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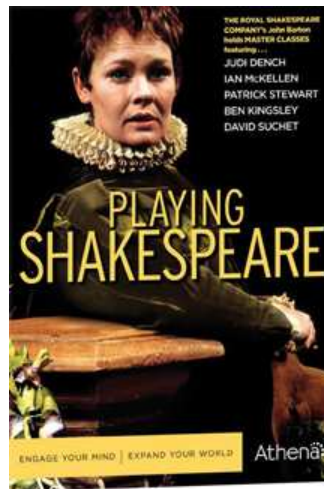
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April '09 Classics on DVDs



Written by Kevin Filipksi

In a series of nine acting master classes recorded in 1982 and now released as ***Playing Shakespeare*** (Athena/Acorn Media), director John Barton and nearly two dozen of the Royal Shakespeare Company's best actors give enlightening discussions about several aspects of how to approach Shakespeare onstage, like dealing with the language, finding the characters' motivations and discovering hidden direction from the Bard himself within the plays. Although Barton is at times too pedantic and the actors are often allowed to speak about the Bard—which is rather less enlightening than watching them perform speeches or scenes from the plays—this is irresistible for anyone who loves theater and Shakespeare. For the record, among the actors and actresses we get to see do excerpts from *The Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, et al, are Ben Kingsley, Roger Rees, Judi Dench (pictured on the cover), Patrick Stewart, Peggy Ashcroft, and Ian McKellen. The lone extra is a 20-page “viewer's guide,” but with over 7-1/2 hours of programming, you don't need much more.



also available...

The Boys from Brazil (LionsGate), Ira Levin's novel about Nazi hunters, was brought to the screen by Franklin Schaffner in 1980 as the ultimate guilty pleasure: often unintentionally funny, with less-than-thrilling sequences and a splendidly overacting cast led by Gregory Peck, Laurence Olivier, and James Mason (warning: this looks like the old release was given a new cover instead of a new transfer); Italian provocateur Tinto Brass made ***Deadly Sweet*** (Cult Epics) in 1967, an artsy, treacherous romantic thriller between Jean-Louis Trintignant's middle-aged male and Ewa Aulin's swinging teenager (best extra: Brass's commentary); Nagisa Oshima's 1978 ***Empire of Passion*** (Criterion) is a beautifully-photographed, highly stylized ghostly horror story that unfortunately runs out of dramatic steam halfway through, limping to an exhausted ending (best extra: cast and crew interviews); one of the essential documents of the radical movement of the 1960s, Chris Marker's three-hour 1977 documentary ***A Grin without a Cat*** (Icarus) looks back at the successes and failures of that tumultuous time with humor and thoughtfulness; Terence Stamp chews the scenery gloriously in ***The Hit*** (Criterion), Stephen Frears' 1984 crime drama that also features grand support from John Hurt and Tim Roth (best extra: 1988 interview with Stamp); ***In the Realm of the Senses*** (Criterion), Nagisa Oshima's notoriously explicit doomed-love story between a prostitute and a married man—whose genitals she cuts off after strangling him during one of their frequent bouts of bizarre sex, still arouses controversy three decades removed from its 1976 release (best extra: deleted footage); 1984's ***Irreconcilable Differences*** (LionsGate), Charles Shyer and Nancy Myers' glib comedy about a young girl who sues her estranged parents for divorce, is best served by its trio of top comic stars, Ryan O'Neal, Shelley Long and a nine-year-old Drew Barrymore—at least this is the best movie from “The Lost Collection,” which features seven other movies from the happily forgotten 1980s; ***Johnny Got His Gun*** (Shout Factory), Dalton Trumbo's earnest, humorless 1971 adaptation of his 1939 anti-war novel about a wounded WWI soldier left a quadriplegic who cannot see, hear or speak wades through its preachy, ultimately self-defeating seriousness (best extra: 60-minute documentary about Trumbo's long, storied Hollywood career); the 17 vintage animated short films that comprise ***Max Fleischer's Superman*** (Warners) are a delightful throwback to the early days of animation, over two hours' worth of serials filled with humor, drama and invention (best extra: featurette, *The Man, The Myth Superman*); a trio of movies by the French soft-core enfant terrible, director Jean-Marie Pallardy—***My Body Burns/Erotic Diary of a Lumberjack/Truck Stop*** (*Le Chat qui Fume*)—each has its erotic moments, negated by dated, just plain bad acting (best extra: 60-minute feature, *The Erotic Journal of Jean-Marie Pallardy*); it's surprising that Peter Bogdanovich would pair his best movie (the evocative, B&W, 1971

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Nickelodeon) on a Director's Choice double feature set (**Sony**), but he apparently believes that Nickelodeon is among his finest, as seen by his decision to pointlessly include the film in B&W, thereby ruining Laszlo Kovacs' color cinematography, one of its few redeeming qualities (best extra: Bogdanovich's cheerful commentaries).

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