosby's attempts to romance the princess between songs (including "Moonlight Becomes You") and gags. The portrait of 1940s Morocco is an exaggerated cartoon drawn from biblical epics and Rudolph Valentino films and Hope and Crosby constantly comment on the fact that it's all just a movie (a running gag in all the *Road* films). While there's not even a hint of cultural respect, the two Americans are far worse than any of the Arabian stereotypes: a pair of petty, self-centered, backstabbing fellows who constantly sell out one another. Debuting on Blu-ray, extras include audio commentary by film historian Jack Theakston, a 1945 "Command Performance" comedy short with Hope, and a behind-the-scenes featurette. Sure to appeal to Crosby and Hope fans, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)



### The Sea Hawk ★★★1/2

Warner, 127 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99

Five years after *Captain Blood* made him a swash-buckling star, Errol Flynn returned to the high seas, playing privateer Captain Thorpe in *The Sea Hawk* (1940). Flynn's dashing gentleman pirate is a dedicated patriot, looting Spanish ships to fill English coffers with the private blessing of Queen Elizabeth I (Flora Robson). The film opens with a rousing sea battle: broadside cannon fire sends masts falling and splinters flying before Flynn's army scrambles aboard like a swarm of hornets, filling the screen with flashing cutlasses, clashing bodies on deck, and a sky full of pirates swinging into battle on ropes. The fearless Thorpe becomes a stumbling schoolboy when he falls for the Spanish Ambassador's niece, Doña

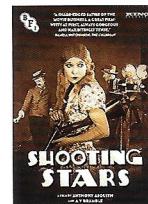


Maria (Brenda Marshall), but is back in his element when he sails to the New World for treasure and lands in the middle of a deadly conspiracy. Big-eyed beauty Marshall stands in for Flynn's usual love interest, Olivia de Havilland, and the film misses the latter's sass and spirit, but it's a minor shortcoming. Claude Rains plays his usual smoothly conniving villain, while hearty Alan Hale Sr.—who played Little John to Flynn's Robin Hood—returns as the loyal sidekick. Michael Curtiz proves once again why he was Warner Brothers' top director in this handsome, action-packed film that mixes intrigue and suspense with grand set pieces, concluding with a rousing series of escapes, chases, and a runaway swordfight. Extras include the archival featurette "The Sea Hawk: Flynn in Action" and the "Warner Night at the Movies 1940" program (with a newsreel, short, and cartoon). Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

### Shooting Stars ★★★

Kino Lorber, 101 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Set backstage at a movie studio in London, *Shooting Stars* (1928) is a savvy show business satire that takes a turn into romantic drama and crime thriller. Annette Benson and Brian Aherne star as Mae Feather and Julian Gordon, a married couple who play movie sweethearts on screen and are portrayed in the press the same way off screen. But the temperamental Mae is having an affair with Andy Wilkes (Donald Calthrop), a baggy-pantsed, bristle-mustached clown who has been offered a Hollywood contract. Mae wants to leave Julian and follow Andy but the scandal would ruin their careers so she plots a deadly scheme. The direction is credited to A.V. Bramble but Anthony Asquith made his debut here as the uncredited co-director and the strong images and dramatic storytelling style suggests that Asquith was the dominant filmmaking partner. Restored in 2016 by the BFI National Archive, this silent film features a lively score composed by John Altman, and includes a gallery of stills and documents from the BFI special collections. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



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