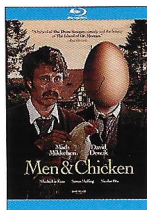


classic 1970s "giallo" movies of Mario Bava and Dario Argento, particularly the latter's 1977 cult classic *Suspiria*, which centered on a ballet school that housed a coven of witches. *Masks* is set at an acting school and eschews any supernatural elements, but does feature a spate of grisly murders staged in the gaudy style typical of the Italian gialli. The plot centers on aspiring actress Stella (Susen Ermich), who comes to the school in hopes of honing her modest talent up to a level that will bring her not just success but recognition as a master of the art. Of course, achieving her aim will require great sacrifice—and lots of spilled blood. The twists in *Masks*—the title derives from the use of masks in the school's acting exercises—do not make a great deal of sense (which, to be fair, is characteristic of the genre), but even though Marschall's low-budget effort fails to match the ghoulish extravagance of its Italian models, it comes sufficiently close and is likely to appeal to genre aficionados. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

### Men & Chicken ★★1/2

Drafthouse, 104 min., in Danish w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.95



Although some might classify this eccentric Danish film as a "comedy," it's really more like a circus freakshow: the funny is so faint that it does not even qualify as "gonzo" humor. Director Anders Thomas Jensen's *Men & Chicken* centers on two hare-lipped brothers who were the subjects of failed interspecies genetic experiments by their mad-scientist father. When the brothers find out they were given up for adoption, they decide to travel to a remote island where their other long-lost brothers supposedly live with their father. Elias (Mads Mikkelsen) is an unhinged chronic masturbator, and Gabriel (David Dencik) is a crackpot philosopher, yet the pair prove to be the pick of the litter: their brothers are mentally disturbed genetic abominations who commit casual bestiality and routinely beat each other with iron pots and taxidermized animals. As it turns out, father has long since passed on, but Gabriel in particular becomes unhealthily obsessed with the lingering secrets of dad's demented genetic experiments. Most of the film is set at the dilapidated, unhygienic old mansion where the clan of misfit brothers live, but while the film scores some points for weirdness, it's only a comedy if you think grown men pummeling each other with stuffed animals is funny. Optional. (M. Sandlin)

### Mia Madre ★★★

Music Box, 107 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

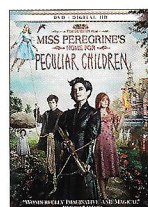
Echoes of Fellini's *8½* can be found in

Nanni Moretti's *Mia Madre*, which centers on an Italian film director named Margherita (Margherita Buy), who is struggling to complete her latest movie—a drama about labor unrest at a factory that was recently sold to an American entrepreneur, who intends to lay off a large part of the workforce. Margherita must simultaneously deal with her mother Ada (Giulia Lazzarini) being hospitalized for cardiac issues, demands from her teenage daughter Livia (Beatrice Mancini), and problems with her own boyfriend Vittorio (Enrico Ianniello), who is also an actor in Margherita's film. These domestic issues imperil her ability to finish the project—which is further burdened by her American star Barry (John Turturro), a *prima donna* who keeps bungling scenes and forgetting lines. Moretti juxtaposes realistic scenes involving Margherita's family and the film crew with dreamlike sequences recalling her younger self. Moretti's sedate, undemonstrative style cannot compete with the wild exuberance that Fellini brought to his portrait of a director in crisis, but in its quiet subdued way *Mia Madre* does strike an emotional chord, enhanced by Buy's subtle and multifaceted performance. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



### Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children

★★  
Fox, 127 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.98



Adapting Ransom Riggs's creepy 2011 novel would seem like a perfect fit for the macabre imagination of filmmaker Tim Burton. When shy, teenage Jake Portman (Asa Butterfield) is summoned to his beloved grandfather's home in suburban Florida, he discovers that the old man is dying, the victim of nefarious thugs. But not really: as grandfather Abraham (Terence Stamp) explains, it's all connected to the bedtime stories Jake has heard over the years about leaving Poland just before WWII, along with creepy vintage photographs of a bizarre orphanage on a small British island off the coast of Wales. With the help of a grief counselor (Allison Janney), Jack convinces his parents (Chris O'Dowd, Kim Dickens) to let him visit grandfather's mysterious island refuge. The fun begins when Jack time-travels back to Sept. 3, 1943, to find vampy, pipe-smoking Miss Peregrine (Eva Green) tenaciously guarding her fascinating flock of mutants, including weightless Emma (Ella Purnell), who wears lead shoes so she doesn't float away; Olive (Lauren McCrostie), whose fingers ignite fires; and Enoch (Finlay MacMillan), who animates objects to fight each other. They are living in a continual 24-hour Loop that is set just prior to a Nazi bombard-

ment. But ghoulish invisible monsters called "Hollows," led by Barron (Samuel L. Jackson), are determined to acquire that Loop. While initially intriguing, this strangely spooky and stylish film ultimately disappoints on a narrative level. Optional. (S. Granger)

### Miss Sharon Jones!

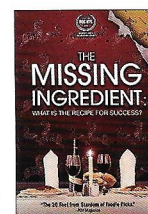
★★★★1/2  
Anchor Bay, 95 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.98



Gifted documentary filmmaker Barbara Kopple (*Harlan County, U.S.A.*) turns her lens on remarkable soul and funk singer Sharon Jones in this powerful, stirring profile. After working stints in various jobs, Jones began finding consistent success in the 1990s as a performing artist with her band, the Dap-Kings, along with her intrepid music director, Gabriel Roth, co-founder of Daptone Records. But after building a devoted audience, Jones—then in her 50s—was diagnosed with cancer, had surgery, and embarked on a course of chemotherapy. *Miss Sharon Jones!* is largely shot during Jones's "cancer year" of 2013, during which she loses her hair and copes with limited energy while also worrying about the people who depend on her ability to tour and record. Kopple presents ample, pre-illness evidence of the constantly dancing Jones at her best on stage, showcasing her wonderful voice. Such impressive talent becomes hard to reconcile with the small, bald, exhausted woman here, but there never seems to be any doubt that she will somehow, some way return to form. Part of the dramatic tension comes from the somewhat tough-love approach that Jones's manager and the Dap-Kings begin to apply when they feel that she's ready to greet an audience again. Weary and concerned about not being 100%, Jones looks exquisitely human and vulnerable in her magical comeback show. An inspirational portrait of an artist struggling with a daunting illness (Jones passed away in November 2016), this is highly recommended. (T. Keogh)

### The Missing Ingredient: What is the Recipe for Success? ★★★

Virgil, 87 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99



Canadian filmmaker Michael Sparaga focuses on New York restaurateur Charles Devigne's efforts to overhaul his struggling venue Pescatore's by appropriating the style of Gino's—a nearby culinary fixture that recently closed after 65 years in business. In attempting to channel Gino's character, Devigne goes so far as to redesign Pescatore with Gino's signature wallpaper featuring zebras galloping across a red background. But looking like Gino's is not the same thing as capturing the personality of the beloved eat-