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DVD/CD REVIEW

By Pete Roche

BACK IN TIME...

Ever wonder what your dad was like in high school? Wouldn't it be cool to go back in time and shadow your old man around campus a few days, just to see how cool (or kooky) he was? And hey, what if your mom attended the same school? And what if instead of the straight-laced goody-goody matriarch you know today, she was the school slut? Sound preposterous? Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale thought so. But they also saw the potential for a fascinating screenplay that could warm hearts, fire the imagination, and tickle funny bones. Directed by Zemeckis (and produced by Gale with Steven Spielberg), 1985 blockbuster *Back to the Future* is widely regarded today as not just a good movie but in many ways a *perfect* movie with its effective blend of comedy, romance, teen tropes, and sci-fi swashbuckling. The world has learned many of *BTF*'s once closely-guarded secrets since its initial theatrical run, especially when a treasure trove of behind-the-scenes footage and interviews were added as extras on anniversary editions of the film on DVD. The movie enjoyed another spike in popularity last year, when it marked its 30th anniversary (and all of us actually lived out the October 21, 2015 date to which the heroes travel into the future).

Brace yourself for another trip in Doc Brown's plutonium-powered DeLorean: Available now on DVD, the documentary *Back in Time* not only returns to '85 for a closer look at the making of *BTF* but studies the film's remarkable ripple effects on today's pop culture. Director Jason Aaron interviews Zemeckis and Gale, tracks down movie producers who rejected their *BTF* proposal, visits with project champion Steven Spielberg, and gets key commentary from most of the principal players—including Michael J. Fox (Marty McFly), Christopher Lloyd (Doc Brown), Lea Thompson (Lorraine Baines-McFly), and a few memorable side characters, too (Principal Strickland, Marvin Berry, Jennifer #1, Mayor Goldie Wilson, etc.). Collectively, these flashbacks and anecdotes not only tap into viewers' nostalgia but provide a unique (and often hilarious) perspective on how *BTF* came to life—and why it continues to resonate with cinema geeks and casual moviegoers alike. We learn how Gale conceived the idea for a time-travel picture by thumbing through his father's school yearbook, and how Zemeckis (then known for *1941* and *Used Cars*) parlayed the success of *Romancing the Stone* into a campaign to get *BTF* greenlighted by Columbia Pictures. We're reminded of Columbia's mid-eighties buyout by Coca-Cola, and how corporate restructuring threatened to mothball the movie. We also hear why Warner Brothers, MGM, and Disney shot down their proposal. "Are you nuts?" asks one Mouse exec. "We're Disney, and this is a movie about incest!"

Zemeckis talks about casting Eric Stoltz (*Mask*) as Marty (due to Fox's initial unavailability), and how trouble arose when it became apparent Stoltz lacked the comic demeanor needed to pull off certain jokes and sell audiences on the character's relationship with Doc. We're even shown rare clips of now-familiar scenes with Lloyd's nutty professor interacting (at Twin Pines Mall) with a jean-jacketed, skateboard-toting Stoltz. "I was in denial," says Zemeckis—who hints a *BTF* version of *BTF* might one day see light of day.

Fox—then a star on NBC's *Family Ties*—explains how he juggled his hectic schedule to accommodate the movie (TV show by day, *BTF* at night).

"I napped in the car," Fox says. "It was energizing at the time. It felt like we were doing something cool." Later, Fox shares his memories of sitting beside royal couple Prince Charles and Lady Diana at the movie's London premiere...and of having to go to the bathroom the entire time. "It was agony," he recalls. "But Lady Di was *hot*!"

Insiders speculate that—aptly enough—*timing* had everything to do with the film's unexpected box office success. One even surmises that today's cynical audiences wouldn't accept the friendship between 17-year old Marty and middle-aged recluse Doc Brown ("They'd see Doc as a child molester.").

Lea Thompson—who portrayed both older and teenage iterations of Marty's mom—relished the challenge of becoming flirty young Lorraine specifically because she wasn't recognized as possessing such traits herself.

"I played her like a kitten in heat," she giggles. Rocker Huey Lewis remembers being asked to write "The Power of Love" for the movie... but doubting that the tune would work in a film where romance played second fiddle to adventure.

"The song (and love story) was tangential," observes the singer. "That was better in a way." Composer Alan Silvestri likewise

The documentary gives us a peek inside the design and construction of the movie's iconic time machine, which needed to not only be mobile but resemble a "flying saucer"...at least in the eyes of the Peabody family 1955. We reexamine the gullwing-doored DeLorean, discover where the original car (and its flux capacitor) are being housed, and speak with enthusiasts who were instrumental in refurbishing the prop for display (and with aficionados who collect other *BTF*-related vehicles).

"It's a celebrity in its own right," says auto refinisher Rob Ferguson. "We didn't half-ass anything."

The film studies the accuracy of the moviemakers' predictions for 2015, and introduces fans to a handful of entrepreneurs who "invented" their own hover boards and flying cars. We also tour a replica Hill Valley, swing by a couple *BTF* conventions (and witness a marriage proposal), and find out what deleted sequence was repurposed for an *Indiana Jones* sequel.

Back in Time is a welcome addendum to the bonus materials on the 25th and 30th anniversary editions of the *BTF* DVD releases, and a must-have for fans who recognize that the original movie was not only a cinema landmark, but a pop culture phenomenon whose ideals, ingenuity, and charm really *do* transcend space-time.



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