

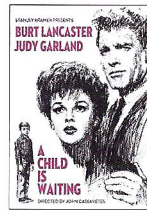
Turpin; *The Champion* and *In the Park* with Edna Purviance, his leading lady in all subsequent shorts) are steeped in the Keystone tradition of pratfalls and well-placed kicks to the rear end, but you can see the Tramp persona develop through the films and mature in *The Tramp* and *The Bank*, which combine pathos and slapstick in a manner that defines Chaplin's greatest comedies. By the end of his stint at Essanay, Chaplin is in top form with *Shanghaied*, a stowaway farce on a boat; *A Night at the Show*, playing both a drunk dandy and a working class rube wreaking havoc at a vaudeville show; *A Burlesque on Carmen*, which spoofs the classic opera; and *Police*, in which the Tramp leaves prison to enter a world of rampant poverty and crime (portrayed by Chaplin with a cynical, satiric eye—yet also heartened with hope). This collection of newly restored films not only shows Chaplin's evolution as a performer and a filmmaker during his greatest period of growth but also represents a vital chapter in the development of silent comedy and film history. Extras include the bonus shorts *Triple Trouble* and *A Night Out* (both constructed from Chaplin outtakes), and a booklet with behind-the-scenes images and an essay by film historian Jeffrey Vance. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

A Child Is Waiting

★★★

Kino Lorber, 102 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

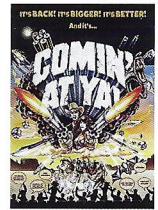
John Cassavetes was one of the pioneers of American independent cinema, directing important, emotionally-charged, impeccably-acted films on limited budgets outside of the mainstream studio system. That said, Cassavetes also worked within the system both as an actor and director (using the money to finance personal projects), serving as director on 1963's *A Child Is Waiting*, a sober drama with an impressive pedigree that included Stanley Kramer as producer and Abby Mann as screenwriter, along with stars Judy Garland and Burt Lancaster. Garland plays Jean Hansen, a new hire at an institution for mentally disabled children, who clashes with the institution's head, Dr. Matthew Clark (Lancaster), over the treatment of a particular child. The film could have slipped into obscurity as just another standard social issue melodrama, but the acting lifts the material, and Cassavetes's preference for improvised performances brings a realism that would have been lost in rote line readings. Clashes with Kramer led Cassavetes to disown the film, but *A Child Is*



Waiting remains a fascinating entry in the auteur's filmography. Extras include an audio commentary by film historian Tom Charity. Recommended. (P. Morehart)

Comin' at Ya! ★★★1/2

MVD Entertainment Group, 91 min., R, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95



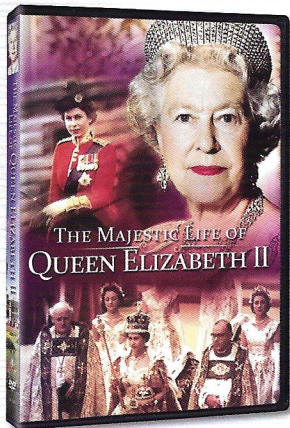
The 3D format was a half-forgotten novelty by the time this 1981 low-budget Western resurrected it, achieving surprising box office success. But while the film deserves credit for restoring the reputation of then-much-maligned 3D, *Comin' at Ya!* is not exactly classic cinema. The brainchild of two spaghetti Western veterans—director Ferdinando Baldi and actor/producer Tony Anthony—the story follows newly married H.H. Hart (Anthony), whose bride has been kidnapped by a pair of criminal brothers operating a white slavery business. Hart embarks on a quest to find his kidnapped wife, which involves the usual amount of B-Western mayhem. Throughout, the viewer is assaulted with an endless stream of objects that are thrust directly at the camera: coins, a yo-yo, a bowling ball, a snake, flames, and even a bare-bottomed baby—all meant to exploit the 3D experi-

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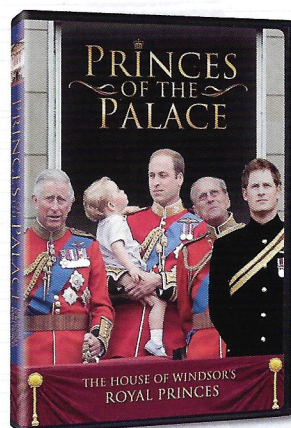


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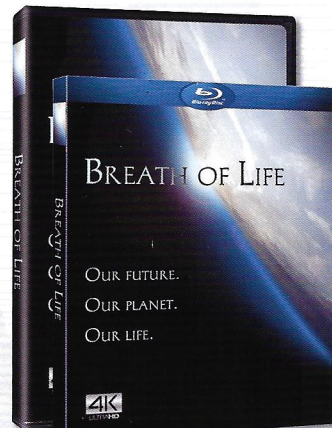
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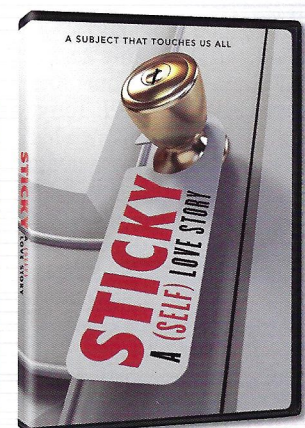


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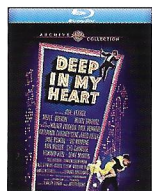
DVD VF-1032 UPC# 881394122321
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ence. But what might be amusing for a few minutes eventually becomes something of an endurance test—a particularly pointless one for those who watch the 2D DVD release. The 3D Blu-ray (featuring a frame by frame digital conversion of the polarized over-and-under format of the original 3D release) at least showcases the film's chief claim to fame, but viewers will need to have a 3D TV to enjoy it. Optional. (P. Hall)

Deep in My Heart ★★

Warner, 132 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99

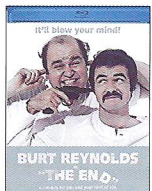
MGM was the king of movie musicals during the 1940s and 1950s and one of their specialties was the musical biopic celebrating great songwriters, a formula that guaranteed an excellent soundtrack and all of the production numbers that could be squeezed in. After tackling the likes of George M. Cohan (*Yankee Doodle Dandy*) and Rodgers and Hart (*Words and Music*), MGM turned to Sigmund Romberg—a classically-trained composer who became a success composing songs for Broadway musical revues and operettas produced by the Shubert brothers—for this highly fictionalized portrait. Jose Ferrer—not known for comedy or singing—acquits himself well as the Hungarian-born but American-raised Romberg, displaying uncharacteristic energy and comic chops when he does an entire show in digest form, performing all of the parts (singing and dancing) and even providing pratfalls. The romanticized story, however, is basically just a framework for Romberg's songs from shows such as *Maytime*, *The Student Prince*, and *The New Moon*, many of which are performed in colorful production numbers by MGM's stable of musical stars, including Rosemary Clooney, Jane Powell, Vic Damone, Ann Miller, Cyd Charisse, Howard Keel, Tony Martin, and Gene Kelly (appearing with his brother Fred Kelly in the latter's only credited film role). Although it doesn't rank among the great MGM musicals, this one is snappy and fun (thanks in part to director Stanley Donen) and features 22 classic songs, along with a great cast. Extras include outtakes from three unused songs, plus the 1954 Oscar-nominated short *The Strauss Fantasy*, and an archival cartoon. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



The End ★★

Olive, 101 min., R, Blu-ray: \$29.95

At the height of his Hollywood stardom in 1978, Burt Reynolds directed and starred in this atypical gallows sitcom-style movie. The result, unfortunately, is more of the funny-peculiar kind than funny-ha-ha. Reynolds stars as Sonny, a philandering,

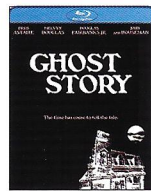


shady Southern California realtor who is shaken by a diagnosis of a leukemia-type terminal illness. Given mere months to live, a panicked Sonny awkwardly turns to religion, sex (Reynolds' real-life then-girlfriend Sally Field portrays the anti-hero's cat-hoarding mistress) and, finally, attempted suicide. The latter antic lands him in a mental hospital, where Sonny finds a sympathetic but bumbling loon (Dom DeLuise) willing to murder him. Lots of familiar faces (Carl Reiner, Myrna Loy, Norman Fell, Joanne Woodward, Kristy McNichol, Robby Benson) drift through this sketch-like scenario, at least giving this aimless farce some nostalgic value. Optional. (C. Cassidy)

Ghost Story ★★

Scream Factory, 110 min., R, Blu-ray: \$29.99

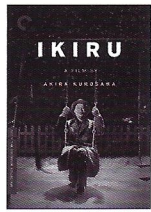
Based on the 1979 bestselling novel by Peter Straub, 1981's *Ghost Story* shines a spotlight on famed movie stars Fred Astaire, Melvyn Douglas, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and John Houseman, playing old friends who gather to tell each other ghost stories—until a specter from their past comes into their lives. They are haunted by a young woman (Alice Krige) who first targets the sons of Douglas, and then the elderly gents themselves, taking vengeance for a horrible crime that they committed and covered up decades before. Fittingly, much of the film takes place in flashbacks, as stories told to one another after a surviving son (Craig Wasson) appears with his own story of a fiancée with a cold heart. Director John Irvin creates a handsome film set in a snowy New England winter that could be a Christmas card cover (thanks to Oscar-winning cinematographer Jack Cardiff), and the four Hollywood veterans bring a touch of class to their performances. But the long flashbacks drag on, dissipating the narrative's mystery and suspense. And while it does play mostly like an old-fashioned horror film, there are brief moments of gruesome special effects (such as a beautiful woman suddenly becoming a rotting corpse). Extras include audio commentary by Irvin, and cast and crew interviews. Optional. (S. Axmaker)



Ikiru ★★½

Criterion, 143 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95

Ikiru, which translates as "To Live," is one of legendary Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's most emotionally powerful and intimate dramas. Takashi Shimura (the lead samurai in *Seven Samurai*) stars as Kanji Watanabe, a widower single father and political bureaucrat who discovers that he has stomach cancer and realizes



that he has wasted his life keeping busy in a largely meaningless job. After 25 years of punctuality and impersonal interactions with a staff who think of him as a dull, emotionless functionary (one young employee nicknames him "The Mummy"), Watanabe suddenly drops out, trying to deaden the fear through drinking and clubbing, and then becomes inspired to accomplish something meaningful during his final days. The film is split into two parts, with the second jumping ahead to Watanabe's wake, where co-workers toast the man and a memorable late-life achievement. Flashbacks punctuate the narrative, ranging from Watanabe's memories of how he reached his current state of apathy, to co-workers recalling the sudden passion and humility of Watanabe's last months. Presented with a new restored digital transfer, extras include audio commentary by film critic Stephen Prince, and two documentaries on Kurosawa. A beautiful, touching film that is one of Kurosawa's best-loved, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Julien Duvivier in the Thirties ★★

Criterion, 4 discs, 410 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$59.95

Julien Duvivier was once a giant of French cinema but his reputation declined late in his career. This boxed set of four standout films that Duvivier made with actor Harry Baur shows he was a versatile filmmaker who found innovative and expressive ways to tell moving and entertaining stories. *David Golder* (1930)—a drama about a ruthless banker with a spoiled family—is Duvivier's debut sound film, and he creatively uses the new cinematic dimension right from the opening scenes. *Poil de Carotte* (1932), which translates to "Carrot Top," mixes comedy and tragedy to tell the story of a sweet, imaginative young boy whose generous spirit is constantly smothered by a neglectful family. *La Tête d'un Homme* (1933) stars Baur as Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret in an inventively-directed mystery that is part police procedural and part battle of wits with an arrogant young killer. Finally, *Un Carnet de Bal* (1937), the tale of a recently widowed heiress who tracks down the young men who courted her 20 years ago at her first society ball, is one of the director's most beloved films, serving up a melancholy meditation on memory, loss, and disappointment (along with Baur, it also features French greats Fernandel, Louis Jouvet, and Raimu). These black-and-white films show some signs of wear and damage, but all have been well-mastered from archival sources. Part of the Criterion Collection's extra-less Eclipse line, this set is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

