

KINO LORBER FILMS

(\$29.95 Blu-ray) 2/16

I'M GONNA GIT YOU SUCKA (1988)

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D: Keenen Ivory Wayans. Keenen Ivory Wayans, Bernie Casey, Antonio Fargas, Jim Brown, Isaac Hayes, Jan'et Dubois, John Vernon. 88 mins.

Wayans' blaxploitation parody boasts a powerful all-star lineup featuring Brown and Hayes (looking convincingly out of shape) as retired tough guys Hammer and Slammer; Fargas, who deftly sends up his patented '70s pimp roles; erstwhile urban-action stalwart Casey; Vernon as token honky heavy Mr. Big; and the late, great Steve James as terminally out-of-sync chopsocky champ Kung-Fu Joe. Filmmaker Wayans doubles onscreen as **Sucka's** decidedly unmacho hero, a returning GI clerk-typist who's continually being rescued by his far fiercer mom (Dubois), while younger brother Damon Wayans scores as a Mr. Big henchman who suffers nonstop abuse at the hands of both the good guys and his own evil employers. Though Wayans' sometimes sketchy script and occasionally ill-timed direction keep the flick from soaring to max satiric heights, **Sucka** provides its fair share of honest laughs. Kino's new Blu-ray edition includes a making-of featurette, additional interviews and B-roll snippets, and a trailer gallery. Genre queen Pam Grier, meantime, returns as the eponymous shamus in William Girdler's 1975 black actioner **Sheba, Baby**; Arrow Video's double-disc Blu-ray + DVD set includes an audio commentary with producer/screenwriter David Sheldon, a bonus Sheldon interview, the Chris Poggiali-hosted history **Pam Grier: The AIP Years**, and an illustrated booklet.

—The Phantom

MVD VISUAL/UNEARTHED FILMS

(\$39.95 DVD) 10/15

FLOWERS (2015) ୪୪1/2

D: Phil Stevens. Colette Kenny McKenna, Krystle Fitch, Anastasia Blue, Tanya Erin Paoli, Kara A. Christiansen, Makaria Tsaporis, Bryant W. Lohr Sr. 79 mins.

Beneath a house, a garbage bag tears open and a woman crawls out. As she makes her way over a pile of bodies, she sees through cracks in the floorboards another woman murdered by the serial killer (Lohr) who lives here. She keeps going and when she emerges into a different cramped, rotting crawlspace, she is now another woman. This is the setup for **Flowers**, a wordless tone poem of decay and mutilation. We are following the victims of the killer after death as they slowly make their way up through the house, the identity of the woman we are with changing after each stage. The squalor of the settings becomes more and more specific, establishing links to the manner of each

woman's death. There is never any direct explanation for what we are seeing, writer/director Stevens leaving it up to us to interpret this grim vision of the afterlife. And the film is certainly striking. It takes nerve to make what is essentially a silent film but it works, and the sound design (by Ronnie Sortor) is suitably unnerving. The makeup effects, too, are expertly realized, and we are plunged into an unrelieved world of rot for the entire running time. Does the film achieve what it sets out to do? I believe it does. But the viewer should be aware that what this means is seeing women suffer and die for 79 minutes. By the end, as the spiritual journeys reach their conclusion, I was left with the uncomfortable feeling that there was a suggestion the victims had, in some way, brought their doom on themselves as if the Hell in which they found themselves was warranted. This is particularly the case once we reach scenes that appear to have the victims giving way to the sins of **Gluttony** and **Vanity**. I don't know that this is what Stevens meant to imply, but that was where I was left. A well-crafted, grueling exercise in horrific imagery, then, but one that might be reveling in the plight of its victims.

—David Annandale

OLIVE FILMS

(\$29.95 Blu-ray each) 2/16, 11/15

PRESSURE POINT (1962) B&W

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D: Hubert Cornfield. Sidney Poitier, Bobby Darin, Peter Falk, Carl Benton Reid, Yvette Vickers, Richard Bakalyan. 89 mins.

As a showcase for late, great greaser icon Dick (**The Cool and the Crazy**) Bakalyan, **Pressure Point** disappoints. The erstwhile quintessential celluloid juvenile delinquent's participation here is limited to a speechless cameo as American Nazi Darin's partner in sadistic crime. (Bobby's longtime off-screen bud, Bakalyan later played his neighborhood pal on the singer's network variety show.) On all other fronts, however, this vintage Stanley Kramer production scores as a then-daring, still-intense showdown between African-American shrink Poitier and racist sociopath Darin. Though largely set during WWII, **Pressure Point** reps another gem from the Golden Age of Anxiety, heightened by Ernest (**Mildred Pierce**, **Hell's Five Hours**) Haller's stark, at times nightmarish black-and-white cinematography. Our fact-based tale, adapted by director Cornfield (of **Plunder Road** pedigree) and co-writer S. Lee Pogostin from a Robert M. (**Rebel Without a Cause**) Lindner case study, kicks off in the present, with young psychiatrist Falk, frustrated by his failure to communicate with a Caucasian-hating black patient, petitioning superior Poitier to be removed from the case, thus setting the stage for the latter's extended flashback. While Poitier proves as strong as expected, Darin, normally associated with lightweight fare (e.g., the previous year's Rock Hudson romp **Come September**), displays surprisingly impressive dramatic chops as Poitier's

toxic, seething but ultimately pathetic charge. Olive performs a valuable service bringing this gripping inquiry into the nature of hate to the Blu-ray ranks.

—The Phantom

VOODOO MAN (1944) B&W ୪୪୪

D: William Beaudine, Bela Lugosi, John Carradine, George Zucco, Wanda McKay, Louise Curry, Tod Andrews. 62 mins.

While **Voodoo Man** will never make anyone's all-time Best Films list (actually, you never know!), it's still a fun and reasonably well-made Poverty Row chiller. The film's recent release on Blu-ray is a testament to Lugosi's lasting impact as a horror icon. Six decades after his passing, Lugosi films still have an audience. Much has been written about the tragedy of Bela's typecasting, but of course there's more than one side to that story. Monogram, the studio that produced **Voodoo Man**, treated the actor like the star that he was, giving him top billing and keeping him gainfully employed for a big chunk of the 1940s. Lugosi in turn gave each film his all, and this kept his audiences coming back for more. While certainly not in the same league as his Universal horrors, the Monogram flicks weren't bad. The stories were the perfect fodder for a Saturday afternoon at the bijou; in the case of **Voodoo Man**, Lugosi fans got a fairly straightforward tale of a heartbroken doctor who was trying to bring his beloved wife back from the dead. While not particularly scary, the film does have its eerie moments—such as the scene in which Lugosi and henchman Zucco attempt to transfer the soul of a young lady they've kidnapped into the wife's zombified body while other beautiful zombie girls stand in the background as a maniacal Carradine beats on bongo drums. There's a definite spooky vibe to these proceedings. Along with Lugosi, seasoned character actors Zucco and Carradine appeared in scores of these no-budgeters. Like Lugosi, they never phoned it in. They treated their work seriously and gave each production the respect the audience deserved. And while hardly lavish, the film's sets are decent. Poverty Row pictures are never going to make the American Film Institute's annual list of films worthy of preservation. While the viewership for these charmers remains loyal, it's still a somewhat limited audience—no one is going to spend money to have these films restored. Olive should therefore be thanked for finding a decent—if slightly faded—print of **Voodoo Man** and preserving it. Unfortunately, there are no extras. A commentary track from noted Lugosi historian Gary Don Rhodes, who's written a number of books about his idol's life and career, would have been nice.

—David-Elijah Nahmod

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