



**On Blu-ray™**

**David Hare**

**“...enthuses.... reviews.... rediscovers....  
reports on.... is disappointed by.... swoons  
over.... retrieves....analyses....draws  
attention to....”**

**Collected Reviews from  
Film Alert101**

**ON BLU-RAY™**

**Collected Reviews**

**By**

**DAVID HARE**

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Front page photo of pre-cinephile David Hare (aged 2)

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## FOREWORD



This is how shelving plays out, three across, nine up, barely 6000 discs (a Lilliputian collection compared to some). As you may discern more than half my library is on burnt discs kept in best quality pvc archival sleeves. The quality ranges from 1080p backup to frail low rez bootleg. We're all in that boat I think.

Someone asked if the discs are chronological as well as by director. Not quite, if I try to add chronological to the alpha director I would go mad with anality. I threw out almost all of the old DVD covers over the years to save space, some remain like the lovely MK2 Keaton cardboard book covers from France, titles which I am now about to triple dip on as new Bologna 4K restos come out next month from MoC. Anyway I've kept Blu-ray covers with the discs, but some clumsy boxsets (like the Universal 22 disc Hitchcock box) was thrown out because it was shit and the spindle nipples damaged the discs and broke them in half so they like a couple of thousand other Blu-rays in PVC sleeves.

Everyone has their system it seems. I could never adopt the "by country" method because it is too ambiguous too often, and the alpha by title method because there are so many content problems and cross referencing. Whenever multiple titles by different directors turned up on a single DVD (The Warner Lewton collections for instance) I ripped and burnt to DVD-R the "second" title and had second physical disc for that under the correct director. On it goes. Madness was passed years ago. Yet I hate collecting and I loathe clutter!!!!

I believe I am the only one who has discarded covers for what is now about a third of the current total (the DVDs by and large). I frankly welcome the reduced space, but I know others like Noel B are loath to discard cover art and packaging. Life gets too crowded for me...I think amongst the faithful there are more than enough people to make a Collectors' Corner.

The way people arrange them is a clue to their personality and philosophy I suppose, What sort of auteurist? If auteurist at all? My inspirations for arrangement go back to the old Kim's Video stores in Manhattan in the 80s (now long gone). The biggest one in East Village (or was it West 4th St, cant remember?) where the staff would become bored and occasionally changed everything around , for instance from director alpha during one year to actor, and another year to classics by Director of Photography. Confusion always reigned and it was a kind of snobby game by the staff (which I loved). I was there when a woman threw her hands in the air and yelled out, " Oh for Chrissake where is *Blade Runner*?" I quietly said to her across the room in a stage whisper, "Under C for "Cronenweth, dear.

Finally, in the interests of sanity and domestic peace I got rid of all my VHS and laserdiscs many moons ago. The lasers had absolutely no value in Australia and they ended up being largely binned. I burnt them all to DVD-Rs first of course. This is where I can truly say I am not a collector. I knew hoarders early in my life and it was like aversion therapy. I cannot abide clutter at all.

David Hare

# A

## THE ADVENTURES OF HAJJI BABA (Don Weis, USA, 1954)



The scrumptious John Derek and equally scrumptious Elaine Stewart in Don Weis' 1954 Scope adventure for Fox, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba*.

The disc is from a stunning new Twilight Time Blu-ray disc with a doozy of a 2K transfer by Fox's Schawn Belston. Fox's proprietary version of Eastmancolor, DeLuxe is

given a gigantic boost here by Cukor favorites, Production Designer Gene Evans and Color Consultant, George Hoyningen-Huene. As you can see from the screens (above, and more clearly below) only a master of color design could stage a major scene like the prelude to the last act in black and white wardrobe with a single gash of scarlet against the blue desert sky.



You know you're in for something extra special, when the opening credits finally roll after several minutes of a harem of female slaves awaiting auction, laid out in long lateral

tracks for the Scope frame, sharing space with a bevy of mostly topless hairy chested men getting haircuts and oil rubs from the likes of John Derek, the humble barber's son



Walter Wanger, probably the most interesting independent Hollywood producer from the "golden years", takes producer credit, with a seductively persuasive "Arabian" score, here in the original 1954 four track audio from Dimitri Tiomkin which carries the movie with grace and excitement.

The movie unleashes such a visual and musical assault on the senses, you simply take for granted such elements as dressing the entire female cast with startingly modern 50s Dior style makeup and coiffures (Edward Polo), and post-Dior Islamic chic wardrobe (Renié).

So at one level the movie plays it straight as an exotic period adventure, suitable for the kids, which it does much more convincingly than Minnelli's knowingly camp *Kismet* from 1955, but the absence of camp here or any other "grown up" savvy in Don Weis' approach to the material basically commits itself to an endless display of beautiful women, playing the game of the ages against an extremely good looking hero, (with the opening possibility of equally beautiful men) all given the ripe visual sensuality only such a spectacle could command.

This and *I Love Melvin* must be my top Don Weis movies.

## AGE OF CONSENT (Michael Powell, Australia, 1969)

My least favorite Michael Powell film, *Age of Consent* from 1969, with the first movie appearance of Helen Mirren. God knows how or why but this is another one of those slightly outré movies with an unexpected full frontal female nude shot of Mirren (her first, more later for Ken Russell et al) but with no visible "bush" as they used to say which blithely passed the pre 1971 "R" certificate Oz Censorship Board to get an "NRC". I saw this on its first day at the Rapallo in March 1969 and to say the audience drew breath at the sight of Helen posing nude for Mason is an understatement.

I had and still have big problems with the movie. For all the goodwill I can muster I cannot abide some of the secondary performers, in particular the awful Jack MacGowran (with whom Powell had always wanted to work) and a teeth grinding Neva Carr Glynn as Cora's gin-soaked "guardian".

The master seems to be from the same encode Sony did in 2009 from the Aussie 35mm restoration prior to that. As

it was with the DVD, I am not crazy about color and grading here. It seems to me black level is pushed a bit too high and this has thrown color values up to slightly oversaturated, with a dark undertone which occasionally affects flesh tones, especially Mason's, whose natural tan sometimes goes gray. I am guessing the 35mm may have been reprinted and color timed like this and that any further transfer and grading/disc mastering has had to work with that. Certainly my viewing back then recalls a very bright image with unpushed shading and natural vibrant color.

Anyway, it will probably satisfy most viewers, especially folks who are more fond of the movie than me. The new Indicator BD comes with a plethora of extras, every one of them wonderful history and recollection some from 2009 and others new, like Ian Christie's superb analysis of Powell and Islands. To a sceptic like me these easily outweigh the movie's own shortcomings to make for a worthwhile purchase



Screens here are the very lovely Harold Hopkins (above)

airing his basket for Cora on the boat over to Dunk Island, and the famous nude scene in reverse shot.



**ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS (Douglas Sirk, USA, 1955)**



From Bologna. The deer at the window in the final shot of *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, USA, 1955) is always the last straw that breaks the floodgates for me and sees the tears roll. Today's viewing, including tears, was of a first run 35mm IB Tech print, the third and last of three Sirk/Hunter melodramas and still my personal

favorite Sirk. The three were supplied by the Academy Archives and a couple of lighter reels notwithstanding, the autumn and summer glow, the fleshtones and Sirk's outrageously expressionist use of color filters and mirrored surfaces (down to a piano music stand) sang in this print with commanding beauty.



The color is both so saturated yet refined you can visibly detect the differences in shades of makeup and depth of lippy in every two shot with Aggy Morehead and Wyman. I had never noticed before in literally dozens of viewings the stunning red one piece dress Aggie wears for her last scene with Wyman in a kind of final mirror salute to Jane's

famous red dress from the first Country Club sequence.

A quick note on aspect ratios. *ATHA* was screened in approximately 1.75:1. *Magnificent Obsession* was screened in 1.37:1 and *Written on the Wind* yesterday was screened also in something like 1.75:1.

### **L'AMOUR D'UNE FEMME (Jean Gremillon, France, 1953)**

The new Arrow Academy Blu-ray release last week of Jean Gremillon's last feature film, *L'Amour d'une Femme* from 1953, is one of the most important breakthroughs in French cinema presentation for the last ten years. The disc also hosts something just as significant and unheralded, an astonishingly detailed and thorough 94 minute documentary from INA made in 1969 called *A la Recherche de Jean Gremillon* which covers Grem's life and career in what must have been the first of several

major retrospectives of his work, after his death in 1958 at the age of 61. The inclusion of the INA show is a masterstroke from Arrow, although they made an editorial decision to present the show as it first appeared on French TV, without any of the titles I believe are necessary to identify the dozen of more talking heads who appear throughout the show. Fortunately the program follows the time tested method of bringing on the majority of commentators in the first few minutes with a few horses talking the rear late in the piece.



So I have persuaded Arrow management to post names to accompany the mug shots on the Arrow social media page and elsewhere. The four mugshots captured here from the show are four of the most titanic figures in French cinematic patrimony. The monolithic Charles Spaak (above), is in my opinion the greatest screenwriter in French cinema and his work for Gremillon included both *Gueule d'Amour* in 1937 and their first talking picture, *La Petite Lise* in 1931, a landmark in daring experimental anti-realistic use of soundtrack and music. Spaak identifies it also as the first French talkie, released on 5 November 1930 (Duvivier's *David Golder* would follow in May 1931.)

The film was a commercial disaster and Pathe Natan which had not long previously come under the stabilizing control of Pierre Natan, hated it, refusing to give the picture an adequate release or any publicity whatsoever.

They treated Grem's next picture, the astounding *Dainah la Métisse* from 1931 with even greater contempt cutting it and throwing out half the length of the picture reducing it to 49 minutes

In any case Spaak has this to say in opening his recollections of Grem: "He was Blessed by the fairies..."



Rene Clair

Only moments later the taut, finely made but razor sharp Rene Clair becomes the second or third talking head and

he offers: "He was too talented..."





Fernand Ledoux

Moments later Fernand Ledoux, the fine actor from the Comédie Française who played two big parts for Grem in *Remorques* (1940) and *Pattes Blanches* (1949), says of him, with ambivalent insight: "He had the spirit of a young girl at times..."

These three commentators and a fourth, the immense Henri Langlois, the grand daddy of the Cinematheque

Française, contribute the lion's share of commentary amongst a larger roll call of over a dozen, including actors Michel Bouquet, Madeline Robinson, Micheline Presle, Pierre Brasseur and Charles Vanel. Despite sheer numbers and the sheer breadth of memories recalled Gremillon as a subject still refuses to allow easy categorization as an artist nor indeed as a man.



Henri Langlois

I have to say, personally in years of writing about movies and especially French cinema, I have the most trouble of anyone in writing about Gremillon, if not about his films, especially the very best half dozen titles. A friend and I once joined forces in Berlin a few years ago to record a vanity commentary track for *Gueule d'amour*, which we thought appropriate as we were making this in an apartment in Schoneberg, not far from the original location of the Neubabelsberg studios where *Gueule* was largely filmed (as was Renoir's *La Bête Humaine* from the next year, 1937). Only copious amounts of cheap white wine, and a packet of Camels (I had not smoked for over a decade) were anywhere near sufficient to break what I

was experiencing as complete block.

And so it goes even today, where I still find myself confounded by so many contradictions in his life and his personality and work. Sensualist and deep theological thinker, hetero and homo, tough nut and fragile artiste, that worst of veiled dismissals of any film maker, the Cineaste Maudit, and brilliant but difficult. Fortunately, we have his work to stand as his testament.

The feature movie on this disc, his last from 1953 is if not at the top of his inspiration, (I believe that last came with the 1949 adaptation from Anouilh, *Pattes Blanches*) a

project with both a commercial imperative and a very personal dimension, set in his beloved home country of Normandy, and the portrayal of a feisty sexually liberated woman largely standing in for Grem (at that time, and in this place!) who breaks with convention and starts an affair with an émigré Italian, played by go to Euro hunk du jour Massimo Girotti, fresh from the arms of Signor Visconti. Massimo was undoubtedly cast in a production decision to enable Italian engagements in an era where Franco-Italian productions were not uncommon.

It's with the two leads that the weaknesses in the movie most show through the cracks. Massimo especially shows too limited a range in his moods and performance without very close personal direction such as Visconti, or a later director like Pasolini could give him. So rather than expressing force or menace, he merely seems more petulant than powerful. Micheline Presle in the lead of the proto-feminist doctor and dedicated single woman often looks, even in her most medically focused scenes, like the long night waiting for the small girl's fever to break, as though she would rather be elsewhere in Paris sampling the latest Dior frocks. But all else in the film is profoundly satisfying, in particular the show stopping scene, mid-point of the outdoor mass for the school children who are farewelling their older spinster (possibly lesbian) teacher to make way for new blood. The scene has no dialogue other than the uttered Latin of the sacred text, or Grem's unerringly beautiful amplification of the natural setting with little recourse to sets, or studio and the landscape.

If I were running a Blu-ray company and I wanted to introduce new audiences to Gremillon with a fast drip feed

through the major work I would probably end with this title, as a very worthy closing chapter, and start with the first talkie *La Petite Lise* which has been restored in a new 2K by Pathe but has been lying around in a vault somewhere without a single engagement or even Festival screening.

The next might be *Gueule d'Amour* which has itself been released from a stunning new 4K but in French language only on a superb Blu-ray from France. *Pattes Blanches* would be next and this has indeed been released on a French Gaumont disc with English subs although a combination of a darkish prime 35mm element and a darker than usual 2K encode by the usual suspect (Lab Eclair as PostHouse) very slightly takes the edge off the brilliance of the image quality for this masterpiece.

And for now in Anglophone territories we have this absolutely beautiful new Arrow disc released in both the US and the UK. I urge everyone with the slightest interest in French cinema to buy it perhaps assisting an environment in which Arrow and other Anglophone labels might be encouraged to pounce on the cart and start another "rediscovery" of Gremillon, this time one on shiny silver discs which may spread the word further than any previous events, including Chris Fujiwara's groundbreaking Edinburgh Festival program back in the 90s, a season at Bologna just four or five years ago and a massive French cinema overview at MOMA in the late 80s through the entire gamut of films from the late silents through to the Nouvelle Vague. Not to mention Tavernier's new 3-hour retrospective of French cinema from someone who knows it like the back of his hand.

## **ARRIVAL (Denis Villeneuve, USA, 2016)**



Amy Adams, *Arrival*

Amy Adams (above) in a field with an alien craft carrying Heptapods at the centre of Denis Villeneuve's moving and

intelligent adaptation of *Arrival*, a 90s short novel by Ted Chiang, "The Story of your Life". The material is the sort of

grown up, semi-philosophical quest that has been germane to the genre for some years now, ever since people recognized Philip K Dick, Aldiss, Sagan and others as serious writers of intelligent fiction in the sci-fi realm. The question of time is at the center of *Arrival*, and the narrative of alien visitation with a confluence of fortune, planning and sheer aesthetic pleasure at the meeting of two alien cultures, humans and the heptapods, whose purpose seems to be gifting a frankly unworthy and stupid species like us a completely radical way of perceiving time and life and the whole nature of memory and prediction.

Time and prediction are not new themes, certainly and concepts of simultaneous dimensions of time as it were, are also prominent in numbers of Aboriginal and other prime cultures, the Aborigines of Australia for example and the dreamtime, the Swedish/Nordic Sami, the Native Americans and others. The joys of the novel and film are many, even down to the predictable if narratively "logical" outcome of human hostility in the last act of the movie propelling what should have been a friendly visitation into warfare. We are hopeless....and who can disagree?

But we can be thankful for enlightened humans like Amy Adams (Louise) and a very agreeable secondary male character in Jeremy Renner, as Ian, in an admirably gender leading role reversal for Hollywood. An equally gratifying pleasure is the direction of Denis

Villeneuve, none of whose earlier films had I seen and which I must now catch. Villeneuve directs classically well with such oft ignored basics as setup, blocking, staging, composition travelling shots and every other imaginable tool of *mise-en-scène* firmly under the belt to maximise the intimacy of the show while playing off the spectacle which indeed carries its own particular personal intimacy, one which Louise constantly shares with the audience.

Villeneuve apparently dislikes blue or green screen CGI material intensely and he built actual scale sets for the internal space ship and other sequences, which were then lit and filmed "naturally" without optical processing. The result is a picture quality that dazzles with almost impossibly humble elegance and simplicity. The director also storyboarded everything down to the physical scale of the visitors to their habitat and to the natural human world. The movie was shot with Arri Alexa cameras and Arri and Zeiss primes, in the 2.8k domain and DI was executed in 2K which was then used for 35 Scope Deluxe film prints.

If I suggest a very, very slight disappointment with the visual quality of the Australian Blu-ray disc from Roadshow, it's probably because it follows multiple viewings of a truckload of 4K native material here recently.

The movie and disc come highly recommended.

## ASPHALT JUNGLE (John Huston, USA, 1950)



The climax of Huston's terrific *Asphalt Jungle* and probably his most impressive closing sequence (among many.) All the more poignant and moving for Milkos Rosza's stunning score which rises again after only appearing once previously to announce the very opening credits in a film otherwise entirely without music, at least until the pre-climactic jukebox diner capture of Sam Jaffe/Doc in the movie's penultimate nighttime setting.

Huston's and Ben Maddow's screenplay is taken from a book by the granddaddy of American crime to movie sagas, W.R.Burnett (Little Caesar, High Sierra, Beast of the City).

What he also does is luck into Metro and the studio system at their last peak with an ace team of producer Arthur Hornblow and DP Harold Rosson with material and craft so perfect Huston is able to deliver a seamlessly fluid *mise-en-scène* and a firm narrative tonal line that both encapsulates and in some ways ends the Noir cycle, With similarly effortless style, he also announces the end of his own thematic and formal redirection from the crime related genres which he explored so successfully (*Maltese Falcon*, *Sierra Madre*, *Key Largo*) into several more decades of initially shaky but ultimately productive and expressively personal literary adaptations of material that chimes close to his bones.

(*Fat City, Wise Blood, Man Who Would be King, The Dead, Prizzi's Honor, Reflections in a Golden Eye.*)

Meanwhile *Asphalt Jungle* delivers a hard eyed view of a rotten society, operating outside the small criminal milieu who should but don't get away with a near perfect heist, in a manner that casually throws the notion of wider corruption and bastardry into the ring as an afterthought to the central game of mutual engagement between determined, specialist

men that simply goes wrong in every possible way for no reason other than bad luck.

The new Criterion Blu Ray is one of their first licensing deals with Warner HV and the new 2K master for this is a thing of breathtaking beauty. The opening sequence of *Dix* (Sterling Hayden) gliding along magic hour Cincinnati streets and colonnades in open air had me gasping for breath at the sheer quality of light and dust. B&W movies don't get better than this.

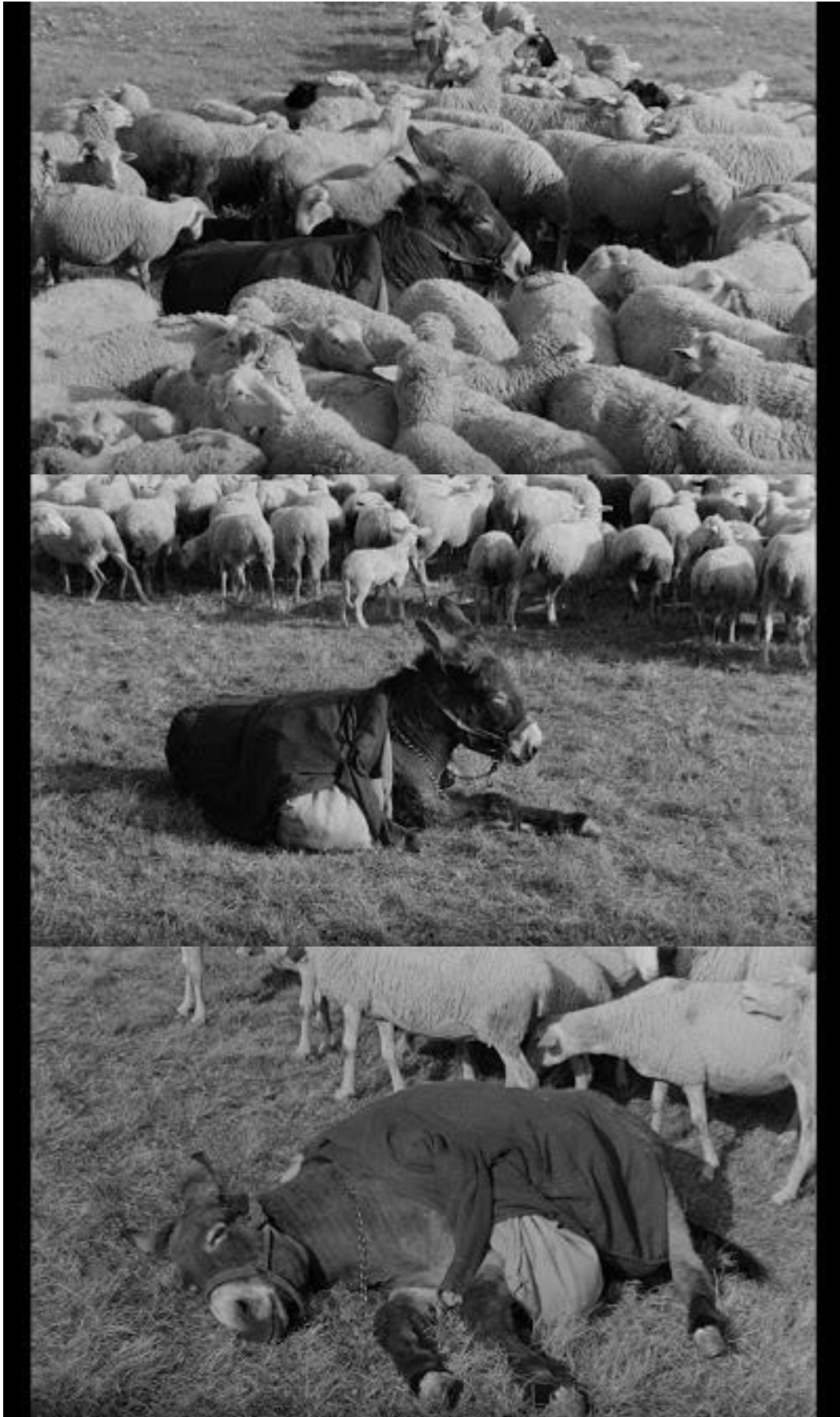
## **AU HASARD, BALTHAZAR (Robert Bresson, France, 1966)**

The death of Balthazar in Bresson's sublime and unbearable masterpiece. New Criterion Blu-ray, many years coming, now here and flawlessly beautiful.

Nothing more I can say.







## AUNTIE MAME (Morton DaCosta, USA, 1958)



Mame (Roz Russell) with Vera Charles (Coral Browne) and Lindsay (Patric Knowles), (above) in a rare didactic moment from the eponymous adaptation of Patrick Dennis' quasi-biographical novel, *Auntie Mame*.

If ever there was a movie that sang out (Louise) the gay experience of a young boy, without ever acknowledging it (more or less impossible in 1958) this movie must be it although the only fleeting reference to that which dare not speak its name or any other parts is once only alluded to with a clutch of several older Tweed-clad Radclyffe Hall dykes at one of Mame's late parties in Manhattan. I am in multiple minds about this picture. On one hand I accept it as a part of that run of highly static and Broadway-based stage and music theatre works Warners adapted from the mid-fifties onwards, forever ending the direction of the peak movie musical, along with Fox studios and their R&H franchise.

But I am a dinosaur and I still regret the passing of the Freed Unit and its glories, probably absurdly and wrong-headedly. So I am an official Mame Grump. But how far can one be a grump when confronted with so much high keep the occasional saccharine moments at bay

end campery in a single film (despite the subject being the literal elephant in the room), with the supreme talents of people like Orry-Kelly for wardrobe, the adaptation of Dennis' book by Comden and Green, a brassy Warner orchestra (post Salinger) score from Bronislau Kaper, and Harry Stradling photographing one of the very first 6 perf Technirama movies, itself a graduation from the earlier and more expensive, super high quality 8-perf Vistavision, with dye transfer 50s top quality printing for the 35mm and masked reduction prints by Technicolor.

At bottom however I have a distaste for the sheer mercenary throwaway of a nasty line like "Life is a banquet and all the suckers are standing outside." It seems to belie a would-be Bohemian approach to life being performed by a woman, indeed a group of people for whom possession and white privilege is everything, for all their protestations of liberalism. So grump I remain. The disc needless to say is from a spanking new 2K scan of pristine elements and is flawless. To be downed with a lot of vodka martinis to keep the occasional saccharine moments at bay.

# B

## BABYLON BERLIN (Tom Tykwer, Germany, 2017)



New ultra-super-duper German sixteen part series *Babylon Berlin* set in Weimar Berlin 1929 to 34, which started playing on local (and US etc) Netflix last month has grabbed me by the curls with a vengeance.

The screen above (crap quality, can't get screens from Netflix streaming) is from the killer 12 minute finale to

Episode 2, a giant mass dance sequence set in the historic Weimar epicentre of decadence, the Moka Efti club directed by (I suspect) Tom Tykwer one of the three listed producers and directors for the series of 16 eps. Tykwer's "segments" were far and away the best parts of the always interesting *Cloud Atlas* and first series from the Wachowskis mini-series, *Sense 8*.



Severija Janusauskaite as Sorokina sings "Ashes to Ashes", *Babylon Berlin*

Indeed in the giant ten minute polysexual orgy in the hot tub in *Sense 8*, with effectively the entire cast nude and nekkid was an exercise in hot paced, deliriously directed

soft core swoon that meets its clothed match here in the killer climax of *Babylon Berlin's* ep.2.

The show is so good, we're not binge viewing at all but leaving it for savoring in a single ep per night.



Uli Hanisch's fabulous set of the exterior of Moka Efti nightclub,  
*Babylon Berlin* (click to enlarge)

### UN BEAU SOLEIL INTÉRIEUR (Claire Denis, France, 2017)



Juliet Binoche, *Un Beau Soleil Intérieur*

The loves of a woman is no more and no less than the subject of Claire Denis' wonderful new film, with the astonishing participation of Juliette Binoche, *Un Beau Soleil Intérieur* which has just been released in a very fine English friendly Blu-ray by Curzon Artificial Eye in the UK.

The movie debuted in English language territories in July last year at the sister Festivals of NZ and Melbourne, and has since enjoyed only limited commercial runs in Europe and the USA.





Xavier Beauvois, *Un Beau Soleil Intérieur*

My only quibble with the new Blu-ray is the appallingly misconceived faux-hip translation of the original French title which should read something like, "A glorious inner

sun" to something as hideously banal as the Gerome Ragni-esque homage, "Let the Sunshine In".



Nicolas Duvauchelle.

The film has its beginnings in a 1977 text by Claire's old chum the late Roland Barthes, "Fragments d'un discours amoureux". Or as Claire would have it, as she does in a

disarmingly sweet 30 minute interview to camera on the new disc, 34 Fragments, in effect a sister film to her earlier movie *35 Rhums (35 Shots of Rum, 2008)*.



Alex Descas and Valerie Bruno Tedeschi

In both this and that film, a woman languishes, albeit in considerable sensual pleasure and genial ambivalence, with one of Claire's most present and sustaining male

actors, Alex Descas coming late to the picture, as a potentially redeeming figure to the woman and her currently unfulfilled desire for both sex and affection.



Juliet Binoche

Claire is very much not a director for gender studies devotees, nor indeed much of modern so called western "feminism". I imagine her effigy being ritually burnt in Gender studies classes the world over for her "sins". Like several previous essays in transgression, ranging from a

serial transvestite granny killer (*J'ai pas Sommeil*, 1994), to *Cannibal Vampires (Trouble Every Day*, 2001, admittedly with the odious Vincent Gallo playing lead Vampire, along with the sublime Beatrice Dalle), to lovable but incestuous fathers (*Les Salauds*, 2013).



Juliet Binoche, *Un Beau Soleil Intérieur*

Such transgressions are redundant in the new film, with a handpicked cast of men whose characters, bar one, are obnoxious almost beyond belief. Her growth as an artist and human being, which already to me seemed complete

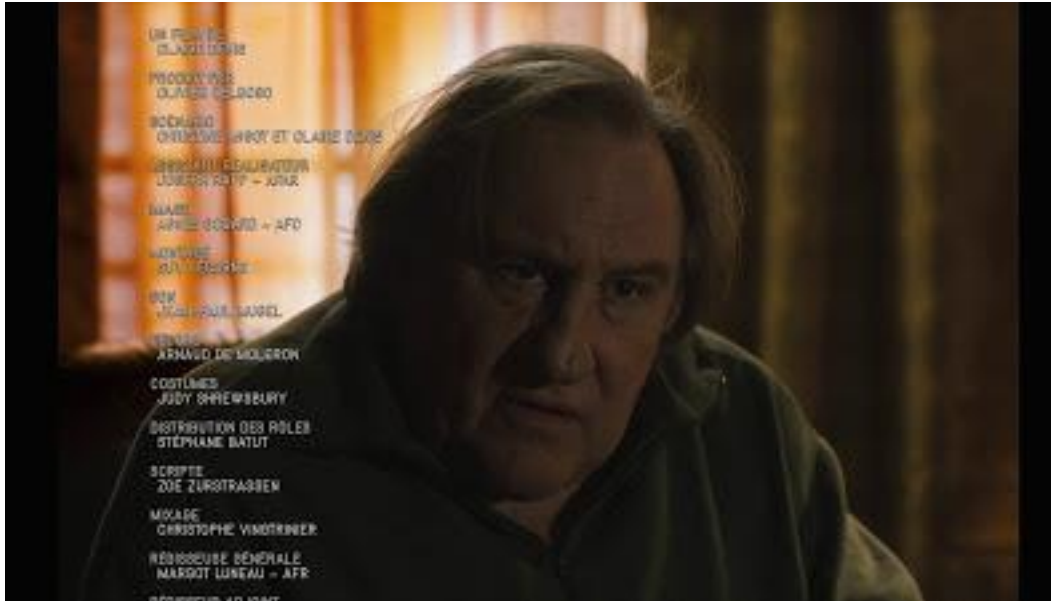
long ago now reaches the highest levels of artistry by engaging effortlessly with such charmless arseholes through delirious lightly played comedy, rooted in very harsh and very real anguish.



Bruno Podalydès.

Thus her current affair and fuck buddy (played by the exceptional director, Xavier Beauvois as a fat, smug self-obsessed status prick who orders “gluten free olives” with glasses of high end Scotch at a bar), is a man whom she confesses to enjoy fucking with because she can always have an orgasm the moment she re-imagines him as the

vulgar little shit he actually is. Her possibly even more vile ex-husband Francois, played by Lawrence Grevill, has two brief appearances, only one more than their daughter who also seems completely superfluous to Isabelle’s life in the here and now.



Gerard Depardieu, *Un Beau Soleil Intérieur*

The movie musically glides its way through a gorgeous funk jazz score from the Julian Siegel Quartet through to Etta James' "At Last". The latter song signals the movie's epiphany, (if it indeed needed one), just as the Commodores did in Claire's fabulous *35 Rhums* a decade ago, and once again, with perhaps her favorite male actor, Alex Descas.

Which leads me back to one of her favorite female actors, the unassailably beautiful and moving and flawless and real Juliette Binoche who takes us on this glorious, exhilarating ride into Claire's life. If one of the perfect subjects of cinema is photographing a woman's face,

Claire surely shares this noble conceit with masters like Sternberg, Ozu, Mizoguchi and Ophuls. One might cede some evidence of ups and downs in the rides Claire has taken with some of her pictures over the last 15 years, notably *Les Salauds* (2013), *L'intrus* (2004) and particularly *White Material* (2009) which I feel is burdened by an overly self-conscious performance from Isabelle Huppert and too schematic a screenplay. But the director's irrepressible impulse to pleasure and pain, and to sheer joy, and the intoxication of her form and image are overwhelming.

### **BECKY SHARP (Rouben Mamoulian, USA, 1935) & FOXFIRE (Joseph Pevney, USA, 1955)**



The US Blu-ray label Kino Lorber has been running all over the competition in the last couple of years for sheer

volume and quality. It must surely claim some prize for sheer output of great missing chasms of "interesting" to



great American cinema from the 30s to 50s with literally dozens, if not hundreds of titles which the majors (who, own them) have not bothered to release.

Sometimes K-L involves itself with new 4K scans of partially restored titles which they finish off to some low cost spec, like Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn*, an invaluable exercise in film rescue, whatever you think of the movie (I personally love it.)

Amongst several dozen K-L releases over the last two months are the very first and the very last feature length films made in the three strip Technicolor process in the USA. First, in 1935.

*Becky Sharp* shot by Ray Rennahan and directed with some vigor, if not much individual inspiration by journeyman Rouben Mamoulian.



The film really is a tribute to Selznick as producer to be the first cab off the rank, like Disney for his short animations from 1932, when the process first became available. And for Selznick to then sign a long term contract with Herbert Kalmus' Technicolor company which had just

invented and perfected the technology, the cameras and the complicated matrice based dye submersion printing lines to make those incomparable saturated, lush prints. We owe Selznick for this and many other things, if not for his control freakery as a sometimes meddling producer.



Kino Lorber had also released some weeks earlier the very last film to be photographed in the USA in the three strip camera process, *Fox Fire*, in 1955 for Universal, directed by a spirited Joe Pevney and shot by Bill Daniels, starring Universal's alternative to Rock as 50s hunk du jour, Jeff Chandler. Plus Jane Russell, in a budget busting wardrobe with as many as three costume changes per

scene, playing a suitably fiery white woman who impulsively marries Jeff's highly Egyptian- dusk yellowface "apache half-breed". Jeff's culturally estranged mother, "Princess Saba" is a native Apache and is played in a small part by Celia Lovsky, a very white Czech born actress who's given an even heavier layer of Max Factor Dusk.



The latter movie is a king hitter for Pevney fans, if not quite at the celestial level of his Joanie "woman in danger" Noir masterpiece, *Female on the Beach*. That one again has menacing rough trade gigolo and potential assassin, Chandler, from 1954, and was also released by Kino Lorber in a superb B&W transfer in February. *Fox Fire* can I think be forgiven for the yellowface of the two actors for the simple fact that it openly treats the commercialization of the tourist trap reductionism of the Apache camps as ethnographic geekery, and

the trivialization of Native American culture, with the surrounding prejudice as a live subject. I really like Russell in this a lot, and she seems to be giving over a lot of the scenery and the cues to Chandler, a far weaker technical actor whose woodenness is legendary. Just as Joanie seems to need Chandler to bounce off her range of neurasthenics in *Female on the Beach*, one can enjoy watching Russell taking the back seat to leave Chandler space and air in the widescreen frame to move and feel his way into a very difficult and moving part.



The transfers are interesting. *Becky Sharp* was taken from an absolutely sterling restoration which was only finally completed in 2017 after an initial UCLA exercise by Archivist Bob Gitt in 1994. While the last reel is clearly salvaged from a murky dupe positive element, the first 80 minutes of the film is absolutely spectacular, and reflects the high grain quality of the original 35mm nitrate neg filming and the earliest registration process from YCM matrices that was required to make these literally artisanal prints. It is a complete joy to watch for anyone who has previously luxuriated in viewings of other IB Tech original

run prints at Bologna, and elsewhere as a matter of infrequent but delirious pleasure.

Universal's source for *Fox Fire* supplied to K-L is, I would guess, a good quality Eastman recomb and it rarely falls foul of registration issues. The color saturation and balance is gorgeous. But as is so often the case with slightly older Universal HD scans someone there has hit a preset button on the fucking de-graining panel, and you end up with both slight waxiness in faces, and a kind of bee swarm flurry of grain in less tightly encoded shots.

The worst example of this bad tech by Universal is its total and complete fuckup of *Marnie* for the Hitchcock Masterpiece boxset. As far as I know they have never revisited this abomination to correct the problem.

The screens from *Becky Sharp* have Frances Dee (top), as the "nice girl", and with Miriam Hopkins (second

picture) as Thackeray's "bad girl", in a blue and a yellow outfit. The two screens from *Fox Fire* are first of Jane Russell with Jeff Chandler and competing love interest Dan Duryea!! And Jane again in another costume change while she smashes into Jeff's Pandora's box of Ancestral memories.

## BEGGARS OF LIFE (William Wellman, USA, 1928)



Louise Brooks, *Beggars of Life*

The black and white screens are from a new Kino Lorber Blu-ray of William Wellman's late silent, *Beggars of Life* from 1928, coming just after the justly honored *Wings* (1927).

In the first frame here's a deliciously boy garbed Louise Brooks fresh from the BDSM female angst of all those

Pabstian crypto-masochist psycho-pathologized males, and indeed from Hawk's weirdly homo skewed *A Girl in Every Port* (1928) in which she plays sidekick to a pair of guys, one a drunk who keeps asking his buddy to "pull him off". (I didn't believe it either.)





Louise and male lead Richard Arlen (above, also fresh from a male to male kiss in *Wings*) as burns on the lam in this screenplay that seems like a precursor to Wellman's great 1933 Warner First National actioner *Wild Boys of the Road*, one of his dozen odd pre-code greats from his incomparable Warner 30s talkie period.

In Kino Lorber's *Beggars* Louise morphs from girl in boydrag to dodge near gang rape (as a boy or a girl?) to girl again after several plot menaces, until she and Arlen match alpha credentials with a guignolesque Wallace Beery and his gang of super hoboes. It's a memorable

scene. At this point Wellman finally stages and films them in two shots as the couple they are, and by now Arlen is looking quite as gorgeous as Brooks, no mean feat for any of us of any or all three of the great sexual persuasions-homo/het/bi.

The source is still ragged and occasionally thin for texture and detail but it's a million miles ahead of the old bootlegs up till now which had virtually no definition and terrible image qualities which had to pass then. But no longer.

## **BEND OF THE RIVER (Anthony Mann, USA, 1952)**



Julie Adams, *Bend of the River*

Two screens from a new German Blu-ray of Mann's *Bend of the River* from Explosive Media who are doing a titanic job releasing great westerns. It may be churlish to neglect the two male leads here, Stewart and Arthur Kennedy for

screens but who can resist Julie Adams and (blink and you'll miss him) very junior (and delicious) Rock Hudson in one of Mann's earliest existential Westerns from 1952.



Rock Hudson, *Bend of the River*



I am not sure how I feel about this transfer. The encode from Explosive is technically good and tight for grain and stability but what was original three strip Technicolor filming here looks very much like a relatively faded and overly brown (yellow layer) Eastman print has been

digitally massaged for better color balance. The producer (Torsten Kaiser?) has kept the tonality in hand but it never looks like *plein air* Technicolor. Call it serviceable and quite attractive in motion.

## **BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1980)**

The new Region B, 5 disc Blu-ray of Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* from 1980 is, alas taken from the original 2006 restoration, itself performed in 2K from the 16mm masters. This was used for the earlier DVDs, including Criterion's. That set was compromised by its scanning NTSC speed of 24fps (from 25fps masters) which adversely affected both image and audio. I had hoped this new version might have at least heralded a new restoration but that's not the case.

The new 1080p which has obviously been laboriously worked on by Technical guru Dave Mackenzie and the Second Sight team is itself fatally compromised by the original work. The people in Fassbinder Foundation who did the first 2K scan, including DP, Xavier Schwarzenberger have pushed the pedal down and held it there on DVNR (Noise Reduction ) and the scan they produced engages so much over the top grain removal the image quality they subsequently tried to correct is hardly ever able to achieve the appearance of natural 16mm film stock.

Other Fassbinder movies including *World on a Wire* and *Martha* which were also shot on 16mm have responded more recently extremely well to carefully calibrated 2K scanning and restoration work and the technicians on those titles seem to have absorbed the lesson that grain equals detail and sharpness. In basic English, grain is the breath of film. Without it there's no life in it. And that's how this 1080p *Berlin Alexanderplatz* looks. Only rarely does a wide shot or even a close-up look natural, or display any filmic image quality. The whole enterprise looks forever like pastel, soft focus, vaseline smeared, remembered blurry image.

It's a disaster, and none of it is the fault of the Second Sight technical team. The original 2K is simply rubbish and the RWF Foundation needs to find the money to go back to elements and start all over. These are images I cannot watch for more than ten minutes without getting eye strain.

## **THE BIG KNIFE (Robert Aldrich, USA, 1955)**

Released just in time for the public downfall of serial creep and molester Harvey Weinstein, Robert Aldrich's 1955 first "Horrors of Hollywood" movie is given a Blu-ray release by Arrow Academy.

I will immediately confess to never having liked the movie much, even as a fan of such neglected and important missing in action Aldrich's as *Autumn Leaves* (1956) or *Hustle* (1975) both of which deserve major re-issues in good prints and encodes - the chances of this with *Hustle* are sadly minimal as the film was archived with the dreaded CRI interneg which basically fades to dust. God

only knows what useable elements are left for that film.

As Hollywood expose pictures go I prefer Aldrich's own adventures in Baroque scream queen fare like *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (1962) or his great lumbering meta-camp *The Legend of Lylah Clare* (1968) with Kim Novak clunking around as a Dietrich/Garbo-esque figure, ever shadowed by her lezzo drug-addicted dresser played by the sublime Valentina Cortese, and best of all Peter Finch as Josef von Sternberg with a British Goyim accent. Who else could have concocted this folly but Aldrich?



Jack Palance, Ida Lupino, *The Big Knife*

Anyway the bigger problem today for me is the way Aldrich has staged and directed Clifford Odets' screenplay as anything other than a filmed play, with minimal degrees of 'outsiding" and even faintly dramatic POV montage or mise-en-scène. Odets was a writer who, to my mind always needed the most fluid and dynamically plastic of directors to move things, and us, to inject life into the endless speeches, and shape shift the narratives, which were often in need of entire States worth of Western Unions to handle the sheer volume of "messages".

I find it more surprising than anything that Aldrich adopted this approach in *The Big Knife* given his immense skill in, say, *Attack* (1956) where he dramatizes the complete breakdown and eruption into anarchy of a military troupe, staged within a cave hidden foxhole.

The same intensity and violence is evident in *The Flight of the Phoenix* (1965) in which a Sartrean hell emerges from the collapse of the group in the outdoors, literally in the middle of a wide open empty desert after the plane crashes.



"Il Re de Prosciutto Assoluto"  
Rod Steiger, *The Big Knife*

The Burbank soundstage rooms of the house in contrast set the scene for Cliffy's drama of venality, power and greed in Hollywood (it almost sounds like a comedy). As if to amplify the dramatic artificiality of the material Aldrich has taken to directing some of the actors to give the biggest performances of their careers to an imaginary balcony, possibly the Hollywood Bowl. Among the few

showing restraint with what is admittedly choice material for ham and baloney, the sublime Ida Lupino and even Wendell Corey who again plays the mediocre spineless shit he was in real life. For the rest of it we have two Major Drama Queens to duchess across the screen in the form of Jack Palance and Rod Steiger, the latter surely King of Ham Assoluto. The platinum hair job he sports also seems

to throw a dose of Weimar era Pabstian sadist who tortures small girls into the personality mix.

In either case he's more than matched by the normally super reliable Jack Palance who here affects a sort of high toned early Crawford twerp English accent, replete with Welles-ian mispronunciations (like the "t" in "apostle" etc) and strategic pauses of such monumental length they leave his fellow actors in the shot rock still with their arms swinging in the air. He has never given a worse performance, all one note in keeping with either highly perverse or actually zero direction from the maestro.

I know I am in a minority in not caring for the film but I will add salt to the wounds of the offended here by adding there is something very, very peculiar in the BD disc encode which Arrow has delivered us. Grain levels are so high and so enlarged they come at you like a sandstorm, all through the movie. I remember seeing this in 35mm

during the SUFG 60s era and there is no way Ernest Laszlo's photography for the picture was anything other than tight, high contrast with fine grain for sharpness.

Arrow presents the picture in widescreen 1.85 which may be wrong or right, but it could possibly have been 1.66. In any case some shots look more than others like they have been optically zoomed and then masked to whatever the intended matte was for screening in the final print. This practice wasn't uncommon around the mid-fifties when there were still theatres, especially outside the USA who weren't equipped to do 1.85 or even Scope framing without hard matted reduction prints. In any case I guess the tech people at Arrow have had to make do with what they were given (by Fox in this case?) And their QC is always a very high standard indeed.

For the dedicated.

## BLADERUNNER (Ridley Scott, USA, 1982)



*Blade Runner*

Screens are from the new Warners 4K/HDR Blu-ray of Ridley Scott's groundbreaking *Blade Runner* (1982), photographed by Jordan Cronenweth, from Philip K Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?". The screens were taken manually by Iphone of my Panasonic 4K screen, a hopelessly compromised way to get caps, because no software is yet available to do direct lossless screens on a PC with a regular hard disc drive.

I was intending to be brave and hold on until general release of the *Blade Runner 2049* sequel which seems to be opening at every cinema in the world next Thursday, including our own here in Masterton via DCP 4K, but an early review by Peter Bradshaw in the Grauniad has

pushed me back into the here and now to review this new 4K/HDR disc from Warners of the original 1982 movie.

The movie itself barely needs speaking to at any length, so well covered is it, although there will undoubtedly still be others who see it more as spectacle than art, or a triumph of production design and breathtaking high contrast color photography. All those positions simply keep feeding discussion of a film that possibly even more commentators feel guilty about admitting they like, than are perhaps willing to admit. Its influence on later movies, especially sci-fi and spectacle pictures after 1982 is simply immeasurable.



*Blade Runner*

Even in the earliest days of then blue screen tech for some process shots, Ridley Scott simply blasts the screen into the stratosphere with both sheer mouth agape spectacle for which he is a master, as he continues to do so in sequels to the *Alien* trilogy, notably *Prometheus* (2013), IMO an underrated near masterpiece, and the hugely entertaining and self-reflecting *Alien: Covenant* from 2017.

Scott also displays a complete command of shape, dramatic architecture and narrative control which is as classical in its manipulation of surprise, tension, exposition and resolution as you could hope to get these days. And whatever weaknesses he shares with another Alpha director like James Cameron, including spotty dialogue writing, it hardly seems to matter when he displays so much collaborative goodwill to the extent of handing over direction of the new *2049* film to French-Canadian Denis Villeneuve, almost certainly based on his admiration for the latter's superb 2016 sci-fi meditation film *Arrival*, with Amy Adams which is a later subject of this review.

But in anticipation of the new *2049* picture, I want to go into a little depth about the new 4K Blu-ray, hopefully without boring the pants off everyone. Within this story is an encouraging development for the future of movies themselves. When Warners were looking for additional elements to make a revised "complete Director's edit" of the film prior to 2004, their crew including restoration maestro Robert Harris discovered among other pristine 35mm and 70mm film elements a longer print from the UK which had additional footage and a number of other elements that now constitute the revised "director's cut" we know today. It included the reinstatement of the full Vangelis score, the removal of the voice over (which I always liked) at the end to cement the Noir mood, superfluous as it now seems, and other bits and pieces.

Even better, Warners addressed restoration issues using the then relatively new and forward looking 4K scanning

technology, and did all their harvest and mastering in the 4K domain. Thence to a 4K intermediate for 35mm prints, as well as a 4K for eventual DCP theatrical master. This was then downrezzed in 2007 to 1080p at the comparably inferior but still regular BD AVC encoding format and those Blu-rays have been the premium video standard until now. Scott came to help Warners with this new 4k disc encode this year and they were able to add the dramatically higher specced dimension of 4K compliant HDR (High Dynamic Range) for color spacing (12 bit over 8 bit, color spacing for 4K Rec.2020 standard over 1080p spacing of Rec.709), and massively increased contrast from dead white at more than 1000 nits measurement to pure dead black zero nits, not the regular blacker than black that is usually obtained from even premium Kodak 35mm stock like the Vision series.

The result is an image of incomparable contrast, depth, resolution, finesse, nuance, color spectrum and original fine film grain which you can now play at home (on a 4K player and the largest 4K screen you can possibly afford to give yourself). This is thus the exact equivalent, lossless viewing experience of the very same master 4K DCP being projected with carbon arc lamps under the most optimal conditions possible to a physical cinema onto the largest screen possible.

This is the first time in the history of movies that this has been feasible for home viewing at prices that now seem, if not initially, laughably reasonable. (\$400 up for the player, 4 grand or less for the optimum 65 inch screen.)

If ever a movie needed and received such premium treatment in a technologically nurtured process that parallels the sort of magnificent restoration and archival work we are seeing these days at Bologna and elsewhere every year, this is it. Watching *Blade Runner* in 4K/HDR at home is like the first time over again, but amazingly even better than that.



## **BLONDE VENUS (Josef von Sternberg, USA, 1932)**

*"You don't look anything like these other women."  
"Give me time."*

Dialogue unquestionably written by the master of the mordant, Jules Furthmann for *Blonde Venus*, read by Dietrich and PI Robert O'Connor (below) in a highly veiled Alabama bar cum bordello.

I mention it because in an exercise to insulate myself from the horrors of yesterday's news in Christchurch, and an encroachingly savage depression, I have, as I usually do in these moments, resorted to burying myself in Sternberg and Jean Gabin movies.



So I finally got around to reading the three terrific essays in the booklet for Criterion's great Jo boxset. The last by Farran Smith Nehme is a miracle of a piece, tackling perhaps the most neglected aspect of Jo's movies, the crew other than him who worked on them and gave them so much of their lustre.

After giving honor to supreme artists like Hans Dreier and Travis Banton (Set Design and Wardrobe respectively) and how much the two contributed to defining Paramount house style for the thirties, and with it Jo's own series of

fantasmagoria as poetic geographical worlds with Dietrich.

When Farran gets around to the inimitable and totally mysterious screenwriter Jules Furthmann who worked with or without credit on most of Jo's pictures, she describes a moment when an early script idea by Jo and Dietrich for *Blonde Venus* was passed on to former Broadway writer Sam Lauren. Lauren comments on having to attend to Jo later in his office which he describes as "three times the size of Hitler's."

I needed that today.

## **Budd Boetticher**



Budd Boetticher

The Boetticher Ranown box was originally released on DVD only ten years ago and is now in the new Indicator Blu Ray set called Five Tall Tales. These are all but two of the great Ranown cycle now in best available prints and

new HD encodes. One title only – *The Tall T* has been given a new 2K scan and a full restoration but all of them look great

## John Brahm



John Brahm

Dave Kehr of MoMA recently revived five 30s films made at Fox studios by the director William K Howard. They screened, in glorious new 2K and 4K restorations, at the recent Bologna Cinema Ritrovato. The series reminded me, along with some gentle nudging by Geoff Gardner, of a promise I made last year to review a couple of 40s Fox films re-issued in Blu-ray by another "missing in action" auteur, John (originally Ludwig) Brahm. The director's work has long gone unappraised and unacknowledged.

So to make amends here is a group of key Brahm movies.

One of the two reissued in Blu last year was *The Undying Monster*. Reviewing the new disc then I said: "One screen is not enough to sample the multiple Weimar inspired expressionist gems that pop like jewels throughout Lucien Ballard's gorgeous photography for the new Kino Lorber Blu of John Brahm's 1942 Fox Horror, *The Undying Monster*."



*The Undying Monster*

"It's amusing after coming back from the bloat of

*Dragonwyck* (1946) and its near suffocation in the drapery

of the costume melodrama. Fox happily had a tradition going back to the thirties for running a "B" unit with absolutely superb production facilities and soundstages. Thus Norman Foster's (mostly, other directors rarely popped in) string of Mr Moto and Charlie Chan pictures, which never skimmed on sets, costumes, multiple setups, complex staging, tracks and dollies, were virtually serviced as A pictures with B casts and a tight production schedule. "*The Undying Monster* is perhaps one of the thinnest of Brahm's many pictures for Fox during his stint at the B

Unit but it's a relentless exercise in style (to quote Sarris on *The Scarlet Empress* (Josef von Sternberg, 1934) and does its business with great aplomb. Brahm was no Mankiewicz, but his lack of reputation overshadows his considerable achievement. His half dozen or so Fox pictures are all of great interest, and one with RKO and master DP Nick Musaraca, *The Locket* (1946), is a complete masterpiece, and one of the half dozen very greatest Film Noirs."



Henry Fonda, *Let us Live*

And so it is I go back to the 30s and one of Brahm's earliest pictures, made at Columbia in 1939 with an A cast but a B budget and schedule in a tight 67 minutes. The film is *Let us Live* with a screenplay by Anthony Veiller (La Cava's *Stage Door*; (1937), Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946). Henry Fonda and a glorious Maureen O'Sullivan are the leads, with Fonda and a down-on-his luck buddy wrongly sentenced to the electric chair for a murder they didn't commit. Fonda, already coming into his peak as an actor,

brings huge resonances from past Lang and future Hitchcock to the picture, in particular his role in Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937) with Sylvia Sydney, one of the first unofficial Noirs and the prototype of the "Bonnie and Clyde" narrative. Brahm marks out the visual territory of *Let Us Live* with Lucien Ballard as DP for the first of many pictures together in a textbook of unyielding, controlled chiaroscuro and architectural shadow.



Fonda on the way to the chair, *Let us Live*

This is the first film I am aware of in which Brahm shoots even the most interior and intimate scenes in medium or wide shot, with lighting dissecting the volumes of the set surrounding a lone figure with vertical and horizontal sectioning, and layers of composition in depth. A unique post Weimar *mise-en-scene* is clearly at work here in terms of these multiple subjective and objective representations and POVs, as part of expressive narrative pacing. The studio appears to have been so taken aback by such unconventional *découpage* for a 30s studio feature (the standard being medium wide, two shot, reverse, close, etc) and I believe the post production has optically zoomed three originally long take wide shots of Fonda when he realizes he's struggling to get his case up, in which the editing is broken up from single medium takes into a faux optical close, then medium shot then back to

close then back to original un-zoomed medium, thus breaking the continuity of Brahm's original longer single take of the dialogue with his jailed buddy.

The movie's screenplay also has unmistakable retrospective resonance for us with Hitchcock's 1957 masterpiece in which Fonda plays another wrongly convicted man, *The Wrong Man* for Warners in 1957. Where Vera Miles in that picture is the character who falls victim to disenchantment and insanity, it's Fonda who becomes the critically damaged character in Brahm's movie. *Let Us Live* is very much in style and mood a precursor to Noir, along with Boris Ingster's 1940 RKO picture, *Stranger on the Third Floor*. *Let Us Live* got a release some time ago on a Sony VOD (NTSC) which was transferred from what looks like a very nice fine grain 35mm. I encourage people to seek it out.





Laird Cregar, *Hangover Square*

Jumping to the forties and still at Fox, Brahm made a couple of super-atmospheric period thrillers, more accurately known as "Gothic Noir" by the wittier amongst us. The second of these, in 1945, after *The Undying Monster* from the previous year is *Hangover Square* in which he's paired for the first time with the great Laird Cregar, a hulking, towering figure with a magnificent voice and infinitely depressed bottomless eyes which only ever light up in the thrall of some deeply unspoken sexual perversity.

The cast for this includes Linda Darnell, surely one of the lushest babes ever to grace the movies and a frequently wasted talent at Fox. The movie is more than widely admired and I need to say little more but to cite the stirring climax with the huge set in flames surrounding a now totally demented Cregar pounding away on the piano playing his Concerto (Bernard Herrmann's in fact) to Linda Darnell whom he's just tried to murder.



Laird Cregar, Sara Allgood, *The Lodger*

Cregar had a talent for nifty improvisation and generally keeps his performances fairly still until the writing or his own inspiration gives him a chance to rise and chew up the not inconsequential scenery and Lucien Ballard's high contrast lighting. In *The Lodger* from 1945, a remake of Hitchcock's 1927 silent with Ivor Novello, Cregar completely dominates every inch of a scene at the 40 minute half way mark in which Sara Allgood, his landlady discovers a small photograph he hides in his drawer of an extremely beautiful young man. Cregar lifts his shoulders, his eyes and his voice at the moment she looks at him and

launches into a towering declaration of both perverse and unquenchable love and obsession with the man in the photo, supposedly (according to the Breen Office friendly screenplay) his "brother" whom he worships over all else in life, especially the loathed horrors of "a woman's flesh" for which he spews the profoundest Leviticus level bile as something invented by the devil to deprave men's bodies and minds. In most other hands this would be straight fruitcake camp, but Cregar personalizes it through pure self-admission *The Lodger* was released on Blu-ray last year by Kino Lorber.



Laraine Day, *The Locket*



Laraine Day, Robert Mitchum, *The Locket*

Which now leads us back to Brahm, no longer with Laird who died too young at 30 just after *Hangover Square*. Brahm was loaned out from Fox to RKO in 1946 where he was given a fine screenplay for *The Locket* from a novel by Norma Barzman about a psychotic killer told in a series of flashbacks within flashbacks. Brahm was also given a

peerless Noir cast including Mitchum, Brian Aherne, Gene Raymond and Laraine Day plus RKO's top DP Nick Musuraca (*Out of the Past*), and RKO in house music director Roy Webb. Perhaps the most oniric of Noirs ever made Brahm throws everything he's got at it in terms of visual set-ups for uncertainty and anti-determinist action.

Of all the many onieric Noirs, this is the most narratively and logically engaging (where Ripley's near meaningless construction of reality dream, dream reality in *The Chase* is perhaps the most confusing.) Warner DVD (NTSC)

released a serviceable disc some years ago. The source has substantial emulsion damage and some dupey looking material and one hopes the MTI facility will do a 2K restoration of it for Blu in the future.



Alfred Linder, *The Brasher Doubloon*

The next year Brahm did another Noir at Fox, back with Lucien Ballard, *The Brasher Doubloon* from a Raymond Chandler Philip Marlowe novel, "The High Window". The picture is lumbered with two less than ideal leads, George Montgomery as Marlowe, an actor who never seems to stop smiling. And Nancy Guild a budding vedette who's first movie was also Mankiewicz's first in 1946, *All Through the Night*. For all the hopes of her benefactors Ms Guild could not act her way out a bag of popcorn, and the requirements for her to play a woman as apparently frigid ("she dreads the touch of men") ice queen from prior abuse and some innate feebleness, morphing into full

throttle nymphomaniac is, to be blunt, beyond her. She has one potentially juicy scene which Brahm sets up for her as a wide single take, in which she comes into Marlowe's bedroom door, holds him up with a revolver, and then orders him to take off his shirt so she can admire his body. A dozen takes couldn't get the meat off this bone as she just doesn't have the range. Unlike the gorgeous Martha Vickers who delivers in spades as Carmen Sternwood ("this is the first time someone sat in my lap standing up") for Hawks in *The Big Sleep* in a not dissimilar role.



George Montgomery, *The Brasher Doubloon*

The supporting cast do redeem everything they're in for *Brasher* though. Particularly wonderful is Florence Bates as the Matriarch with a more than Oedipal "son" ("Leslie" who resembles a punk teen rentboy in a suit.) It's Bates/Mrs Murdock who hires Marlowe in an opening template sequence almost replicating the opening of Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. There is also a very personal

bit from Fritz Kortner as the former German Cinematographer who fled the Nazis but ends up as a pornographer and blackmailer. *The Brasher Doubloon* is also available on a Fox VOD (NTSC) from a good looking source.

And so rests some of the case for John Brahm.



Merle Oberon, George Sanders, *The Lodger*



## Gil Brealey – Vale

I am keen to put up this notification although Gil was a fine age at 85 when he died.

Don Groves is rightfully unsparing in his obituary in Inside Film about the bitchery and ego stomping so characteristic of the movie biz and arts administrations in general, which were responsible for the appalling time Gil had after daring to step in with the disastrous opening of *Sunday Too Far*

Away which was proving basically unplayable to audiences, and supervising a massive re-edit which gave Ken Hannam's film the structure and the presence it needed. The opproprium he had to wear for this was and is unspeakable.



On a much lighter note, I used to run into Gil and his very long time partner, Rodney Sangwell often back when (together since the 70s). I first met them both in 1976 after I'd moved to Adelaide for work at the ABC where Gil had himself originally worked before moving to the Oz Film Commission. The occasion of our meeting was the very Sunday the newly elected Fraser government announced the award of Gil's Order of Australia. I had only been in Adelaide a couple of months and on this Queen's Birthday Weekend Sunday I had been brought to the annual Adelaide QB gay picnic in the McLaren Vale which was organized by the local society queens ("what passes for society in Adelaide" sniffed one of them) by a pal and older colleague from the ABC, the late Michael Ingamells who had me under his wing. I meekly congratulated Gil for this very first signal honor and he replied with completely unaffected modesty, "Oh it's nothing really, I don't know what to say".

A little later that day he gave me some sage advice that I found I had to live by for the next 15 working years at the cesspool of ego and mismanagement that was and is the ABC. I mentioned how bitchy some of the local Gay glitterati were in Adelaide at this increasingly boozy afternoon. "If you want bitchy," he said, "just watch your back at the ABC. The arts invented bitchy. Bitchy is normal Just watch your back." He was right and I learnt that lesson early thanks to Gil.

It was impossible not to get on with Gill and Rodney like a house on fire, indeed here in 1976 the whole State and Oz politics in general was still buzzing from the exhilaration of the Whitlam years and the whirlwind that had taken over the Oz movie business, one in which Gil was a very powerful and historic player.

Then, after that palmy 1976 year of Adelaide Dunstaniana, an "Age d'Or" if ever there was one, I went back to Sydney to face other realities of my own. Indeed, Gil and Rodney also left the town when he went on to head the Vic Film Commission, and much more. Ultimately they ended up living North of Sydney, first on one of the Hawkesbury Islands which must have been a very pleasurable refuge from the smoke, and finally in Leura. Rod is still with us.

A propos of Rod I want to recall one among many anecdotes of his appearances around town as an Arts, and especially a Theatre, tragic. During one of the Adelaide Festivals - possibly 78 or 80, a tribe of us went to the Playhouse for a Rodney Fisher production of "Coriolanus", possibly an Oz commercial first, indeed a Shakespeare which back then was not on anyone's front page, even for a company like John Bell's or the RSC Aldwych. The play had huge political resonances in the wake of the coup which brought about the dismissal of Whitlam's government in 1975. Anyway we all dutifully watched it, but at the end it was given what can only be called polite applause. I stood to get myself together and saw Rodney, always a striking, big, handsome guy who looked like a lumberjack, turning and opening his mouth to project in that booming baritone I had come to know and love, to the balcony: "FABULOUS! FABULOUS! I ADORE Coriolanus. I've seen four productions, the greatest of the Tragedies".

Everyone around us looked on in a mixture of approval or shock and the evening came to a merry close. And every time I ran into them every few years, Sydney airport more than usual, I would remind Rodney of Coriolanus. Vale Gil.

## C

**CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF (Richard Brooks, USA, 1958)**

Liz Taylor with her violet eyes and Paul Newman with his baby blues, one of the very good reasons Richard Brooks was asked to film the 1958 MGM adaptation of Tennessee's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in color. Veteran DP Bill Daniels, the king of female close ups for MGM since the 30s, including Garbo and Crawford, went with the spherical/ non anamorphic open matte widescreen option rather than Scope which is formatted here on a lovely new WB Archive Blu-ray in a good, tight and ideal 1.75:1. Daniels did close ups better than anyone in the business, and the intrusion of even minimal late Scope Mumps (pinching) and parallax error edges, along with wide composition requirements would have chewed away at the CUs and even the three shots.

The new Blu-ray from Warner Archive is a thing of beauty, complete with classic Metrocolor grain and wide shots so sharp you can see at the beginning the join lines on the background open air sets with the studio floor. Color saturation is classic Metrocolor warm with startling blue. Indeed, MGM may well have gone for their own proprietary Eastman printing in preference to Technicolor IB for the former's reputation for handling intense blues and indeed violet.

Brooks films the show with apparently leisurely *mise-en-scène* but he's very careful handling the timing and determining the shot length and placement of the actors, no mean task in itself. Williams' dialogue so often turns to the epistolatory and the declamatory, so the danger in directing him is to often stall the actors in fixed blocking. Brooks and Daniels have followed the time tested stage method (also followed by Kazan in his movies of Williams) of pitching the staging and choreography very much to medium and close two shots to reduce pointless movements beyond reaction playing within takes. Only more recent productions and films of Williams seem to have taken the chance to tackle him in

more abstract and exploratory ways with more adventurous blocking and staging with sometimes unpredictable results.

The text however is something of a major hurdle here. Considering homosexuality as a mere idea let alone the sub or primary text (until Preminger took on the Code single handedly with *Advise and Consent* in 1960), we are here stuck with this compromised picture two years before, and another classically "botched" Williams adaptation,

There was Mankiewicz's *Suddenly Last Summer* from 1959 with Liz again and a befuddled screenplay to which even Gore Vidal added more confusion than sense. Although the conceit of vicious nelly fag Sebastian Venables being eaten by the very Sicilian adolescent boys who were his sexual prey is not without its charms. I just wish Mank's version had been even more hysterical than only Liz is encouraged to play it, as though they were all sparing poor Kate Hepburn the shock of acknowledging her own lesbianism. But enough of that.

The 1958 *Cat* screenplay was bowdlerized to within an inch of its life with only Liz now and her very great beauty serving as cues to Paul Newman's/Brick's guilt and gay self-hate over his closeted "fooling around", as they used to call cornholing back then, with football hero Skipper. In place of the sexual "perversion" so frowned upon by the Code, Skipper is instead given a limp and a pair of crutches to objectively correlate the still unmentionable.

Another major change to text and one that is in fact very interesting, is the virtual rewrite of the Act 3 Big Daddy/Brick showdown and truth game for a happy ending (so to speak) which ends with Brick smashing to pieces Big Daddy's vast tat collection of "priceless European antiques", yet another objective correlative for both "the Other" (faggdom) and his own expensive rich bad taste, all of which looks like it

comprises the accumulated kitsch of several decades of Metro costume pictures. A nice metacinematic touch I thought.

All through this farrago of catharsis, Brooks keeps Big Daddy immobile in the foreground while Brick propels himself with impressive agility on a now single crutch all around the frame for long angry takes. The dialogue also shades into an unmistakable flavor (to me) of daddy/son gay porn, and it's here I started wishing Tennessee and screenwriters Brooks and James Poe, who was brought in to do the hatchet job on Brick's and Skipper's cornholing, could have re-positioned Big Daddy as Big Stepdaddy to facilitate a possible sexual relationship between the two men. It's finally time to call out Burl Ives as one of the original icons of Bruno Bara manga Daddy figures and the possibilities in this are effortlessly queered into his performance as poacher in *Wind Across the Everglades* (USA, 1958) by the great Nick Ray in which Burl appears to keep a harem of boys. .

With regards the dreaded H word Brooks was both a pioneer in writing gay material but a bit of a nelly in presenting it. He wrote the groundbreaking novel for the movie of Dmytryk's extremely fine *Crossfire* (USA, 1947) in which Brooks originally pitched the murder as a gay hate crime. It had to be re-written on Code orders as an anti-semitic killing. Dmytryk,

perhaps a more sophisticated man than Brooks, effortlessly re-establishes the gay signals of the material in the movie through his direction of Sam Levene's "Jew", along with the "confused" young soldier going AWOL, and Levene's very obvious female beard in the very obviously gay bar in which they pick up the young soldier and his homo killer buddy Robert Ryan.

Brooks tackles another gay subtext between the two leads in the superb *In Cold Blood* (USA, 1967), his best film. Certainly gay theming pre-1960 Code breakthrough was something easily engaged with and was regularly subverted by directors as diverse as Don Siegel in *The Lineup* (USA, 1958) with the steam room and pickup killing sequence, and Richard Fleischer in *Compulsion* (USA, 1959) with Bradford Dillman's Teddy Boy Loeb-esque murderer. And of course the master, Hitchcock himself in a handful of pre 1960 titles including *Murder!* (UK, 1930), *Rope* (USA, 1948) and *Strangers on a Train* (USA, 1951).

Anyway the subject is open for discussion. And the new BD is an enjoyable entry for a forthcoming cycle of gay/pre-code revision reading Hollywood in honor of the (very) late Vito Russo.

## **CERTAIN WOMEN (Kelly Reichardt, USA, 2016)**



Michelle Williams, *Certain Women*

The screens show Michelle Williams, Kristen Stewart and staggering newcomer Lily Gladstone with Laura Dern topping and tailing in Kelly Reichardt's sublime *Certain Women* from 2016 now released on a flawlessly beautiful Blu-ray by Criterion. The film was, like all of Reichardt's movies shot on 16mm film - Kodak Vison stock 3 with an Arriflex 416Ss camera for this one. The format and stock

gives movies back an entire universe of visible ethereal fine grain, itself an intensely, orgasmically beautiful component of film that's so long been invisible or hidden, and this encode from the 2K DI is a work of great beauty. Her DP on this is Christopher Blauvelt who also shot her previous two pictures.



Kristen Stewart, *Certain Women*

I've been a big fan of Reichardt since *Old Joy*, which was released in 2006, and *Wendy and Lucy* in 2008. Since then I've seen everything else including the two features before *Certain Women*, *Meek's Cutoff* (2010) and *Night Moves* (2013.) Her entire work is now easy to find and discover on Blu-ray.

The only living American director who comes even close to her for formal and cinematic control today is PT Anderson, but Kelly's world and style is closer to an artist like Raymond Carver and his microscopic emotional lives, rather than Anderson's big subjects. And her geography is not California, or the vast sweep of 20th Century America but the seemingly endless immensity of Montana.



Lily Gladstone, *Certain Women*

Her characters are often hurt, often unlucky but testy real women whom Reichardt catches in the middle of apparently dead lives that seem to be going nowhere. With *Certain Women* she's adapted three stories from two volumes of stories, 'Half in Love' and 'Both Ways is the Only Way I Want' by the writer Maile Meloy, I've not read

Meloy's stories, but Kelly's adaptations and movies are the closest thing to Raymond Carver the American Cinema (or any other cinema for that matter) could ever hope to achieve.





Laura Dern, *Certain Women*

I thought *Old Joy* was and is a masterpiece, and the sheer unspoken-ness of the idea - a friendship that has just been allowed to age and go stale - is such a rarity in the world of movies, and one of so many denied realities amongst men in particular. It also delivers a repeated referral to her material, that is people who might take a chance to connect or change things, but don't, or who ignore a possibility, made all the more painful by the fact they are aware of the choice. She captures a vision of real life which is so hidden yet so universal, which goes beyond dialogue, screenplay and narrative, and even perhaps more intimate cinematic tools of gesture and mood like gesture and shadow. Her formal control is completely astonishing. No more gracefully and empathetically truthful a film maker could one hope to see in the 21st century.

I didn't think any new artist could top the work she did with *Old Joy*, but *Wendy and Lucy* (which stars the director's own dog, Lucy.) comes very close. And to an extent *Meek's Cutoff* with regular Michelle Williams and *Night Moves* although they both seem slightly down for sheer level of inspiration of those earlier pictures are still remarkable works.

*Certain Women* however seems to take off all of a sudden, even before you notice it has, with this kind of palpable thrilling but unnerving inevitability and all 107 minutes of its running time becomes a rapid testament to emotion and lost opportunities, always within a "real life" scale of event and rhythm, but never with the grandiose arthouse pretentiousness of pseudo-tragedy so hideously self-indulged by total phonies like that wanker Aronofsky and other current darlings of the festival circuits.

The movie ends with a final credit, like her earlier *Wendy and Lucy*, with a dedication to Reichardt's dog Lucy, who had recently died (in real life.) As someone with very great wisdom said in an appreciation of the film elsewhere, in the end there's a fourth "Certain woman", who had a dog and made it a star, and then the dog died and she decided to dedicate this to her.

If you haven't discovered Kelly Reichardt, in my opinion one of the very greatest filmmakers working today, you are doing yourself a very grave disservice.

## Henri-Georges Clouzot



Henri-Georges Clouzot

While I sit here fretting over my screen, awaiting pre-Xmas Blu-ray late arrivals like the BFI *Celine et Julie*, and the Masters of Cinema Keaton boxset, I need to attend to some overlooked goodies from 2017.

One such is a three title tranche from StudioCanal, in France only so far, of Clouzot films in brand new restorations which lift the movies in question from reliable old 90s era DVDs out of the old StudioCanal Classics grey cardboard box DVDs (still adored for their packaging and their opening Canal classic clips montage logo with the Harry Lime theme), to a brilliant new 1080p level for the High Def era. These are quite aside from Clouzot's most famous movie, *Le Salaire de la Peur* which was recently released in a longest ever 154 minute cut on a superb BFI from a new 4K, with commentary from Adrian Martin.

Canal has now re-issued three other Clouzots, one from 1968, *La Prisonnière* in fabulously psychedelic Eastmancolor, and his two greatest movies, *Le Corbeau* from 1945 (*The Raven*) made under the

Greven/Continental Films administration during the Occupation, and his dark, savage and perhaps funniest picture, from one of the great sardonic misanthropic moralists of cinema, *Quai des Orfèvres* from 1947. Here the fine stage and film comedian Louis Jouvet plays a trench-coated police inspector with a black son (or adopted son, we never really know) investigating a murder amongst the denizens of two of society's least salubrious métiers, showbiz and a pornographic society photography racket run by neither the first nor the last of Clouzot's very unstable Lesbian villains, here played with considerably nervous adroitness by Simone Renant as Dora.

In fact, the entire cast of *Quai des Orfèvres* play their parts in overcoats and furs and other items for providing warmth, given the post war deprivations of achingly cold winter studios and soundstages with no heating. You can feel the actors shiver while taking in the visual spectacle of so much sleaze and depravity.



'two trained Fox Terriers who do some very neat faux shock/horror reactions'

The three screens here are, in my modest homage to Clouzot lui-même, two trained Fox Terriers who do some very neat faux shock/horror reactions to the aptly named Clouzeau regular Suzy Delair, playing the even more nicely named Jenny Lamour, not quite murdering a song at rehearsal. The dogs manage to upstage the entire

rehearsal sequence in three cutaways which surely enhance the reputation of the reverse angle shot to the Pantheon of cinematic language. Only Clouzot would and could make such a meal out of this otherwise tedious five-minute slab of exposition.



'not quite murdering a song', Suzy Delair, *Quai des Orfèvres*

Clouzot's career right up to the late fifties and the Nouvelle Vague is an extremely sustained run of fine pictures, all clearly stamped by his personality and his razor sharp eye for human folly. Thematically he is the inheritor to the caustic vision and wit of Duvivier, during his own peak through the 30s into the fifties, coming to an end in 1954 with his great last burst, *Voici le Temps des Assassins*.

Clouzot would make only a few more movies after the ascension of the new guard in 1958, who had by then locked him into their despised Tradition de Qualité.

Ironically it was Chabrol himself who most closely inherits Clouzot's mantle for moralist and sardonic commentator on human weakness, with the birth of the N-V.

Clouzot deserves better treatment today, and the resurrection of his first two decades through these terrific new 4K and 2K masters and Blu-rays is a great beginning.

The three Canal discs reviewed above are currently only available from France although they are optionally subtitled and language friendly for English markets. All are hard coded Region B.

If, like so many of us you loathe Xmas and all the crap that goes with it I can think of no more perfect a director to give the season the finger than Clouzot.

## **THE COLOR OF POMEGRANATES (Sergei Paradjanov, USSR, 1969)**





In place of review, random hallucinatory screens from the Second Sight 2 Blu-ray disc boxset of Parajanov's

mythical film, *The Color of Pomegranates*.



Blu-ray disc of the year so far, and surely hard to beat. It's like Jean Rouch took a giant acid tab and channeled Kenneth Anger into this frontally tableau style tapestry of

the life of Armenian poet and musician Sayat-Nova. Which is then overtaken by the wildly lyrical personality of the genius, Parajanov himself.



Jim Steffen has suggested *Pomegranates* shares a degree of mood and tone with Anger's *Inauguration of the*

*Pleasure Dome* and I share that sentiment totally.



Among other things, Parajanov's temperament displays a keen gay sensibility that presents his male actors in both fetishized and transgressive ways which were able to

completely slip under the radar of the censors, even in the Soviet approved Yutkevich cut.



Spellbinding, essential cinema.



The screens are from the restored Parajanov "cut" on the Second Sight Region B UK disc. The Criterion Region A disc (not reviewed by me) includes a 48 minute video essay by my friend James Steffen, as well as a commentary from Tony Rayns but does not include the Soviet approved "alternative" cut by Sergei Yutkevich, included on the Second Sight UK set. which itself also

carries a different color temprature and palette to the restored Parajanov cut.

I made the impossible decision of which of the two sets to buy by only getting the UK Second Sight 2-discer, and now I really also want the Criterion if only for Jim's essay.



Anyway soak up these images and dive into one or the other or both purchases of this incredible, unique film.

Should I also mention this will, be screened in this

breathtaking restoration during the Cinema Reborn festival in Sydney May 3 to 7.



## THE CRIMSON KIMONO (Samuel Fuller, USA, 1959)



Glenn Corbett, *The Crimson Kimono*

Glenn Corbett (Sgt Charlie) fondles his right breast during telephone pillow talk with Anna Lee - "Mac" the alcoholic oil painter and most recently painter of murdered stripper from the 'hood, Sugar Torch. In the second screen Victoria Shaw as Christine and James Shigeta (Detective Joe),

Charlie's colleague, ex-Korean War comrade and best buddy, roommate and barely acknowledged bromance in Fuller's first major picture for Columbia in 1959 after leaving Fox, *The Crimson Kimono*.



Victoria Shaw, James Shigeta, *The Crimson Kimono*

Screens are from a gorgeous new Twilight Time Blu-ray taken from a mint 4K scan from Sony. The picture quality alone simply runs over the older Sony DVD which was plagued with a greenish chroma bug tint and lousy audio. This is a must buy for Fullerians, region free.

With the first screen Fuller very blatantly and consciously sexualizes Charlie in order to signal us to the high probability of a sexual - requited or unrequited - dimension to him and his colleague, Joe. A dimension still not

permitted under pre-1960 Breen rules, and even after, when faggotry was generally relegated to "abnormal psychology" at best, and still usually is. The second screen also speaks to the budding new romance between Joe and "Christine" (Aussie actress Victoria Shaw.) But this turn of events cuts a deep path between the two previously inseparable men and provokes an even greater crisis for Japanese-American Joe which at the least parallels his "journey" into heterosexuality (if you do, as I do, read the boys' relationship as substantially



homoerotic.) Joe begins to question his entire racial identity and undergoes something like Susan Kohner's crisis of self-hatred and internalized racism in Sirk's *Imitation of Life* from the same year. Indeed, *Kimono* is as powerful a movie in terms of its presentation of internalized racism as Sirk's, especially as it is in a sense double weighted with the additional burden to Asian-Americans for whom choosing to "pass" as some light skinned black people like Kohner may do, is impossible.

So just as Joe falls into physical and psychological paralysis, Charlie picks up the reigns of the job and methodically covers the crime, revisiting the JapanTown areas of Los Angeles and Joe's old contacts shown earlier in the first act of the movie. The way Fuller continues to underline the power of this male "friendship", in which Charlie tirelessly and passionately works to sustain his relationship with Joe (or whatever else we may need to call it), is perhaps the most moving aspect of the film. Although the torment Joe reveals to Christine in several scenes (a wonderful performance also from Shaw) is a powerful case study of a young man about to leave emotional adolescence, if not also in a romantic relationship with his buddy that he can't acknowledge as he "changes" into a genuine but threatening heterosexual one.

I loved this movie from my first viewing decades ago, and although Fuller no longer has Scope to work with, a luxury

from his Fox days and Zanuck's patronage, he makes more than most of the standard 1.85 widescreen frame. This movie and *Verboten* filmed the same year may well be the beginning of his punchier, more comic strip, newspaper banner highlight style which dominates his visual methods in the sixties. The opening sequence of Sugar Torch's number and her subsequent death on a crowded LA street are more like collisions of shots than any regular "montage". But then minutes later Fuller introduces Shigeta's character in a breathtaking exterior of a massive Japanese-American war heroes open air graveyard, Fuller opens the shot from a towering high position over the entire graveyard site and does a completely staggering downwards crane to the Caretaker and Buddhist priest, a real life Ryosho Sogabe, who turns forward to the camera and greets Joe. It is impossible not to view the glorious shot from DP Sam Leavitt as a reverse replication of Mizoguchi's sublime last rising crane in *Ugetsu Monogatari*, in which the camera rises up above the child planting flowers at the grave of his mother, Mlyagi (Kinuyo Tanaka) to survey the ongoing life beneath it.

And it is precisely these almost unbelievably outrageous extremes of *mise-en-scene* and expression, both textually and visually that make Fuller such a totally unique auteur and a still very rare American voice in the movies.

## George Cukor

*The following Facebook conversation occurred after Bruce Hodsdon published a piece on George Cukor*

**David Hare:** These posts from Bruce just keep giving so much. Terrific work. Quick correction for future collation by Geoffrey, *Bhowani Junction* definitely IS Cinemascope, not 1.85 (i.e. 1956 Bausch and Lomb lenses anamorphic 35mm Scope licensed from Fox). I checked the horse's mouth so to speak and checked the disc. By then the masking was 2.35 down from the earlier 4 track audio 2.45 or even 2.55 masks pre 1955. Continuing Cukor's "Scope"

*on the Film Alert 101 blog.*

films chronologically, *My Fair Lady* was shot on 65mm for limited release 70mm prints at 2.20, 35mm reduction prints constituted the bulk of release, masked to 2.35. *Let's Make Love* was Scope 2.35; *Justine* was post Scope (and Bausch and Lomb mumps lenses) in Panavision 2.35. *Travels With My Aunt* was also Panavision 2.35. That was his last 2.35 Scope work.



Ava Gardner, Stewart Granger, *Bhowani Junction*

**Bruce Hodsdon:** Thanks for the compliment. I do see myself as trying to bring together other peoples' work in a more focused way, in this case particularly McGilligan, whose books contains so much information on how directors worked on the set. At the same time, it can be a bit dispiriting at times to read descriptions of what actually

went on to the point of wondering how this can be reconciled with what we experience on the screen. A *Star is Born* and Nick Ray's films with Bronston for example. In the latter case you wonder how the films got made at all. I tend to feel at times there is some bias, an over-riding intent to de-mythify Hollywood.



Ava Gardner, *Bhowani Junction*

Thanks David for correcting the errors on Scope which was careless (given my special interest in the subject) because it is indicated in the credits I have for Cukor in the case of *Bhowani Junction* - probably partly reflects that I've never seen it. Widescreen is something I plan to return to if it's not outstaying the welcome. Cukor's mise-en-scène in *Les Girls* has been under appreciated something he seemed to encourage repeatedly speaking of himself as not a director of musicals when *Les Girls* comes up.

I think this lack of engagement with the genre meant that he devoted himself all the more to the non-musical sequences especially given those he had to work with both in front and especially behind the camera. I would like to think he had a big hand in the staging of the 'off stage' number in the apartment between Kelly and Kendall reminiscent in its inventiveness of Kelly-Donen in the Freed musicals.



Mitzi Gaynor, Kay Kendall, Taina Elg, Gene Kelly  
*Les Girls*

**David Hare:** Cukor says (or I think he's ascribed it by Clarens) that he didn't want to make musicals, so his own work on *A Star is Born*, and *Les Girls* have musical numbers which are kept fully diegetic (more or less.) The long Richard Barstow Born in a Trunk Sequence I do to like very much and it's the only thing in that movie that really "fits" the musical genre. *Les Girls* is a masterpiece.

Even more so than *A Star is Born* I think. And I sense you like *Travels with My Aunt as much as I do*. I cannot bear to imagine Kate in the part, even before the Parkinson's set in, and I love the way Cukor and his DP Doug Slocombe filmed Maggie so affectionately and beautifully at the various points of her growth as a "character" from teenager to old woman.



"Fonda's white dress and the big floppy white hat" *The Chapman Report*

The artifice is complete and convincing and is enabled by a total dedication to suspension of disbelief through intensive naturalistic detail and performance. One interesting side note re outside references in a kind of movie insider reference - Orry Kelly's last gig for wardrobe at Warner (for which he came back in fact) was *The Chapman Report*. Jane Fonda's white dress and the big

floppy white hat are one of the results of a fabulous film. The one film in which his enforced adoption of all that heavy Edwardian shit was less than ideal is the Cecil Beaton decor in *My Fair Lady*, which he tried to subvert with clever mise-en-scène, especially with Higgins' study which is positively colonic in browns and blacks.

### **CUTTER'S WAY (Ivan Passer, USA, 1982)**



John Heard, *Cutter's Way*

The lead acting trio includes the late John Heard as Cutter in career peak as the damaged Vietnam vet, Lisa Eichorn

his alcoholic girlfriend who shares their bed with a spineless gigolo and boat salesman Jeff Bridges who is

eye-opening in a role which revels in shallowness and smug self-regard. The sheer rage of Cutter alone as an oppositional figure to a probable murder by an establishment "pillar of society" in their town drives the film to an end with the trio's ill executed and doomed raid on one of the Bigwig murderer's massive garden parties, ending with Bridges dead, and Cutter smashing his way through the house into the sitting room on a white horse.

It's a literally stunning final shot.

I remember seeing this for the first time in 1982 at a small rep theatre in the West Village in NYC with a near empty house. All of us left the theatre shell shocked after the screening - no one could speak. Passer made a number of other movies in America but I can't really rate any of them at this astonishing level.



# D

## DADDY LONG LEGS (Jean Negulesco, USA, 1955)



These two screens (above and following this paragraph) from the 12 minute "Nightmare Ballet" choreographed by Roland Petit hopefully give some hint of the extremely high voltage sexuality on display. The film is *Daddy Long Legs* directed in 1955 in Scope by Jean Negulesco for Fox and shot by Leon Shamroy in their proprietary Deluxe

Eastmancolor. The slamdunk Johnny Mercer score is a doozy, perhaps the biggest number musically from the show is "Something's Gotta Give." Fox's great Lionel Newman oversaw the entire musical treatment for the picture.



And we have Fred to thank for casting Leslie Caron, then 24 in her last dance movie musical - in 1958's *Gigi* she doesn't dance and I frankly find the film one of Minnelli's absolute worst. *Daddy Long Legs*'s provenance goes back to the early 20th century and a 1912 novella adapted for the movie by Henry and Phoebe Ephron.

It's one of three ingenue/older man tropes to star Caron, beginning with Minnelli's *An American in Paris* in 1952,

and ending with *Gigi* in 1958.

Donen's sublime *Funny Face* in 1957 with Audrey Hepburn replacing Caron completes this trilogy-rondelay of older-younger narratives that was a staple for so many 50s screenplays, like Billy Wilder's two movies with Audrey, *Sabrina* (1954) and *Love in the Afternoon* (1956)

But one decade's PC nightmare is another decade's lollipop and in any case the ongoing performance genius

of artists like Kelly and Astaire generates a base and an audience for these movies. To say nothing of the old world-new world theme of dance Astaire incorporated into his 50s movies, with Cyd Charisse in *The Band Wagon* (with a nod to Kidd). And this neglected treat from the much maligned post-Scope Negulesco, with triple choreographic credits for Roland Petit (ballet), Astaire himself and superb chorus work, from Dave Robel.

Negulesco is not taken seriously these days but one ongoing feature of his movies is his own interest and skill in 20th century art and design. There's an office scene here with Mondrianesque walls composed of blocks of color which harks forward to the superb sets he designed for the Office girls' workplace inside the newly opened Seagram building in Manhattan for the 1959 adult soap, *The Best of Everything*.

The sexual politics of that movie, including a hinted abortion, are a testing point for a movie made the year before Preminger busted the Code. As for the 12 minute Roland Petit work for the "Nightmare Ballet", maligned as ever by critics across the globe, it is in fact textually infused with a hugely Freudian visualization of Caron's

own adult sexuality, and that of the men young and old dancing around her.

One doesn't often think of Petit's work as particularly butch, but here it's redolent with fleshy legs-astraddled, crotch bulging sailors and other specimens of male debauchery and priapic horniness. Negulesco drags the testosterone and sweat out of Petit here in spades. I think the ballet is one of Petit's best works on film.

The movie is impeccably staged and directed, and while the longer numbers may incline some to sign it off to Minnelli's influence, that is surely a good thing in what was one of the first Scope musicals, with its fantastic opportunities for large scale chorus staging, blocking and fluid cameras. And a musical not made by the Freed Unit.

The new Kino Lorber Blu-ray of this movie presents a slightly cool but very beautiful color print, true to Negulesco's fantastic palette. The audio appears also to replicate the wowza original Magnetic four channel track.

A real doozy of a picture.

## DAISY KENYON (Otto Preminger, USA, 1947)



Joanie as *Daisy Kenyon*, Preminger's masterpiece from 1947, with best girlfriend/pal Martha Stewart/Mary Angelus in the foreground and the magnificent thirty foot high fine profiled steel framed windows and semi-sheer silk drapes from Lyle Wheeler and the Fox production design crew, which depict her West Village "hovel" as it's described in Elizabeth Janeway's novel. The seemingly overpowering production values in this totally studio created reality work superbly to Preminger's advantage as major elements in an idealized, objectively correlated New York and a story of apparently successful lives which is belied at every turn by the not quite fatal flaws of every major character. Daisy herself despite a fulfilling career, needing a marriage with someone who's already married, Dana Andrews, Dan O'Mara the lover and king hit lawyer whose success has taken him far from youthful idealism and his own marriage now veering towards the

rocks, and Henry Fonda, Peter Lapham a WW2 vet carrying around in his head what we now call PTSD. Even O'Mara's neglected wife, played by a fine Ruth Warwick, has reverted to child abuse as a means of dealing with a failing marriage. *Daisy Kenyon* is one of my top six Premingers. Like the others it just becomes more perfect every time I watch it. This time around it also comes in a mostly great transfer from Kino Lorber in another of their outstanding run of classic Fox titles for this year. A few shots, some medium closes of Joanie, or first of two running shots for optical dissolve montages are grainy, soft and digitally compressed in the mastering. The CUs at least seem to have been filmed by DP Leon Shamroy with intentional shadow and soft focus to filter Joan's handicapping 43 years, here playing a younger woman albeit extremely well with enormous composure under Otto, one of her best, if not the best, parts. The HD master is obviously the

same one used for Fox's ten year old DVD with no further work done to address a few compromised shots like these. At this stage of 2016 I don't care.

The disc is simply essential. And it carries over all the bonus materials from the older DVD.

## LES DAMES DU BOIS DE BOULOGNE (Robert Bresson, France, 1944)



The incomparable Maria Casarés (above), contrary to general knowledge, was "discovered" for the movies by the great Marcel Carné who cast her as Natalie in 1944's masterpiece *Les Enfants du Paradis*.

Even in this debut Casarés manages to withstand the sheer cyclonic force of leading lady Arletty, playing Garance, a part in which the latter lady not only chews up the scenery but several of the other not inconsiderable players.

Casarés second movie in 1945 was for Bresson, *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* also his second movie, just after war had ended. Bresson seems to have loosely adapted Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, as much as he did the titular Denis Diderot novel for the triangular psychodrama of guilt and malevolence with the least hint of redemption.

Many have remarked upon Bresson's subsequent abandonment of professional actors with his next picture, *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*, from 1950 which had an unknown Claude Laydu in the lead.

But the whole of *Les Dames* is cast with professionals,

## DARK PASSAGE (Delmer Daves, USA, 1947)

Lauren Bacall here photographed by Sid Hickox gazes directly into our eyes and those of the still "unborn" and unseen (for another 45 minutes) Bogie in Delmer Dave's masterpiece, and perhaps the greatest oneiric dream

including Paul Bernard as Jean and Elina Labourdette as the girl who's being corrupted by her pimp mother. The film is even more astonishing and outrageous in conceits on the screen than it seems on paper.

It also seems to me *Les Dames* is entirely successful within its own intentions and form as a fully professionally cast movie, produced by Raoul Ploquin to reach a subtler, more "poetic" atmosphere and psychology than might first appear. There are two elements for this, apart from Bresson's own direction: one is Cocteau's anti-realistic, fluid soliloquy-like dialogue, and the other is the sheer self-consuming pianissimo ferocity of Casarés incredible performance.

TFI France have released a recent 4K restoration of the title in their "Héritage" Blu-ray series. This unfortunately means Francophone friendly. No other subtitles apart from French HOH which leaves us waiting for some worthy Anglophone label to port the movie. I hope it's sooner rather than later. The movie needs rescuing from a languishing reputation and weak older DVD sources that are less than brilliant.

within dream within dream noir ever made, in a gorgeous new Blu-ray of *Dark Passage* (USA 1947) from WB Archive.



While the film functions supremely well as narrative noir from the David Goodis screenplay, I think I'm ultimately with the French critics, Jean-Pierre Coursodon in particular, and more lately Jim Hoberman in the NYT on this miracle of a movie as something most sensually and best experienced as an endless corridor of dream and nightmare and dream, ending as it does with the outrageous climax of Bogart sitting in a set on a Warner soundstage emulating a ritzy bar somewhere in a Conrad Hilton vision of Peru, with the Pacific in background process as the soundtrack plays, for the last of many many iterations all through the movie, "You're just too marvellous". I cannot think of many more heart stopping moments in movies than this inevitable but literally incredibly perfect ending. Thus Bacall walks into the set

just as we might dream her to, and then into the final two shot with Bogie, just as miraculously, and one might almost say sacredly as Jane Greer walks out of the glare and into the shade of the Mexican cafe in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, USA, 1947). These are privileged moments in cinema, and especially Noir, the cinema of the dark and sleep and death and dream, one of the three great poetic genres of American cinema.

Daves' work is more than eminently achieved and as director of action and romantic conflict he's hard to surpass. But *Dark Passage* comes from somewhere else, somewhere far more subconscious and personal. It's surely a work of amour fou from Daves himself in which he pays rapturous, ecstatic homage to his stars and the material. I just adore the picture.

## DE MAYERLING À SARAJEVO (Max Ophuls, France, 1939)



Yes folks, it's John Lodge (above) just four years after playing "Alexei" for Josef von Sternberg in *The Scarlet*

*Empress*, now promoted to Archduke Ferdinand, with commoner "Sophie", played by the great French diva,



Edwige Feuillère in Max Ophüls' last movie made in France from 1939 (released May 1940,) before he took his

family and fled certain death under the Nazis, to arrive in Hollywood in 1941



'...the great French diva, Edwige Feuillère...'

The screens come from a gorgeous new 2K restoration for Gaumont and the CNC finished in 2016, of Max's *De Mayerling à Sarajevo*, set in the late Habsburg era ca.1906. It's one of three new Gaumont Blu-rays of late 30s Ophüls released on their Découverte ("Uncovered") line. Which sadly means there are no English subtitles, but they do carry Français HOH for those who can cope with this.

The other two pictures are the sublime *Sans Lendemain* made earlier in 1939, and from 1937, Max's Butterfly adaptation, *Yoshiwara*, with Pierre Richard-Willm in the Pinkerton part, Tanaka Michiko in the titular role, an actress who worked entirely in Europe, and Sessue Hayakawa as the third point of the triangle.



The other two titles are still on their way, but having seen the glorious 2K restoration of *Sans Lendemain* earlier this year at Sydney's Cinema Reborn, I can only add the visual glories of this restoration for *Mayerling* are equally revelatory and completely stunning. Where *Lendemain* and *Yoshiwara* were both shot by the great Eugene Schufftan, *Mayerling* was photographed by Curt Courant

plus a second unit, and like *Lendemain* the deeply layered studio lighting and Max's orgasmic travellings, in this breathtaking new restoration are on show for the very first time in a state good enough to display the beauty of his *mise-en-scène*.

This movie and this resurrection of it in fact seems to be

emblematic of an ongoing problem within the world of cinephilia. Max's prewar films were a group of virtually secret, unseen and unknown holy grail for so many of us for decades. *Découverte* indeed. Going back literally 40 plus years it was only the first big rediscovery (in a mint 35mm print) of Max's sole Italian film, *La Signora di Tutti* (1935) which was, once again championed in its first New York and European re-issue by Andrew Sarris in deservedly masterpiece terms.

But the rest of this incredibly fine body of work remained stubbornly out of reach. Then, slowly, with TV and the prehistoric video age, post-1982, some, usually very bad, prints started playing for instance on Stratton's now legendary SBS schedule in Oz, as they also did in both the UK and French TV. Among them Max's single Dutch movie, *Comedy in Gold*, and his 1932 German masterpiece, *Liebelei*, although Strat could only track down the French language co-shoot version of that, *Une Histoire d'Amour*.

Since then other, perfectly dreadful copies from antique provenance surfaced occasionally of one or two things, but the version doing the rounds for two decades of *De Mayerling* was so visually weak and hard to watch I don't think any of us have ever been able to evaluate it properly

from that source.

Certainly not me, in fact as I started to watch this new 2K I basically had to keep picking myself off the floor. It's a new movie discovered for the first time. And it's another outright masterpiece, without reservation, and it joins with the rest of Max's prewar French work as all at that level of masterpiece, with the sole exception of the 1938 *Werther*, his adaptation from Goethe. But even that now has to go into a queue of "subjects for further research".

I can't say how disappointed I am Gaumont didn't release these three in its general Blu line which always includes English subs. But the invitation is there, I guess, pregnantly one might say, for someone like Criterion to collect the six French pictures into a curated boxset, like the recent Dietrich-Sternbergs.

Now that Criterion are about to get the weight of the complete fucking Bergman off their chests (not a fan) they can perhaps turn their attention again to something less arthouse middlebrow, and infinitely more rewarding. Or if you love both Ophuls and Bergman, keep their balance. These would surely be more welcome than another 90s mumblecore.

## **DEATH IN VENICE (Luchino Visconti, Italy, 1971)**





Random screens (three above, and more below) from the hideous new 4K "restoration" of *Death in Venice* (1971) from Cineteca di Bologna in its patented piss-soaked LookUpTable Color grading system.

I have never cared at all for the movie but I do remember the opening day screenings at Sydney's Lido (at which James Sabine was also present) well enough. Among other things I stayed for a second viewing and at one point was so frustrated with the softness and fuzziness of the image I went up to the projection booth, banged on the door and asked the poor guy if he could fix it. He couldn't and neither could I which shows you what a roll of the dice getting good quality Eastmancolor prints to Oz could be in those days.

Despite the poor sharpness and weak detail then, I remember it well enough to know it looked nothing like this current piece of shit that Criterion has the gall to charge money for. It's as though the restorers working at Bologna simply ignored or just felt complete disdain for any concept of using a reference 35mm first gen, or even a reissue 35mm. I gather there's still a 1080p streaming video of this from Warner's own vault available Stateside only through Amazon Prime.

According to Jim Steffen this has much closer resemblance to the original 35mm Eastman prints as the

older DVD in fact, with no hideous yellow bias and crushing of detail in pushed blacks. This new 4K encode must be one of the ugliest looking botch jobs I have seen in a lifetime of watching movies.

Oh, did I mention I don't even like the film? Tepid, sentimental marshmallow from Visconti's "Tragic Queen" period post-1968, along with *The Damned*, which itself has enough fun moments to keep spirits up, like The Night of the Long Knives staged as an underwear party/gay orgy with the old guard of Brown Shirts getting fucked by the younger Guard of dial-a-hustler buffed young muscled pretty boy SS before they are all gunned down by the new guard in a ruthless history.

As is now reasonably well known Visconti basically changed the business on *The Damned* to reduce Bogarde's part, so that he could amplify new BF Helmut Berger's part into a leading role (Thus *Death in Venice* became the director's consolation prize for Dirk two years later.) *The Damned* is indeed the movie in which, after shooting up some drug or other with a splendid antique steel syringe, Helmut rapes/fucks maman, Ingrid Thulin, driving her to lunacy (no surprise there) after he had uttered, whilst still nude to the camera, (displaying an arfully lit and sculpted arse), "I vill destroy you, Mudda." It was clear then, and still is now Visconti's great period of filmmaking had come to an end.







DESIGNING WOMAN (Vincente Minnelli, USA, 1957)



Gregory Peck (above) as the male principle, "Mike", with female exemplars Lauren Bacall, as "Mrs Marilla Brown Hagen", and the almost absurdly voluptuous Dolores Gray

as the ex-girlfriend, "Lori", who incidentally is one of two semi-closeted characters in the picture.



Then there is Lauren's marvellous standard Poodle whose name I can't recall, who is the frequent arbiter between warring husband and wife in Minnelli's often overlooked, but unnaturally compelling *Designing Woman*, from 1957. The screens are from a terrific new Warner Archive Blu-ray. The encode for this gorgeous disc was taken, as usual with Warner Archive practice, from a graded and restored Metrocolor first gen Inter-positive to a 2K digital master for the encode.

The picture has never looked this good, and that extends to original Metro(Eastman) screenings back in the day, when non-Technicolor prints coming out of the States to the antipodes at best had a slim chance of being at all good in quality terms. Also back, despite the original 4 track stereo tracks no longer existing is a very clean remix to DTS-HD five channel master audio which works a treat.



The movie is compelling, partly because it belongs to a

string of seemingly director guided manifestos of late 50s

movies focusing on gender and gender roles. The screens here end with Minnelli granting a rare performing glimpse of the great choreographer, Jack Cole playing a small part here, more or less as himself. Cole in the screen above is hauling sportswriter Peck out of a trash can after single-footedly knocking out a small army of gangland match fixing sports mobsters with what can only be called the cinema's first big kickboxing fight. Cole does this whole sequence of mega-butth assurance in two elegant long takes with the deftest footwork this side of the beginnings of late 60s *wuxia* into western movie theaters. This particular fight scene is immaculately enhanced by

the taste of the director and choreographer of "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" and "Is There anyone here for Love". Clearly Pre-1960 code driven is Cole's character "Randy" who is obliged to play a straight man (as Minnelli himself did so often).

And perhaps as a distraction or even a beard for his enforced closeting, Dolores Gray (below) plays Peck's former GF as someone hidden away through shame from his new bride for reasons that frankly elude me for any coherent narrative reason.



The business however is in the action, and the testing of stereotyped gender responses to situations like the fights, fashion shows and the great pasta eating sequence, are what drives the movie as a generic comedy. At this level the picture plays with the lightest of tones, and Bacall and Peck seem to be having a lot of fun doing the show, despite Bacall's husband's illness in real life. Bogie was then in the final stages of cancer and would die before the picture was released. But Bacall never puts a foot wrong. The movie was shot by Minnelli favorite, the titanic John Alton, and the new Blu-ray delivers Alton's stunning color and lighting with a real whack. Andre Previn who was by now well established in the movies took over musical direction with much of the material being transposed from the earlier Freed/Donen/Comden & Green musical, *It's Always Fair Weather*. Previn also worked uncredited on the earlier picture.

The movie succeeds at a completely surface level, on its own terms as marital comedy. But I confess to having real problems with the way Minnelli takes on gender based

material in movies like this, and especially the lamentable *Tea and Sympathy*. The latter remains to me unendurable, perhaps his outright worst. Both it and *Designing Woman* were compelled by the censorship regime of the day to deny the magic gay word but they make a bigger hash of things by actually drowning even a coded gay option to the point of losing the real dialogue that is going on here. Cukor's *Pat and Mike* from 1952 makes an infinitely better job of this sort of genre material on multiple fronts. The Kanin/Gordon screenplay for one, the Hepburn and Tracy chemistry, and in a smaller but significant note like Cole's in *Designing Woman*, the openly gay David Wayne playing Kate's best girlfriend, Kip, whom he also plays as flirtatiously but openly gay. To say nothing of Cukor's own relative uncloseted-ness with which he could build trust with his cast and writers. It would be another decade or two before the cat really clawed itself out of the bag, and the whole not insubstantial business of heterosexual relationships themselves could get a more completely honest working over, not least with some reflection of the possibility of various "other"nesses. Like Minnelli's own.

## DOCKS OF NEW YORK (Josef von Sternberg, USA, 1928)



Betty Compson

Ferocious emotion in Sternberg.

In the history of movies there has long been a select group of masterpieces nominated over the years from the silent picture era which always rise to the surface, time after time and with good reason. Sjöström's *The Wind*, Murnau's *Sunrise*, Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, Chaplin's *The Circus*, King Vidor's *The Big Parade* and

Sternberg's 1928 *The Docks of New York*.

*Docks*, made at Paramount, brings together cameraman Hal Rosson and screenwriter Jules Furthman with original material by the great John Monk Saunders, who would shortly pioneer the aviation picture genre, starting with Hawks' *Dawn Patrol*, Ford's *Air Mail*, Leisen's *Eagle and the Hawk* and many others.



George Bancroft

The tone and texture of *Docks* is pure, distilled Sternbergiana with signature compositions of characters against bare chipped walls, and ornamentation entirely composed of a flimsy nightie and cigarette smoke, through

to densely layered choreographed riots of crowds whom only a rapidly travelling dolly can break up with its own fervent search for the essential subject of the sequence.





Betty Compson, Olga Baclanova

In this case for the last two screens, the "heroine", Mae a broke prostitute whom Bill (George Bancroft) has just rescued from the New York harbor and a failed suicide attempt. The "other" woman is Lou (Olga Baclanova) who befriends Mae, with the preternatural knowledge from her own life to see the abysmal future in store for Mae. The embrace between the two women in the last two screens is one of the most moving moments in Sternberg, perhaps equalled only by Keiko's ghost appearing at the airport to honor the men returning to Japan, living and dead who

shared her life on *Anatahan*, in that final masterpiece. Both George Bancroft and Betty Compson were hugely popular stars in the day in what the French used to call "alimentaire" or popular genre films, and here they're giving startlingly nuanced performances, often with nothing more than their eyes in shots that last up to twenty seconds, creating a depth of acting so shaded no post-war 20th century acting school could have ever come near it for subtlety and expression.



Olga Baclanova, Betty Compson

Sternberg takes Bancroft's natural physicality and directs him to play scenes often rigid or still, with just one arm or a leg moving in distraction. Elsewhere with only title cards to provide dialogue which happily Furthman has written so everyone can "get it" before it's even read, Jo gives us the central organic truth that only cinema can reveal. It's the human face, and for his entire career, everything Jo created, assembled, wrote, devised, cut, moved around

and photographed was the human face. With everything else in the frame - from a bare wall, to smoke, water and birds, to massive levels of chiaroscuro and disguise, mask, feather, lattice, foliage, costume - all totally subservient to the central meaning of every shot. As he insisted, nothing in the frame is superfluous. Everything points to one meaning.

The screens are from Criterion's reissue, finally in Blu-ray of the three great last Paramount silents first released on

DVD in 2010 including *Docks*, *Underworld* (1927) and *The Last Command* (1928.)

## Julien Duvivier



Julien Duvivier, Fernandel shooting of  
*The Return of Don Camillo* (1953)

I thought some biographical detail on Duvivier would possibly be illuminating, especially in regards to an apparent shift in his relatively "reverent" devotional pictures, both silent and talkie up to and basically ending with *Golgotha* (*France, 1935*), with Gabin in pageboy wig and toga. By this time one can hardly escape the conclusion Duvivier had lost his faith, perhaps as a

consequence of the sharp intelligence he obviously possessed which led to so many (misjudged) critical attacks on his "pessimism" and more specifically his supposed "misogyny". (Which was as much a creation of writer Charles Spaak's as Duviv's with Spaak's original *Femmes Fatales* creations from his 1935 screenplays onwards.



Jean Gabin ("pageboy wig and toga", centre)

I think the fact Duviv's wife was Jewish is widely reported by Dudley Andrew and others. A topic that interests me even more than the above is how he managed to tone down the inescapable views of anti-semitism in the movie he directed from his collaborated screenplay of Irene Nemirovsky's 1929 novel *David Golder* (1930).

Nemirovsky's central character is an essay in what she perceived as a ventilation of the subject of "good Jew/ bad Jew", a barely hidden current in pre-war Europe, from her

viewpoint as a Jew herself. It's a minefield of material and a book's worth of research on its own.

What Duvivier demonstrates is that he was aware of the perils in putting this out to a "liberal" audience, including a Jewish one that the writer was, and the degree to which he could round out the central character so fully as to largely remove the "semitic emphasis" from both the character and the narrative.



Fernand Gravet, Luise Rainer,  
*The Great Waltz*

On the subject of Hollywood, Duviv left France for Hollywood to try-out for Metro on *The Great Waltz* in 1938, but went back after the studio decided it would re-shoot the ending with its ludicrous happy wedding nonsense.

There was also of course the completely gorgeous waltz montage shot by Sternberg which redeems the picture totally. Duvivier realized, by 1939, following his return to France, that he and his wife were not safe and they packed up to escape the fury by the end of that year. A similar fate was not dealt to Nemirovsky who found herself interned in the first Vichy roundups in 1940, and murdered at Auschwitz in 1942.

Also noteworthy. For myself I had never seen any visual footage of Duvivier or heard his voice. Until now however. He is one of the four or five most prominent talking heads in the absolutely superb documentary, *A la Recherche de Gremillon* on Arrow Academy's new Blu-ray of *L'Amour d'une Femme* (1953). Duviv in the flesh (so to speak) is a total surprise. Razor sharp eyes and a tight precise voice and spoken tone, which announce thought of deafening perception and clarity. He and Spaak both clearly perceived the subject of the show, Grem, in a way that I haven't read about previously (and I have read copiously on the subject).

# E

## EASY LIVING (Mitchell Leisen, USA, 1937)



Jean Arthur staggers off the 5th Avenue bus after nearly being knocked out by a fur coat that fell from the sky. Later she's confronted by the great

Franklin Pangborn, seriously adorned in Travis Banton wardrobe (below), at the Hotel Louis, saying "My dear, pour yourself into these and fall in a faint."



The film is of course Leisen's wonderful 1937 *Easy Living*, the first of his Preston Sturges screenplays. And for Leisenistas everywhere Kino Lorber will be releasing Blu-rays of this and the somewhat more prosaic and

stagebound (1934) *Death Takes a Holiday* in late July.

These plus Arrow's July *Hold Back the Dawn*, hopefully hint at a subsequent Blu of *Midnight* before year's end.

## EXPERIMENT IN TERROR (Blake Edwards, USA, 1962)





Ross Martin, Lee Remick, *Experiment in Terror*

Blake Edwards' *Experiment in Terror* from 1962 was previously released on Blu-ray by Twilight Time. I don't know if Indicator sourced a new 4K from Sony for this but there are small and palpable improvements to image most notably grain management and dynamic range in the new Indicator BD. The film has a very curious atmosphere enshrouding it, not just menace but something slightly autistic as if the protagonists seem to be partially behaving

like "normal" from a sense of duty, one which the psychotic intruder into suburban life has aroused as a germ of latent possibility for enlivenment from the thrall of imminent danger. Edwards' control of tone is constantly to the fore and dominates the *mise-en-scene*, indeed viewing the picture can become a little like watching models moving in slow motion while the narrative unfolds with brisk determination.

# F

## FEMALE TROUBLE (John Waters, USA, 1973)



Happy and obscene Family Snaps from what has always been for me John Waters' crowning achievement, *Female Trouble* released in 1973, and still going strong with this elegant and voluptuously bonused new 4K transfer on Criterion Blu-ray.

The only concession Waters makes to modern taste this year is to give all these originally 16mm full camera aperture early Baltimore epics the "modern" twist of minimal widescreen with a 1.66 ratio mask. I recall seeing

this originally on first Oz release in Adelaide mid-1976 at a then fleapit, the Roma in Hindley St when then indie distrib Eric Dare brought it in to debut Waters to an unsuspecting public. *Pink Flamingoes* which accompanied it to the censor's office was banned outright and remains so but somehow, "mysteriously", a complete, uncut VHS tape copy of it started doing the rounds ca. 1983 and despite subsequent re-banning of that fragrant work, the source still survives.



*Female Trouble* is surely a supreme Valentine to the matchless Divine, and her alter ego, Glen Milstead. Indeed, this picture features both personae in a single scene depicting Divine's rape by herself (as Milstead with a rear shot showing his skid marked underpants humping

up and down, an image which poetically evokes a modern day parallel of what Trump is doing to America). This of course leads to the inevitable birth of their half-witted baby, Taffy, in a bathtub, played at later ages to the dysfunctional hilt by the great Mink Stole.



Indeed, further, the Gang's All Here including Edith Massey, and a young Michael Potter whose death defying singing asshole sequence in *Flamingoes* is probably one of the three things that keeps that picture banned in Oz. Everybody who was anybody in the Baltimore pre-punk Trash scene is in this picture. And the sensibility of total defiance to bourgeois hypocrisy and morality holds strong, a perfect position, I suggest for contemporary American

youth who are seeking ways to give Trump and the American Establishment the giant "fuck you".

I was always sorry to see Waters go soft, after *Polyester*. But we all grow older if not wiser, and he certainly donates hours of very recently recorded commentary, interviews and fun to this colossal disc. Almost as Colossal as the great Dawn Davenport herself.

### **FIRST REFORMED (Paul Schrader, USA, 2018)**

Two screens from Paul Schrader's new picture, *First Reformed*. The film debuted in the USA last year at Telluride and has a Blu-ray debut next week on the Lionsgate label. It played the NZIFF last month and is

playing in Melbourne IFF. I cannot ascertain any other Oz playdates with certainty. It has been doing a number of streaming platforms which is how I have managed to see it for this review.



Ethan Hawke, *First Reformed*

The movie is Schrader's finest work since *Light Sleeper* and before that, *Mishima*. The first hour is composed of sparsely dressed, furnished and precisely framed sets with shots that are so intensely tuned, held and doted on that the accumulation of them for the entire first half of the movie takes on an extraordinary sense of exhilaration. Each shot is so powerfully precise in its range of

Schrader's method here, with the faultless participation of his cast, including a career high for Ethan Hawke, is to intertwine an unfolding narrative with parallel self-reflection through both a diary and voice over, just as he has previously in his script for *Taxi Driver*, and in *Light Sleeper*. The opening of course immediately references Bresson's *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne* and the

meanings, shot by shot it has the power to confound your expectations for every following shot. I cannot think of a movie that infuses so much power into its montage (which is to say virtually its entire *mise-en-scène*) since Kubrick and *Eyes Wide Shut*, in which single shots, whether static or mobile deny the viewer any certainly whatsoever about what's to come next. movie's emotional life is totally indebted to that masterpiece.

The second hour takes the picture into other levels of both reality and consciousness, allowing for several possibilities including an astonishing and startling multiple ending which is itself unresolved.





Amanda Seyfried, Ethan Hawke, *First Reformed*

Your feelings about the success or otherwise of Schrader's strategy for the climax is as much dependent on the success with which he carries you emotionally in the character's direction. As the great stylist he is, it is simply impossible not to feel empathy, not only with Hawke's pastor, Ernst Toller (another major reference), but with every actor in the movie, even the amazingly straight faced performance by Cedric Kyles (aka "The Entertainer") as the head of the umbrella mega-church under whose corporate wealth, Toller's/Hawke's petite 250 year old white Shaker weather board church with almost no parishioners is permitted to survive.

So Schrader at 72 has pulled rabbits out of hats. One of them, the most surprising to me, is the discovery that his leading character is not indeed the "loner" of so many earlier Schrader films, but a genuine everyman. Without giving away spoilers I feel as though the amazing climax is as much an extension of the singular to the

encompassing, complete with dual expressions of Christ and Satan.

This is as powerful as anything I have watched in the last twelve months, and formally at least, even the ambivalences which he purposely inserts into structure and filming from what in otherwise conventional terms might have been called a third act is itself the sort of exhilaration which a movie can rarely communicate with you. Indeed, Toller himself records the same reviving excitement in his diary after first meeting the young Eco activist.

The world may have no future, and no future for those of us who are currently destroying it at fearsome speed. I implore everyone to see and if possible buy *First Reformed* from one of the current masters of English language cinema. Nobody capable of rational thought can be unmoved or unprovoked by it.

## THE 5000 FINGERS OF DR. T (Roy Rowland, USA, 1953)



Tommy Rettig, Hans Conreid, *The 5000 Fingers of Dr T*

Although I have never cared for it, Roy Rowland's 3 strip 1953 Technicolor Dr Seuss nightmare fantasy, *The 5000 Fingers of Dr.T*, is released on a stunningly beautiful Indicator Blu-ray from a new Sony 4K. It must be either my tormented Catholic childhood or my extremely filthy adult mind but the whole show reeks to me of extreme pedo kink, with more than a little BDSM torture thrown in for children who never wanted to play the piano (or in my case football, unless it was afterwards in the showers with the older boys.)

I think I would rather watch endlessly looped reels of the actual BDSM client in Barbet Schroeder's 1975 masterpiece of genuine kink, *Maitresse* having his cock nailed to a plank in the specialist Paris bordello by a fetchingly leather and rubber clad Bulle Ogier. I like my perversity clean, not surreptitious. Anyway for others with tastes that lie in the direction of grown overweight men dressed as blowflies in giant pink and yellow tights tormenting small boys (especially the unbearably "sweet" Tommy Rettig) this disc of *Dr T* has your name branded on it.

## FOUR SEASONS IN HAVANA (Leonardo Padura and Félix Viscarret, Spain 2017)

We are loving this like crazy. Coming recommended originally by Rod Bishop and Geoffrey Gardner.

We've devoured three of the four, with the third, *Mascaras* knocking me completely out. The author, Leonardo Padura and the cast and director of the series, Félix Viscarret, are unknown to me but one wants to see much more. Currently on Netflix everywhere.

Havana itself is the beating heart of the show, endlessly seductive and ridiculously beautiful. All the while, beyond

shabby, totally run down, dysfunctional. But by Episode 3 you are no longer seeing the peeling paint, the rusty iron, the splitting concrete, and the broken faucets, you're only seeing the gorgeous wrought iron, the totally unique post deco-moderne curving 50s architecture which is unlike anything in Miami. There are times when the city makes Barcelona look dull!

How much longer will Cuba be like this I wonder. I want to get straight on a plane.

## Samuel Fuller and Douglas Sirk

The two boxes of Fuller and Sirk films released by UK label Indicator from sources held by Sony are another two objects of cinephile delirium which also happen to replicate two superb older DVD boxsets with identical movies released around ten years ago by Sony when it was still doing its own in-house Home Vid.

I have not one word of negativity to add to the recommendations for both new boxsets. For anyone who

doesn't already know, only two titles from the Fuller box are directed by the great man - *Underworld USA* and *The Crimson Kimono*, and for many of us these have probably already been purchased as individual earlier releases. I

think the boxset still remains worth considering for double dipping if only for the very high quality HD masters of Sirk's superb *Shockproof* (1948) from a Fuller script

(almost wrecked, but not quite, by a moronic happy ending written by Helen Deutch.)

I think *Shockproof* survives as one of Sirk's top three 40s pictures (*Summer Storm* and *Scandal in Paris* the others.) It's indispensable. The two thirties and one forties

Columbia B pics, *It Happened in Hollywood*, *Adventures in the Sahara* and *Power of the Press*, with Fuller screenplays are extremely entertaining, and the transfers have clearly been made from pristine original nitrate 35mm elements. You can see the silver halide folks!

# G

## GARDEN OF ALLAH (Richard Boleslawski, USA, 1936)

One of the greatest works of unadulterated camp in cinema, the Polish emigre, Stanislavski-trained director Richard Boleslawski's 1936 early three strip Technicolor *Garden of Allah*, from the High Trash Exotica novel of the same name by Robert S. Hichens.

This was Dietrich's second outing after she and Jo parted company and she's playing her part at so subdued a level she might as well be in another movie. In the first screen she's glimpsed for the first time, having returned to the Convent where she spent the last few years "recovering" from some psychic pain after the death of her father.



"uttering silent prayer" Marlene Dietrich, *Garden of Allah*

She appears to be uttering silent prayer in this screen above but is more than likely cursing "where are you now, Jo?" She's interrupted in her thoughts by the ever buoyant Mother Josephine and the pair recite some of the fruitiest dialogue this side of Oscar Wilde .

*Marlene:* "Mother Josephine, it's like coming home."

*MJ:* "You're not happy my child?:"

*Marlene:* "The only time I was happy was when I was here".

*MJ:* "But surely after your father's death you travelled?"

*Marlene:* "Yes, I travelled the world. Paris, Vienna, the Riviera. But in the midst of people I was always lonely. What am I to do Mother Josephine, what I am to do?"

*MJ:* "Do? Life is full of interesting things. You must find them."

*Marlene:* "But how, Mother? Where?"

*MJ:* "Perhaps, perhaps... the desert."

*Marlene:* "The desert, Mother, what will I find there?"

*MJ:* "There in the Solitudes, you may find yourself. In the face of the Infinite your grief will vanish."





"the worst rug of his career" Charles Boyer, *Garden of Allah*

Thus announced, Dietrich sets off (First Class this time) for Morocco where she finds, rather than the Infinite, Charles Boyer wearing the worst rug of his career (above) as Father Boris the Trappist monk, in civvies, on the lam from his order, dealing with some out-of-control horniness, and that most sublime emblem of 30s Kitsch, the Austrian born "exotic dancer" Tilly Losch, who does the hoochy

cooch in the screen below to a crowd of casting call, toothless "Arabs" who wiggle their ears, do tricks with their handlebar moustaches and inflate their cheeks with their tongues, whilst leering at Tilly, all in close up.



"hoochy cooch" Tilly Losch, *Garden of Allah*

As a bonus Joseph Schildkraut does his peerless screaming queen impersonation playing Marlene's Arab "tour guide". The two of them look great together, in otherwise totally flatly photographed wide two shots with zero movement. At this point there is no more to say but that the movie is completely irresistible.

Kino Lorber's new Blu-ray is taken from the same very fine

source that was used ten years ago for one of the nicest 3-strip Tech transfers to DVD held by the Selznick estate. The new Blu-ray takes this very early beauty to an even higher level of gorgeousness, and it's really worth the price of admission, if not only for the batshit crazy Tilly Losch dance number, but the gorgeous Technicolor. Region Free.

## GOD'S OWN COUNTRY (Francis Lee, UK, 2017)



Josh O'Connor and Alec Secareanu (above), the leads in Yorkshireman Francis Lee's superb first feature, *God's Own Country* which debuted at last year's Sundance. Cornholing and romance are both experiences depicted

here with total authenticity. The film has since played several FF circuits including 2017 NZ and Sydney/Melbourne but only achieved a very limited commercial release in Oz and NZ last year.



"refreshingly blunt"

The sex scenes are refreshingly blunt, especially after the girly, twirly, fairy floss, queeny swooning of the unspeakable Guadagnino picture and Oscar fave, *Call Me By Your Name*. Like the boys' moods and their isolation, the sex in Lee's new picture alternates from spit and axel grease to intensely tender, in defining ways which truthfully display how masculine sexuality can and does have a range, and the depths which it can reach, sexually and emotionally.

And despite the autobiographically imposed limitation of North Country milieu and a narrow range of family personalities defining the narrative, the movie never

abandons authenticity for the sake of flowery, egocentrically self-regarding bollocks like the visual tizzy floss and unceasingly giddy swoontime of such a total phony of arthouse posturing as the vile Luca Guadagnino, a director who throws that film's sex into the soup of the "tasteful" with his pseudo gay, dizzyingly pitched orgy of "good taste", production design, food porn and style, the totally, offensively vacuous and completely shallow *Call Me By Your Name*, surely the most repulsive and dishonest film of 2017.

"It's not really gay" shrieks la Guadagnino to a breathless homo-baiting press, in fact highlighting the only truth that may be ascertained from his swoonfest of circling

cameras, flashes of Bach and breathless smiling actors playing white rich, liberal Jews, all partying in a melee of mutual admiration. Thus Guadagnino's sex scenes look as if Armie Hammer and Timothy Chalamet are merely learning how to dance, as ever more decorative artefacts come into frame to amplify the "Proustian" Summer of 83 memory for the final chapter of Guadagnino's so called trilogy of Lerv, starting with a Tilda Swinton bang in the unspeakable and laughably bad *Io Sono l'Amore* of 2013.

This is not the sort of "Love" one might find in, say Dreyer, or Mizoguchi, or Sirk or Ford or McCarey, or Ophüls, it's the one 13 year olds schoolgirls read about in trashy pop magazines, but that's good enough for Luca's version of the "gay" experience.

And of course HIS film isn't anything so vulgar as just, um "Gay". Oh, have I made it clear yet how much I loathe *Call Me By Your Name*?

Authenticity is indeed the beating heart of *God's Own Country*, and it rings clear through the hesitant but affirmative homosexuality of its two lead parts, the awe-inspiring natural beauty of the farm and the animals, the sheep, cows and goats who are tended through life and death by O'Connor and his newly arrived colleague, friend and soon to be lover from Romania, Secareanu.

The melancholy little family tragedies of daily life prompt a

final change in the plot that brings the now estranged couple back together, of all things as O'Connor decides to take over running the farm from his dying father. I found both the haltingly enunciated feelings and the other periods of silence and repose as affecting and moving as anything else I saw last year, and, again the sheer power of the movie's authenticity engaged me completely.

But something like this that actually celebrates rough male sex, and gay relationships which are not sacrificed or actually endangered by familial meddling or other first world factors is a quiet but major triumph in gay-themed movies. Or any movies really.

A lot of critics kept calling this film a North Country *Brokeback*, but it's far superior to Ang Lee's quite good Hollywood picture, and it doesn't require for a mass audience the very big performances it got from the two male leads, especially Heath Ledger. *Brokeback* did have Michelle Williams in an early lead part which did indeed throw the torch of truth through such direct acting of damaged feelings and hurt. In Francis Lee's new film, the same innate truth and honesty are quite simply embedded totally in the material and with the actors themselves.

The new Blu-ray comes from a UK Label called Spirit Entertainment. As far as I know it's the first disc release worldwide.

# H

## HEAVEN CAN WAIT (Ernst Lubitsch, USA, 1943)



The gloriously happy couple in the two screens above are, of course, Andrew Sarris and Molly Haskell recorded here by Criterion for its 2004 DVD of Lubitsch's last masterpiece, *Heaven Can Wait* from 1943. This terrific interview along with both original and brand new supplemental material has been ported over to Criterion's new Blu-ray edition of the movie including a new 4K

restoration from Fox..

The inclusion of the Sarris/Haskell "married couple" discussion is, surely, beyond felicity for a movie which is ostensibly so grounded in the mystery, magic, the drama and tragedy of marriage. Yet for all that, the movie is most remarkable for two huge temporal elisions.





The first and biggest is a ten year gap, a complete blank from the day Henry van Cleeve (Don Ameche, above) and his beloved Martha (Gene Tierney, in supernaturally flattering Technicolor, below) elope, to the day, ten years later, of their anniversary, when she leaves him to return

to her monstrous parents - Eugene Palette and Marjorie Main - in their lurid log brown toned "Xanadu" nightmare conception of bucolic rural America in possibly the American cinema's ugliest decor.



It's no coincidence the screenwriter, Samson Raphaelson was also the author of Lubitsch's four other greatest pictures: *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), *The Merry Widow* (1934), the Sternbergian-Pirandellian *Angel* (1936) and the sublime *The Shop Around the Corner* in 1940. For a screenplay that supposes the subject to be marriage, *Heaven* delivers itself over to Henry himself and an

astonishingly sustained performance of a near impossible part by Don Ameche.

Henry, even as a 15 year old, here played by Dicky Moore with a kind of Dionysian luridness and a set of smarts manages to get an extra six bucks a week for the new French Maid whom he's just seduced.



Henry is at turns a hypocrite, a lecher, a louse, self-deluding and a quasi-liar, but - thanks to Ameche and Raphaelson and Lubitsch's incredibly personal investment in the character, he's human. And ultimately, as he tells Satan himself – played by a leering Amber-tanned black-suited Laird Cregar, straight out of Murnau's incarnation of Old Nick as played by Emil Jannings in the 1926 *Faust*, but now in a Deco-Moderne version of Hell out of Lube's own 1932 Madame Colet's deco apartment in *Trouble in Paradise*, invented by Fox art Director James Basevi and photographed with all the opulence only Fox 40s Technicolor and Eddie Cronjager could deliver.

It's no surprise Cronjager's other big picture for Fox that year was Busby Berkeley's hallucinatory *The Gang's All Here*.

The costumes in this picture, hideous almost to a shot and character, were "created" by Rene Hubert and reach their apex of awfulness in the dowdy, dead leather and worn coal tones of the rich yokel Strabels. Color design even in the paradisiacal sequences from the van Cleeve household always threatens to run into something way beyond picture postcard, a mood which the movie sets up initially for the recollected memories and then keeps intentionally losing throughout the narrative.



Lubitsch sometimes pulls the color back, and in the most lyrical example (see screen above) he drags it right into a replica of pre 1933 two Color process Technicolor which could only reproduce red and a kind of blue-green. The sequence is the "Sheik of Araby" performance Henry and

Martha attend at the Ziegfeld Follies just before the final sequences of the picture. As critic and Lubitsch scholar Joe McBride notes in his new biography of Lube, the show could well signal a call to one of Lube's own 1920s "history" movies with all its show biz hokum and "exotica".

The payoff is Henry's penultimate opportunity for infidelity, prompted by yet another blonde showgirl, played with fierce but endearing toughness by Helene Reynolds.

It's not only the smart showgirl who determines the final parameters of this playboy's life. Martha herself in two major dialogue scenes, both supposedly reconciling, reveals at every turn of the dialogue she's at least three steps ahead of Henry and has been for the duration. And so will it be for her last great scene, sweetly, shortly before she dies.

What matters to these two, as Lubitsch and Raphaelson clearly express, is also what matters to Gaston and Lily in *Trouble in Paradise*. And to "Angel" and Sir Frederick in *Angel*, and Danilo and Sonia in *The Merry Widow*- they are both innate rebels, they both crave to escape bourgeois rectitude and break out. They are sexually intoxicated by each other, often as much fetishistically by

their mutual transgressions. And they can't live without each other.

Just a few words on the new 4K. The work comes from Fox' technical team under Archival maestro Schawn Beltston. It's almost impossible to believe something so beautiful could have been achieved with not a single first generation element. The restorers were obliged to reconstitute new separations and a working dupe negative from a CRI interneg which is possibly the worst imaginable situation from which a restorer can work. As we doubtless all know, Fox junked all its nitrate negs, including all the nitrate Technicolor three strips sometime after 1977 in some kind of insane economy measure. Quite frankly what Beltston and his team can achieve these days on titles like this and the amazing *Leave her to Heaven* is something only prayers could answer.

## HELL AND HIGH WATER (Samuel Fuller, USA, 1954)



Fuller favorite Richard Widmark (Adam) rubs his cheek against the periscope like a kitten while the wonderful, too seldom cast Bella Darvi (Denise) sorts out the fleshy and greasy all male submarine crew with a charm school lesson in gender politics that has them licking it up in Fuller's completely mad apocalyptic and wonderful Cold War, Chinese Commie, camp masterpiece *Hell and High Water* from 1954.

I first saw this and fell in love with it in the 60s back in the Kings Cross Gaiety Theatre days where a knockout Tech IB print of it used to often play there. Fuller was the perfect director for those totally honest, completely non-bourgeois or hideous pretentious arthouse audiences, along with

Visconti at least for his high period up to and including *Vaghe Stelle dell'Orsa* (*Sandra*) from 1965. These were two directors that genuinely moved the crowd physically and emotionally, and which allowed us to relate to the screen, often verbally with shouting, cheering, booing and general concurrence. Cinema going has never been as engaging for me and was best avoided if I could, until perhaps the fabulous full house for Lube's *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) earlier this year in Bologna in which a substantially first time young audience to the picture again lapped it up like kittens with cream and gave the movie thunderous applause for minutes at the end and beyond the final credits.



Bella Darvi, *Hell and High Water*

And that's how Fuller makes movies. You can never be unengaged from them. This one for all the supposed hokum and drop in his quality is no different to any of his greatest fifties pictures to my mind. Some writers condescendingly ascribe the idea of naivety or fauvist characterization to the background crew/chorus characters here. But their dialogue and actions are actually cleverly constructed to incorporate them into - literally - a chorus and a prediction of how the audience will react, without ever taking the spontaneity of the audience's reactions from us.

And the submarine crew here is as sociologically diverse and emblematic for 50s American movies as is the group of atomic scientists, nationally and linguistically (Bella speaks at least six languages here as do the crew. And Fuller makes a big deal about showing the diversity.) Perhaps the most unexpected of the crew characters is an

almost outrageously openly gay David Wayne, playing a kind of ship jester mostly shot with baretop, in line with the other beefcake specimens of greasepaint and brawn who elaborately depict a backdrop of masculinity and muscle to play off in counterpoint to Fuller's central romance between Adam and Denise, Labor and Science, with a central, very long take of an astonishing four minutes in the cabin love scene completely saturated and printed in screaming deep (Commie and Passion) red, to a depth that only the old dye transfer prints could render properly.

The encode is from a splendid new transfer by Fox for Twilight Time and the disc is region free. I've only said this once before in relation to the superb BD disc of *Dracula's Daughter* and the 30s and 40s Universal Horror cycles but anyone who can't love a movie like *Hell and High Water* doesn't love movies.

### **HITLER'S CHILDREN (Edward Dmytryk, USA, 1943)**





Otto Kruger (above) is Bad Nazi and the luscious Tim Holt (middle) in très sexy buzzcut and uniform is Good Nazi, with the ever gormless Kent Smith and friend (bottom) watching helplessly as the forces of evil mow down Bonita Granville and everyone else in sight who's decent in Edward Dmytryk's more than slightly camp *Hitler's Children* (RKO, 1943).

Now released on a good quality Warner Archive DVD-R . It doesn't come near as close to the bone as Sirk's terrific *Hitler's Madman* with Carradine or indeed Lang and Brecht's superb *Hangmen Also Die*, both also released in 1943, for anything close to dramatic consistency or serious exploration.



But this picture does showcase director Edward Dmytryk's highly resolved post-Weimar visual style and cutting. He stayed on at RKO to do "A" pictures after the war and came up with his best film there, *Crossfire* (1947) which forges anti-fascism with the psychopathy of an anti-Semite and, in the Richard Brooks original, a homophobe.

Back here in Wartime Propaganda Land both acting and a really terrible screenplay by Emmet Lavery (from a book by Gregory Ziemer) never allows the movie to reach past its ultimate value as Gestapo Camp. In these days of appalling news breaking every day that's good enough for me.



Perhaps I enjoyed the movie more than I should have, given the events in Pittsburgh last weekend which was as horribly disturbing to me as the mass murder of the patrons in a Florida gay bar a couple of years previously. Hate crimes are so inherently connected to the rise of fascism, a new development now so present in what used to be democracies which have been taken over by

psychotic big business and dead-weighted Fascist thugs like Trump. You need to be able to laugh at all those aspects which are inherently absurd, like the presumptions of racial or ethnic or Christian superiority.

So I thank a director way back, who was a dedicated anti-fascist, sadly dragged into the HUAC muck of commie ratting, by another major historic American thug and role model for the current horror, Joe McCarthy.

### **HOLD BACK THE DAWN (Mitchell Leisen, USA, 1941)**



In this inexpressibly beautiful shot above, Mitchell Leisen give us a desperate refugee, stuck in Mexico, Georges

Iscovescu (Charles Boyer) undergoing a subtle but profound transformation, unaware it's even happening,

until the second screen below, in a shot so sublime it parallels Rossellini's majestic closing shots of *Viaggio in*

*Italia* and the reconciliation of George Sanders and Ingrid Bergman in the "miracle" sequence that ends that masterpiece.



Leisen, here, at the very end of *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941) takes the mise-en-scène for redemption even further than Rossellini's, into a kind of totally exhilarating, minimalist expression of completion. Unlike Rossellini, who cross cuts the tracks of Sanders and Bergman finding each other again in the crowd, Leisen never cuts back to the object of his redemption, a superb Olivia de Havilland, but simply keeps travelling with a fade to black. The effect is completely devastating.

On a scale of emotional and formal purity, at the most sublime level this shot most closely reminds me of the closing static shot in Sternberg's *Morocco* in which Dietrich shakes off her mules and walks on into the desert, in *Morocco* with the other women and their goats and chattels until she, along with them disappears over the horizon into infinity. Meanwhile only the soundtrack

remains alive, with the wind whistling over the desert sands. And the film fades to the Paramount mountain as a final affirmation of the supremacy of memory. And art.

Leisen's film is one of his greatest, and the resonances today cannot be lost in this terrible age of refugees, millions cast adrift, moral equivalences that seem to overwhelm common sense, rising fascism and humanity at sea.

The new Blu-ray from Arrow is a very welcome addition to the slowly growing Leisen repertoire on Blu-ray. The disc includes an Adrian Martin commentary which fully engages with the movie, and a terrific face to camera video essay, "Love Knows no Borders" from British scholar Geoff Andrew.

## **HOUSEKEEPING (Bill Forsyth, UK, 1987)**



Welcome to a 4K sourced BD of Bill Forsyth's wonderful *Housekeeping* (1987) with the hardly remembered Christine Lahti. This and *Local Hero* (1983) with Burt Lancaster are Forsyth's best known movies but *Housekeeping* has been out of circulation seemingly forever, since a weakly produced and distributed DVD did the rounds more than ten years ago. This Sony/Indicator BD is glorious. The movie deserves a big new audience

and I wish I was familiar with more of Forsyth's work. He and Alexander Payne seem to be the noble inheritors of Hal Ashby's cinema amongst very few others in their gentle preservation of difficult and hurt characters who just get by in life outside and largely despite the uncaring mainstream. Perhaps his characters are even as uniquely "universal" as Ozu's in a brutal modern world.

### **HUMAN DESIRE (Fritz Lang, USA, 1954)**



The screen above is from Masters of Cinema's new Blu-ray of Lang's *Human Desire*. I recommend the disc without hesitation. This is the first time in my recollection the movie has been matted to a widescreen 1.85 format. This is how Sony formatted the picture for MoC's new encode

and it looks a doozy. Only sampling so far but it shows superb grain and stability and I am tempted to think the movie may be much more faithful, even with a shot by shot breakdown, to the great Renoir original, *La Bête Humaine* from 1938



# I

## I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING (Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1945)



Elephant's new Blu-ray from France of Powell & Pressburger's fabulous *I Know Where I'm Going*, released as *Je sais où je vais*. First screen is la Hiller on the train about to sink into one of Powell's craziest fantasy dream montages as she hurtles on to what she believes will be her redemption and her true destiny. Little does she know. What an adventure, not least discovering the comely

Roger Livesey in a kilt, the sublimely liberated Pamela Brown with her wolfhounds and the Corryvreckan whirlpool. This is my all-time fave black and white P&P. It also contains one of my all-time favorite music scores by Allan Gray who also scored *Sans Lendemain*, and a number of other 40s P&P's



Second screen (above) shows a big fat cigarette burn reel marker, which is a fairly typical indicator of the ongoing minor but persistent print damage in this new source.

Elephant appears to have used a UK 35mm fine grain (at a guess) which is certainly far ahead of the older Criterion from ten odd years ago for black levels, detail and

contrast. It is indeed a lovely thing to watch.

But this is in no way or form a restoration, given the sheer volume of fine tramline scratches, dirt, debris, and the above noted cigarette burns. The film still needs a major full scale photo-chemical restoration like the one done several years ago for *A Canterbury Tale*.

So think twice before ordering and paying for those hefty French Amazon postage fees. If you can get it across the pond for a couple of quid and you're a fan like me it's a no brainer. I sort of didn't even really mind all that much forking out 53 NZ bucks for a better version of something I love so much.

## **IMAGES (Robert Altman, USA, 1972)**

Susannah York (Cathryn) gazes upon the house and garden of her own nightmarish children's book "In Search of Unicorns", as well as the distant figure of herself. *Images* (1972), a vital and completely virtuosic film slipped quietly into the backwaters on first release, coming

between Altman's bigger critical successes like *McCabe & Mrs Miller* (1971) and *The Long Goodbye* (1973). *Images* has since had a chequered reception and distribution history.



The screens are from the new Arrow Blu-ray which is itself mastered from what I have to call a problematic 35mm

print presumably sourced from Sony (Columbia), itself the likely victim of decades of neglect and care.



The film belongs right up there with the much later

masterpiece *Three Women* (1977), and the earlier and

much more narratively straightforward *That Cold Day in the Park* (1969). In *Images* Altman depicts, like the earlier Sandy Dennis movie, a Kammerspiel of a closed, even possibly hallucinated chamber cast of three men and a young girl who takes the lead actress' name of Susannah, just as York herself takes the name, Cathryn, of the actress playing the young girl.

I don't want to suggest splitting Altman's cinema into some kind of binary of big ensembles in *Scope*, vs. *Kammerspiel*, also in *Scope*. But this movie and *Three Women* in particular are among the director's most inventive and limpid exercises in gaze, gaze upon gaze, image and meaning, confounding narrative and development, and the most basic rules of character drawing. I think *Images* only carries one shaky sequence and that's the "love scene" at the one-hour mark in which Cathryn appears to be having sex with at least two of the three men in her orbit. Apart from that sequence giving us the first major insight into Cathryn's disorder and her imagination, it's the only setup which feels overly thought through and staged for narrative clarity.

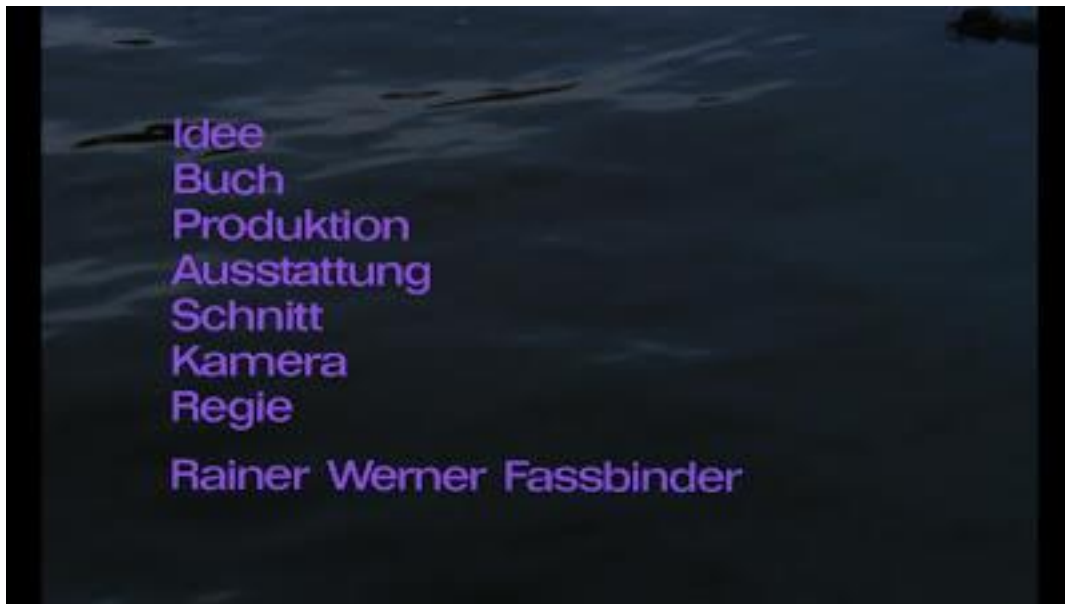
For the rest the movie's ebb and flow is limpid, and shocking. The more I go back to Altman the more I love his early work, especially films I haven't watched for decades - the last time I saw this was mid 1970s. At the

time it left me cold. Now its seductive form tempts me to put it with a very small group of meditative ruminations on character, narrative and the potential for gaze and the gaze back from the fourth wall. This movie belongs with Antonioni's *Blowup* (1966) and *The Passenger* (1975), among others although it has its own distinctive personality and the mischievous dynamic of Altman's own wit and humor.

I feel deeply for the technical video team at Arrow who had to deal with a very much second generation or later exhibition print, rather than first gen elements or anything close. Thus the vagaries of Vilmos Zsigmond's extremely high grain photography in both standard and telephoto modes really takes a beating from being so far from a first Camera Negative or Inter-positive. Sony presumably provided the master, as best they could, and it's taken every ounce of skill from Arrow's mastering and color timing to get this anywhere near their very high standards.

The last reel, strangely looks suddenly perfectly resolved for grain, dynamic range and sharpness, as though that one last reel of the film had been better preserved than the rest, all the more odd as it splits equally into a night-time low light car trip sequence followed by the all-white studio apartment set that opened the movie. So, despite the technical limitation, a must buy.

## **IN A YEAR OF THIRTEEN MOONS (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1978) (1)**



The credits (screen above) say it all.

Fassbinder's masterful *In a Year with 13 Moons*, first released in 1978 is finally out in a new Blu-ray edition taken from a 4K restoration by Studio Canal which I had the great honor to introduce last year at the first Cinema Reborn program in Sydney.

Sadly the current release is German language only, from German Canal licensee, Arthaus. I hope Canal sees enough sales potential to multi-sub the film and give it a broader release soon.

As I commented at the time, this is one of several Fassbinder's that has not been easy to see, and I

speculated then that last year's 4K DCP screening in Sydney was the first in Oz since it was shown once only at Sydney and Melbourne FFs ca. 1978 or 79.

It was notably and oft quoted as made in response to the suicide/coke and booze OD of Fassbinder's longtime on-and-off lover Armin Meier. Fassbinder's legendary grimness notwithstanding, the picture in fact revels in some of the director's blackest and rawest humor, and the ironies are laid on with a trowel, especially the music track which seems to be playing with high Queenerly arthouse as Extremely High Camp, for example, Mahler's 5th Adagietto, pinched from Visconti's turgid and navel-gazing bumfluff, *Death in Venice*, which Rainer scores for Elvira's opening Hamburg beat trawl in which she's beaten up by

some Polish leather queens who discover she doesn't

have a cock.



The same music is then quoted during the second big tableau, a stroll through an active slaughterhouse with BFF Zora played by ex-Mrs Fassbinder, the great cabaret artiste Ingrid Caven (above). Their journey through Elvira's last day takes them to a high Pasolini moment in

Fassbinder cinema, paralleling the crucifixion scene in PPP's Gospel movie where they meet the director's mother, Lilo Pempeit, at a convent playing "Sister Gudrun", who greets the couple and narrates a chapter of "secrets" from Erwin/Elvira's unhappy childhood. (Below)



The movie is breathtaking in its audacity, and the unyieldingly high-pitched performance from Volker Spengler is outstanding even in the context of Fassbinder's concentrated and stylized performance modes. Perhaps the greatest moment of black noise, and complete abandonment of "good taste" is the sequence in which Elvira revisits the love of her life, the man for whom she had her sex change operation, Fassbinder's favourite skinny bad guy, Gottfried John playing the Jewish survivor.

He's now a crooked property developer (aren't they all?)

whose office is secured by a password which, as read by Elvira with perfect recall, is a number from one of the vaults at Auschwitz. When Elvira enters this sanctuary the entire office staff are all dancing in synch to a scene from a rarely seen Jerry Lewis/Dean Martin movie, *You're Never Too Young*, (1955) in which Lewis plays one Wilbur Hoolick. Perhaps, I wondered, if Fassbinder was having a presentiment of Lewis's Holocaust movie?

So an advance notice I guess of one of my own favourite Fassbinder films, with an English-friendly release hopefully not too far away.

## **IN A YEAR OF THIRTEEN MOONS (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1978) (2)**

*First published as a program note when the film was screened during the first season of Cinema Reborn, May 2018*

**Rainer Werner Fassbinder** In an extraordinarily prolific life Fassbinder made his first film at the age of 24. He died at the age of 37 having completed over forty films, two television series, three short films, four video productions, and twenty-four plays, often acting as well as directing. *In a Year of 13 Moons*, made late in his career in 1978, is one of his most personal films.

**The Film** Fassbinder's 1978 film, *In a Year of 13 Moons* opens with a long shot, photographed at the Magic hour of dusk, of a parkland gay beat by the Main river in Frankfurt. The shot is penetrated by the tottering, incoherent figure of Elvira, dressed as a man, who makes contact with one of three hustlers, to whom she hands cash for sex. He begins to caress her genitals while the screen now lights up with another totemic signal of so many 70s arthouse movies, a "sage commentary" text about the seasons of the moon and the alleged lunar effects over periods of 13 moons upon folk with a depressive bent who may commit suicide.

The text reads as much a piece of baloney as the title text page of fake "Buddhist wisdom" by so-called "Bushido" which Jean-Pierre Melville also slides into the opening sequence of his existential gangster masterpiece, *Le Samourai* from 1967. We are now in a rarefied conceit of reality as artifice.

Fassbinder has now added a third iconic element to the opening sequence with the music track, the fourth movement Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth. The piece at this point in cultural history was already a cultural hymn for the decade of the Tragic Queen Movie, initiated as it was by Visconti in his lumbering *Death in Venice* from 1971. Where Visconti's film sinks under the weight of production design, costume and music and leans on its cultural attachments to signify greatness, Fassbinder's film makes explosively derisive and satiric counterpoint with the music, as he and Peer Raben so often did with classical material, and the movie powers into an unmatched level of bleakness.

The trio of hustlers turns on Elvira and beats her up after discovering she has no cock beneath her silk frilly panties. Thus Fassbinder propels the movie into sequences of tableaux as Elvira takes a *Feu Follet* style path down the road to suicide, with a voyage through her past and the people who "made" her identity. To set the tone early, a seven minute two shot sequence leads us through the

slaughterhouse where Elvira, used to work as former working class man, Erwin, and is again blasted with Mahler. But the music and dialogue are now pierced by the screams of the cattle, and the conversation of Elvira and his companion at this point, the amazing Ingrid Caven, a compassionate neighborhood hooker, and real life former Mrs Fassbinder. The mixture of screaming on the live track and Mahler on the Foley looks forward to the mind bending slaughterhouse scene for the Epilogue of the 1980 TV series, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Fassbinder's layering of formal elements to propose as much contradiction and antipathy as possible is by now total.

So does the titanic Rainer Werner Fassbinder knit formal elements of his texts and his movies into great films focussing on despair, greed, and the human condition. His staging and blocking of actors has been unique in cinema since he began making movies from the late 60s. His early days as actor and writer in the Munich arts communes gave him the expressive possibilities for layered meaning, irony and razor sharp insight, especially from masters of formal deconstruction like Brecht.

It's been said that Fassbinder revered the Alienation effect so beloved of Brechtians but I would suggest he actually reinvents it, so unrecognizably has he created a unique personal style in the cinema for staging and directing actors.

One angle of this movie I want to mention briefly is, as one of his "centrally" queer films, not only is the queer (here transsexual) character not the subject in herself, it's her identity. Elvira begins the movie in a state of literal derangement that has started before the movie began. Her boyfriend who leaves her at the beginning says "your head is full of marmalade." In having the sex change operation in Morocco to please a former Jewish property developer boyfriend who also rejected her, she began a process of building an identity, and a mode of even walking and speaking that is still unformed. Volker Spengler's performance in this film is simply extraordinary. Every element of performance itself has been turned inside out, and the usual tools of makeup, costume, even screen diva camp signifiers, are played with. Elvira's body movements are angular, contorted as though she's not really learnt how to walk. In fact she does not know how to live any more.

Fassbinder considered this his personal favourite, along with *Beware of a Holy Whore* from 1971. If you can make the journey with him you may well agree.

**Notes on the Restoration** *In a Year of 13 Moons* was restored by the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation. The DCP is supplied by StudioCanal Australia.



**IVAN THE TERRIBLE (Sergei Eisenstein, USSR, 1944 & 1946)**



A long, long, time coming. *Ivan the Terrible*, both parts, finally in its 2K Mosfilm restoration.



The screens accompanying are from the third last reel, shot and processed in Agfacolor with the all-male ballet/orgy during which Ivan plans the dispatch of his halfwit cousin, Vladimir to eternity, removing the last barrier to his total domination of the Russian Empire. As

we know Stalin was so unnerved by the clear parallels with Ivan's insane cruelty and his own, Part 2 of the film remained banned from distribution after its completion in 1946 until the first cultural thaw under Krushchev in 1958. I still think it's Eisenstein's masterpiece.



The new disc is on the French Bach label, French subtitles only. I see no future plans for it anywhere in the Anglosphere, alas.

Part 1 from 1944 and Part 2 (1946) are both contained on a single BD50 disc and have a reasonable bitrate. If anything, in an ideal world they could double the bitrate and return some of the inherent grain to the image with a

more highly resolved encode. But this rendition is very fine, nonetheless.

The film's restoration itself is meticulous, no more frame jumping (from unprocessed timing notches) which literally plagued every 35mm and video of the movie I've ever seen, until now. No more density fluctuations with leeched black levels or white blowouts, no more tramlines and other emulsion damage, and no more shit quality audio.



Finally, we can hear the last milli-seconds of atmos in the winter soundstages where Prokofiev's score was recorded. All the while in "real life" and history the insanely murderous battle to hold Leningrad from Nazi invasion roared on, with millions dying, in the dying days of WW11.

And a final minor correction to many people's

misconceptions about the color sequences, Although they look superficially like the old two-color pre-1933 Technicolor process, which was essentially red and green printing, Agfacolor was a full color dye subtraction process like Eastman, but in many ways superior for archival quality.



These two sequences in Part 2 were designed by Eisenstein to appear in a controlled aesthetic of flesh tones, red, black, gold and a green range from emerald to turquoise. Blue is absent. This new restoration glows with the unreality of it.

There are so many moments when you think you're

watching the world of Sternberg and Dietrich and *The Scarlet Empress* in particular being reborn in another similar Russian narrative trope, in the way backdrops, furniture, masks and wardrobe take on a life of their own within the frame, as though they are commenting in counterpoint to the human staging.



The same can be said for the role of Peter Ballbusch's incredible set decoration inspired by Russian iconography, in the hallucinogenic visual style of Sternberg's great movie.

If you dig around beyond the Stalinist censored history of Ivan you discover that Fedor was reputed to be Ivan's lover, until he, like all the others who fell prey to Ivan's madness was executed by a now totally paranoid Ivan

towards the end. This tidbit still remains suppressed and denied in Modern Homophobic Russia under a Capitalist Gansgter who is in his own way is as bad as Stalin, and in a culture that's again as lethally homophobic as the nightmare of 30s and 40s Stalinism.

This sequence was surely one of the most daring, risky things Sergei ever committed to film. Stalin and the Bureau must have banned the movie for this alone but there was plenty more they didn't like.

# J

## Derek Jarman

After Lindsay Kemp's death a couple of weeks ago, my mind kept wandering back to that whole punk/post punk era of New Brit anti-establishment 70s and 80s protest.

I guess the greatest exponents of the Costume/High Aesthetic/Romance/ Glam branch of gay punk were Lindsay, and of course Derek Jarman. The very best gay movie ever made in my opinion is Jarman's masterpiece, *Edward II* (1991) adapted from the greatest Shakespeare

history/tragedy the old man never actually wrote. It was written by Christopher Marlowe.

More recently I finally caught up with the new Lionsgate disc of Andrew Haigh's superb, completely non-gay *Lean on Pete*, which is however a product of the most refined gay sensibility currently working in movies. It's reviewed separately in this volume.



The Jarman hits one of its many, many peaks and my own heart breaking favorite, Annie Lennox (above) singing Cole Porter's "Every Time We say Goodbye" for the 1990 memorial anthem AIDS CD and video of Cole Porter covers called "Red Hot and Blue" while Edward and Gaveston clinch for what will be the last time. It's on Youtube The song was previously a track directed by Jarman. It's a song that Jarman stages, dressed with minimal glam and heartfelt romance as a hymn to those of us who were dying during the plague.

It is, needless to say a cue to floods of tears from every gay man who ever drew breath, and I proudly confess to such abasement. I have to say I have an uneasy relationship with Jarman's work. Indeed, the last time I

tackled his *Wittgenstein*, with the grand company of Jennifer Sabine we both gave up after thirty minutes (no dibs Jen.) Maybe it's just that I find his work uneasy as a personal classicist.

I often find Jarman's execution more inadequate than necessary for his conceptions. The didacticism and fourth wall elements of *Wittgenstein* and other movies have seemed to me fragmentarily incoherent. The late abstract films, when he went blind, are very moving, but as much for meta-cinematic reasons as anything. But the two majestic exceptions are his *The Tempest* and especially the Marlowe *Edward V* which is one of the first, and the greatest gay works of art in the English (or anyone's) language.



It does take someone as completely immersed in gay sensibility as Jarman to actually come anywhere near queering the play up to the temperament and florid violence it requires in presentation. The accumulations of detail, like a male nude clusterfuck ballet (above), and La

Tilda (below) swinging a 3500 quid Hermes bag in her first entrance, and then Annie Lennox singing Cole at the high point is where Marlowe's work needed to be taken. Only Jarman could do and he did it.





# K

## KEDI (Ceyda Torun, Turkey, 2016)

Two of the feline superheroes (below) of *Kedi*, a film about the cats of Istanbul by Ceyda Torun. The film was released mid-last year and even this US Oscilloscope Blu-

ray which we have only just caught up with came out Stateside in November 2017.



Quite apart from the compulsive nature of its subject, Torun's movie is very much a hymn to Istanbul. Indeed, it had us drooling and wishing we could simply get the next flight back to Turkey tomorrow. When we were last there two and a bit years ago we stayed in an Airbnb in the Beyoglu district hosted by a charming young woman who also cared for her own 'Stanbuli cat, a feisty long haired black girl called Psik whom we cared for while our hostess took off for an extended photo shoot in Antulya.

We quickly discovered Psik herself was not at all a stay at home type but effectively cruised and held court on the small balcony with a glimpse of the Bosphorus with a tribe of neighborhood cats just outside the kitchen window. One of them was one eyed, another was three legged and all of them even feistier than Psik. We quickly picked up on the vibe, rather than discouraging them by not feeding them, that the opposite was true.

By the end of our stay I initially sensed this attitude of

serene benevolence towards these creatures reflected one of the most sublime aspects of Islamic culture, in fact, charity. As they keep saying in the movie, "Dogs think we're god, but we're the middlemen, and the cats know this."

Indeed, it was spoken on the rare occasions we heard locals even willing to talk about daily life there under the Government of Erdogan over the last five years which had largely handed over a great deal of formerly state-based welfare and support agencies to the hands of the faithful, sparing the self-aggrandising Erdogan government the expense. I heard this story over and over, and as is always possible when travelling, one had to review many, many preconceptions one held about the many glues and social cohesions that attach to Islamic culture.

One of the very great beauties of this wonderful little film, after the cats themselves, is the portrait of the city (below), the world's most magical to me, and its denizens. Torun's film manages to unfold without a trace of documentary determinism, or intrusive commentary. One sequence

shows several people conversing around an old, now vanished market area up the hill somewhat from the tourist safety of Taksim Square.

These old timers reflect sadly on the encroaching road and skyscraper development which is replacing the market gardens. While this is true of every global city these days, not least a mega burg like Istanbul with 25 million people, the reality dangerously also predicts the probable demise of the cats, who seem to have prevailed as a kind of physical manifestation of supernatural deity, as gatekeepers themselves of this immense city composed of such immense history, and the whole amazing ongoing conflict that was the twentieth century.

What do the cats foresee? If anything? What do they know?

Don't miss the picture. It was one of the first titles produced by YouTube Red (their premium service) in a step to the fore on other streaming services like Amazon.

### **KING OF JAZZ (John Murray Anderson, USA, 1930)**



'...extremely comely John Boles', *King of Jazz*

Some screens from Criterion's new Blu-ray Disc of the insanely lavish Universal 4K restoration of the 1930 Two

color Technicolor process Musical Revue, Paul Whiteman's *King of Jazz*.



Bing Crosby, *King of Jazz*

As some readers will recall the movie was showcased at Bologna a couple of years ago, and several other later events to sometimes less than universal joy. Strange as it may be, coming from the heart of one so black in mood as I (at the moment) I have a lot more time for it than others, although having the freedom to hit the remote button on some stretches is a blessing for private viewing (not unlike certain other "personal" genres.)

Screens here include Bing Crosby (right) in a first ever movie appearance, second screen an unnamed pianist also giving a movie first performance of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue (in this case rhapsody in red and green), a number with the extremely comely John Boles in leather chaps giving voice to song and heart fluttering and last screen - what better for two color process? - a bit of feminine leg art based around a highland fling.



'...rhapsody in red and green', *King of Jazz*

As "jazz" goes this is totally vanilla, but it was the biggest of the early talkie musical pioneers mostly coming out of Metro, and compared to the literally leaden weight of those clunkers this comparatively sparkles. Some of it - the comic and novelty act schtick as usual - makes the teeth

grind but a number of the performers had legs, as they used to say. And for anyone devoted to Technicolor itself in its numerous historical steps up to the demise of its matchless dye transfer printing facilities in the mid to late 70s, this is essential.



'...feminine leg art based around a highland fling', *King of Jazz*

### KISMET (Vincente Minnelli, USA, 1955)



*"Lovers come, lovers go  
And all that there is to know  
Lovers know  
Only lovers know."*

Borodin's sumptuous Polovtsian Dances and the second String Quartet slow movement are subsumed by Andre Previn and Conrad Salinger into a giant Arthur Freed score for *Kismet* (1955). Mind boggling production design credited to Cedric Gibbons and Preston Ames but ultimately Minnelli's own. Photographed with totally careless rapture by Joe Ruttenberg and choreographed by Jack Cole (and Stanley Donen, uncredited) in the most visually hallucinatory Eastmancolor picture ever made in the American cinema.

Howard Keel winds up the show with this surprisingly melancholy but ultimately Minnellian number, "Sands of Time", screen at top, scored by the great Conrad Salinger with strings and cor Anglais (like the Liebestod from Tristan) which simply defies categorization beyond being one of the supremely final works in the Arthur Freed canon.

*Kismet* cost Metro more than \$3 million and has never (and will never) make its money back. But it lives and breathes still, some kind of insane folly, one of the maddest and most beautiful in movies, every bit of it pushing the parameters of "camp" or (better put by Nabokov) *poshlosh*t with more taste and insider genius than any other 20th century art movement.





It's as though Minnelli dragged everyone who mattered (including Stanley Donen who hated his guts at this point) into the deranged fabulosity. Any movie that can give Dolores Gray (above) so much range, and explore her own considerable skills as an artist while she wears nothing but applied chiffon and gold lame is something out of the bag.

*Kismet* was a show I always disdained, partly from the snobbery of fearing what destruction might be wreaked on classical scores I loved as much as anything in music. If there were ever proof that a movie reborn in a premium form can be a new force, born again, this now four-year-old Blu-ray is just that, taken from a new 2K, extracted by

a forensically perfect transfer from the Eastman O-neg to a new, flawless inter-positive. The disc now seems to be about to explode from the screen pulsing with every grain of Minnelli's color schemes to burn your eyeballs. And the Warner engineers seem to have found the original multi-track audio stems to deliver a hair-raising DTS HD master five channel audio.

It would be more than impossible for even the most dedicated Freedophile to deduce from the constant tracks, cranes and crab dolly shots what is Donen's or Minnelli's.

I can only surmise, because there is only one signature Donen frontal crab dolly wide, down to face, back to wide and finish on face (like Audrey's "How Long has this Been Going On" from *Funny Face*) that the rest of the travellings may as well have been both of them. Plus Jack Cole



Here are more screens, two studio production shots in B&W from one of the edited documentaries someone at Warner Archive dug out from under a rock, missing for 60 years in the vaults.

First of these above is Freed with leads Keel and Ann Blyth. Next screen below is Minnelli, left and Joe Ruttenberg right, with Howard Keel in costume towering over both of them in the centre.





And then the rest.





**KISS THE BLOOD OFF MY HANDS (Norman Foster, UK, 1948)**



Burt Lancaster and Joan Fontaine in studio bound London fog and rain in Norman Foster's neat little British-set Noir for

Universal, *Kiss the Blood off my Hands* from 1948.



Foster was always a solid, if not always inspiring director and he seems to let the non-directorial elements of this picture carry the weight, most notably Russell Metty's high chiaroscuro photography, and Universal house composer for the era, the great Miklos Rosza.

For some reason Burt always seems to inspire Rosza to leitmotif his Burt pictures with lots of Brucknerian horns over strings. Most striking of these sequences here is Burt chained to a prison wall topless, always a welcome spectacle for his fans.

Robert Newton plays the classic Cockney spiv sleazebag who doubly incriminates Burt in two murders giving the picture it's flow. Burt seems less three dimensional here than in his earlier work for Siodmak and Dassin, delivering

most of the part in his early angry mode, certainly less relaxed than his second tier part as the good guy sheriff, and virtually the only unambiguously heterosexual character in Lewis Allen's totally amazing 1947 Technicolor Noir, *Desert Fury*.

The screens are from another of the great run of Universal Vault DVDs, sold as burnt VODs. This one thankfully defaults the visual parameter to a 16:9 mode with the Academy ratio picture-boxed within it, which means I can get successful screens from it, unlike the more recently released and reviewed elsewhere in this tome, *Zaza* (1939) disc. The Universal Vault discs are always well-mastered but loose hands seem to be occasionally at work in the lab playing around with the disc authoring software.

# L

## LADIES IN BLACK (Bruce Beresford, Australia, 2018)



Bruce Beresford (circa *Breaker Morant*)

I was thinking the other day about John Guare's wonderful play, "Six Degrees of Separation". And the very fine, lucid movie Fred Schepisi made of it. Then I remembered, during a trip to New York with Ken, his first in April 93, when we stumbled into some street location filming for it on the corner of Central Park West and 70th Street. We stepped back and watched Donald Sutherland doing retakes for a while. Then wandered on to Lincoln Center I was also thinking about this when I read a review of Bruce Beresford's new picture set in 1959 Sydney, *Ladies in Black*. Two paras in, I fell off my chair when I read that the screenplay was adapted from a novel by Madeleine ("Mado") St. John (Pronounced "sinjun" not Saint John as Stratton does.)

Some further reading told me that Beresford and Mado were mates from the 50s and early 60s days of Sydney Uni, and SUDS. My mother had known Mado's mum, Sylvette, from those days and recalled the family bitterness after Sylvette committed suicide, when Mado was 13.

Although my own mum Kay was not always insightful, she had clearly spotted the stifling dynamics of the ebulliently European Sylvette to Teddy St John's awfully dour, straight, puritanical and grey/beige 50s Australian establishment. Even Catholics in those days were trash, along with Reffos, Jews, poofers of course and those ultimate decadents, the "arties".



Sydney, top of William St, edge of Kings Cross, 1956



If you wanted to live in Sydney as an “arty” back then from the late fifties, you lived in Kings Cross, and the adjacent Potts Point, Darlinghurst or Elizabeth Bay. I had the great fortune to grow up in Lizzie Bay and attended High School in Darlo, thence graduating to the next island in the stream, Chippendale for Sydney Uni in 1968.

Mado by 1964 had moved into a flat just near us in Elizabeth Bay with her budding then BF Christopher. My clever London based Aunt Adele, who in 1953 had abandoned the dual suffocation of Australia and her stupefyingly conservative Lebanese migrant family, sorted me out to meet Mado, whose mother she had known very well, by now at the age of 16.

Actively and in identification, by 16 I was completely homosexual. But I became so besotted with Mado as I had

named her, and was, well, completely in love. She would never have abided, let alone reciprocated, any desire on my part and indeed she seemed herself sated with Chris the arty lounge lizard about whom I often bristled.

I suspect my own experience with men was well in excess of Mado's, even allowing for her post-Sydney Push liberalism. What she did give me and teach me was a round and full appreciation of literature and music, from the Bohm Vienna Phil “Zauberflote” of 63, to Ezra Pound and Dada. When I first met her she was the only person I knew who had read all of “A la Recherche du Temps Perdu”. Within three years, by 1968 I could count myself amongst a small but growing band of aficionados including my Piano Prof Gordon Watson and my oldest, still living, gay mate, Noel Williams.



Madeleine St John

By this time Mado and Chris had fled the torpors of Oz, the cultural desert, first to Canada where Chris made a documentary and then the Mecca for expats, London. She never again set foot in Oz. And by now we had lost touch as well. I never saw her again, but I have never forgotten her.

I always remember the influence, and the care, which I now find impossible to describe of two great Sydney women, both of whom so helped to “make” me, and whom I still love very much, Madeleine St. John, and the magnificent Norma Chapman, the doyenne of Sydney's finest book

shop, Clays in Macleay Street, another haven for expats and stayers, arties and reffos and poofs and Jews and Sydney originals who needed the narcotic of great art.

And now here am I, another expat, reading about a beloved, paradisiacal Sydney almost gone, and people almost gone too, but remembered, again, for a while at least, by the movies.

PS. I saw the movie tonite after I wrote out these thoughts above. I loved it. Loved it.





Rachael Taylor, Angourie Rice, Julia Ormond, Alison McGirr *Ladies in Black*

**THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI (Orson Welles, USA, 1947)**



Rita Hayworth, *The Lady from Shanghai*

The about to be former Mrs Welles and her flummoxed  
dope of a husband from the climax of *The Lady from  
Shanghai* (1947). Screens are from the superb Indicator

Blu-ray which is no less than the fourth and far and away  
the best transfer of Sony's amazing 4K restoration to Blu.



Orson Welles, *The Lady from Shanghai*

I counsel you to get your hands on this disc, especially if you haven't already purchased one of the earlier BD incarnations, either of the very problematic TCM Archive releases from 2013, or the more recent 2014 Mill Creek bare bones edition which is quite good or seemed so until the Indicator edition turned up . Both TCMs suffer from

compromised encoding, the first too small a file with low bitrate and overly bright white level, and the second "corrected" TCM was a total FUBAR with incorrect black level settings which in layman's terms made it far too dark crushing everything near black to black. It was a major fuckup.

### **LEAN ON PETE (Andrew Haigh, UK, 2018)**

Bucolic simplicity from Andrew Haigh in *Lean on Pete*, a devastating portrayal of a boy growing into a man which proudly belongs in the company of Mackendrick's *Sammy Going South*.

Haigh completely redeems his cred for me here after the disappointment of *45 Years*. The latter was buried by ole dead eyes Rampling who, while she may be nice for BO and video sales, puts a really dampening pedal on the delicate psychology and nuanced mood of that screenplay.



Pete is a wonder, with an 18 year-old Charlie Plummer

(above) in an astonishing feature debut performance

leading the movie in a moving narrative road journey with an old dying racehorse (below) whom he loves, who goes and dies in the middle of the story, leaving Plummer to work his way through the nightmare of growing up alone,

on the road. I have no idea how much critical consensus played on this picture, but I celebrate it as joyously as his debut feature, *Weekend* in 2011.



Haigh has the insight not to overwrite or over-direct either incident or performance, and leaves the space for action and pause to the intuitions of his actors. Despite that his players never seem improvisatory but always spontaneous. The narrative discovery travels with them and comes to us at much the same time. I am inclined to

rate him formally with Kelly Reichardt, although they have quite unique personalities as directors. The movie also looks drop dead gorgeous. And the new US Lionsgate Blu-ray is absolutely perfect. The Jarman comes from a recent Japanese Film Movement Classics Blu-ray which, if you can get it, is highly desirable.

### **LES GIRLS (George Cukor, USA, 1957)**



Gene Kelly 'caught in a modernist web', *Les Girls*

More Kelly and Cole.



Mitzi Gaynor, *Les Girls*

Above is Kelly in the title number from Cukor's best musical, *Les Girls*.

Choreography by Saint Jack Cole.

Wardrobe by Orry Kelly, earning the picture's Oscar.



Kay Kendall, *Les Girls*

Screens are from a new Warner Archive Blu-ray: Joy (Mitzi Gaynor), Lady Sybille (Kay Kendall) and Angele

(Taina Elg) with their puppet-master Barry Nichols (Kelly) caught in a modernist web.





Kay Kendall, Gene Kelly, *Les Girls*

The disc is a doozy.

### **THE LEOPARD MAN (Jacques Tourneur, USA, 1943)**



Margo (above) as "Clo Clo" the New Mexico niteclub dancer in Tourneur's wonderful *The Leopard Man* (1943). From the new Shout Factory/Warner Blu-ray.

As is so often the case in Tourneur, a major musical number signals the first intimation of meaning and mystery in the narrative. Like the Zombie healing ritual ceremony in *I Walked with a Zombie*, or the dusk campfire sequence from *Way of a Gaucho* in which Rory Calhoun and Gene Tierney fall in love before our eyes in ten wordless minutes backed only with shadows cast around the bonfire

and passionately sung music.

This newly minted and sourced image for *Leopard Man* was harvested from a much battered O-Neg and several other elements in 4K workflow and finally delivers a superb visual and audio quality to what was previously the very worst presented title in the now fifteen-year old Warner's Lewton boxset from 2005. The film is now completely revelatory in this presentation and feels like a new experience.

This leaves five more Lewton titles still to go, with Robson's *The Seventh Victim* and Tourneur's sublime *I Walked with a Zombie* as the outright high points. As the beautifully rendered image quality on this disc attests, Tourneur was a master of extracting maximum impact from modest, even humble production resources, upon which he focusses his gaze with the intensity of a deeply powerful auteur. One whose gaze rests on the unknowable mysteries of human behavior and the nature of evil.

*Leopard Man* has one of the most felicitous female casts in all Tourneur, including Jean Brooks (the fallen sister from *The Seventh Victim*) as Kiki, Isabell Jewell as the Fortune Teller, and Margaret Landry as the "innocent" Teresa who's ruthlessly killed at her own doorstep. The males in the picture including the unlikeable lead, Dennis O'Keefe wander through the picture like lost souls, with James Bell who played the Doctor in *Zombie*, here playing another powerless authority figure who has clearly given up on the human condition and its evils in this Cornell Woolrich based screenplay from Ardel Wray.

Apparently Shout Factory recorded fairly dismal sales for the previous Lewton release in this series, Robert Wise's *The Body Snatcher*, which may spell imperilment for the release of the remaining titles in the Lewton series which, I understand have all been rescued and restored at Warner's MPI facility.

The Lewton films are the very sort of thing fucking Criterion should have been at least considering for its number 1000 title. Instead we get a ten-thousand disc deluxe gilt edged bank-breaking boxset of Godzillas from 54 to 77 as the grand celebration of cinema from this once estimable label.

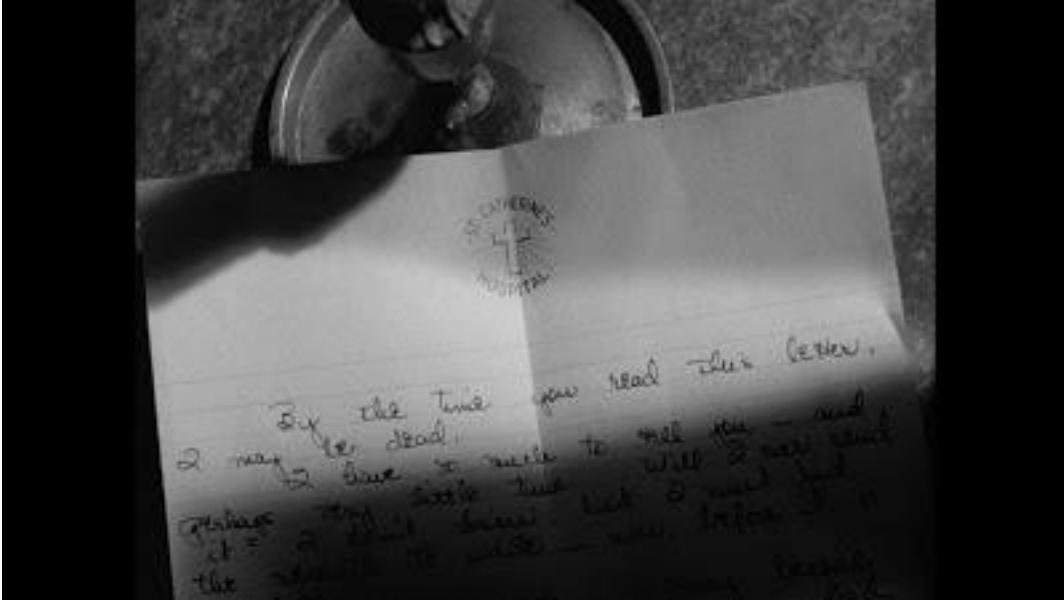
Criterion for all its formerly good work, these days resembles more a wallpaper factory for millennial film college students with its continuous repertoire of often needless reissues of new 4Ks which are already out there anyway for collectors in other regions or territories. Meanwhile strapped outfits like Kino-Lorber, or Arrow, or Indicator/Powerhouse keep producing the goods with joyous abandon in spades from deep and crucial catalogue.

## **LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN (Max Ophuls, USA, 1948)**

Two of the most iconic images in all movies, and in the universe of Max Ophuls. From the sublimely beautiful new

Olive Signature Blu-ray sourced from a new 4K restoration by Paramount.





*"A shot that does not call for tracks  
Is agony for poor old Max,  
Who, separated from his dolly  
Is wrapped in deepest melancholy.  
Once, when they took away his crane,*

*I thought he'd never smile again."*

**(James Mason, star of *Ophuls*, 1948,  
*The Reckless Moment*, and 1949, *Caught*)**

**THE LINEUP (Don Siegel, USA, 1958)**



Eli Wallach (Dancer, above) and William Leslie (Larry Warner, below) in the steam room of the San Francisco

Seaman's Club moments before Dancer rubs out his apparent pickup.



From Don Siegel's amazing *The Lineup* for Columbia in 1958. The title makes its first appearance on Blu-ray in the third and best disc from Volume 3 of the Columbia/Mill Creek/Kit Parker Collection of Columbia Noirs from 1945 to 1960 in Volume three of this nine disc series.

Three titles a disc, three discs a volume making 27 titles. Amongst the frequent and inescapable dross, some absolute doozies.

This disc alone carries the Siegel which, if only for its multi cast gay texts, should be mandatory viewing. This presentation sadly doesn't include the hilarious commentary track Eddie Mueller recorded with "Tough Guy", James Ellroy for the now ten years old DVD boxset of Sony Noirs volume (I think) 2.

Eddie tries - very hard - to bring the resolutely right wing macho Ellroy into a gay reading, not just of this sequence but the singular mobster heroin syndicate's fairy godmother role, played superbly by Robert Keith. During the Muller-Ellroy exchanges, Ellroy mutters, "here comes the swish" referring to Keith. Eddie seizes the opportunity to take this voyage into Ellroy's psyche even further thus,

"So isn't Keith playing the old queen to the young blond talent, Richard Jaeckel." At this point Ellroy falls silent, and there's no more to be had of it.

Probably just as well as the movie itself is so ably carried by Siegel's very personal montage-based dynamic, a style he honed in his days as Senior Editor at Warners through the 40s.

On the same disc (3) from this volume, Fuller's terrific *The Crimson Kimono*, from the same fine source as that used for the excellent Twilight Time US Blu-ray from 2017. Completing this disc a new, to me, de Toth, a very late entry in the cycle, *Man on a String*.

The set has its equal share of duds, notably *Tijuana Story*, directed by Laszlo Kardos and Sidney Gilliat's interestingly cast but lacklustre 1957 *Fortune is a Woman*. But even this disc lifts the game with the third title, Phil Karlson's procedural non-Noir, *The Case Against Brooklyn* from 1958. At some point I need to report back on the preceding two Volumes of six discs and their collection of 18 more Noirs.

## **LOVE ME OR LEAVE ME (Charles Vidor, USA, 1955)**

Doris Day as Ruth Etting hitting the high notes for Ziegfeld in Irving Berlin's *Shaking the Blues Away*. The screen comes from a dazzling new Warner Archive Blu-ray of the 1955 biopic, *Love Me or Leave Me*. In place of the thousand miles of curtains that festooned Ann Miller's stunning 1948 version in the Chuck Walters' *Easter Parade* from the Freed Unit, Charles Vidor and producer

Joe Pasternak substitute a thousand chorus boys as appropriate emblems of both the Ziegfeld hugeness and the relatively new Scope frame. Doris' delivery is stunning because of or despite this, and anyway the staging takes the Scope screen even further with a final track out into the audience for the number's climax.



All through the picture in fact Vidor resolutely ignores the ongoing Scope Mumps arising from the old Bausch and Lomb lenses and cheerfully does whip pans, skating diagonal tracks and fast moving crane shots with blithe insouciance. And the picture is so much the better for it. Doris's arrangements (some from Percy Faith) and performances are without exception peak, in fact her delivery later in the picture of Larry Hart's "Ten Cents a Dance" is so good the Lady Ella herself also sang it virtually identically for her big Verve Hart album from the same year.

But in narrative terms the movie is a near total mashup. The gross bowdlerization of Etting's actual life story and the mutual dependency/use she and her mobster partner and manager husband made of each other is very nearly lost in terms of meaning. It's left instead to the two incredibly different performers to do what only the movies can do. And that's to approach the material from their own performance styles making the real life conflict one of formal approaches. Cagney's is a great old fashioned reading that plays the gamut of emotional, physical and vocal possibilities of an obsessed and ultimately sympathetic bad guy. Doris plays Etting with the single minded determination of a woman who knows exactly what she's worth, and that aint chopped liver. This could

have been one of Doris' textbook pre-feminist archetypes, but with all the moral ambiguities the character might have been allowed to display more clearly, if only the text had not been so curtailed by censorship.

A major Doris Day in premium format. I kept wondering how different the approach might have been if Curtiz who mentored Doris' movie career from the beginning (in 1949 with the fantastically good *Romance on the High Seas*) had helmed. But it has to be acknowledged Vidor manages the essentials with diligence. Long takes, two shots and reverses are all managed with dexterity and expressively underline the two leads' divergences and their all too rare emotional convergences. There's only so much *mise-en-scène* you can execute expressively with a completely botched screenplay. The numbers are expertly rendered especially given their existence as entirely diegetic within the framework of a Pasternak produced musical, in sharp contrast to the earlier "freedom" of the Freed Unit's beloved style. The new era of movie musicals was ending and would basically disappear not long after with the Broadway behemoths overtaking the 60s screen.

If only for the numbers *Love me or Leave me* is a major must have.



## Ernst Lubitsch



Charles Laughton (above) gives his boss the razzie in the Lubitsch episode from *If I had a Million* (1932).

And Gary Cooper is seen next with everyone's favorite old uncle/auntie, Edward Everett Horton (below) sleeping in HIS bed, and (further below) a screen with the devoon

Claudette Colbert on a pontoon in a studio backdrop Paramount Riviera from Lube's *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, which was torn to pieces by the censors, from 1938. (I have to say I suspect Paramount's wonderful production design studio Riviera was probably much nicer than the real thing.)



To say even the double entendres which these two screens hint at are dead is an understatement. This picture, and Cukor's *Zaza*, were perhaps the worst hit victims of the post 1934 Code, both in the same year of

1938, coming on top of variously censored and re-edited titles from the pre-34 era which had to be re-submitted to get the stamp of approval from that old pervert Joe Breen for the new sexless age

▪



These titles, as well as *Design for Living* (1933) a true Lubitsch masterpiece, and *One Hour with You*, a Lube/Cukor joint effort of mixed success (for me) have now been released on Blu-ray by Elephant in France. *Design* was afforded a decent 2K restoration by Universal some years ago, and has since appeared on a Criterion Blu-ray with a great Joe McBride commentary, so skip this Elephant disc in favor of that quality edition.

And unless you're a fanatical Lube completist, the transfer of *Million* is so rough I cannot recommend it for fear of ridicule. *Bluebeard* is also really a title for completists so

it's up to you folks. Image quality is ragged but sharp, but the print is unrestored. Black and white levels are good and consequently there's decent contrast and texture, but

Christ it's technically rough.

So is *One Hour with You*, (below) also in this pile of Froggie releases.

Some players might also have trouble defeating the French subtitles.



# M

## A MAN ALONE (Ray Milland, USA, 1955) and LISBON (Ray Milland, USA, 1956)



Two fascinating movies directed by Ray Milland before he went on to direct the fine *Panic in Year Zero* (1960). Both are released by Kino Lorber. His first film as director, *A Man Alone* (1955, above) a sombre and very credible

western with Milland himself, Ward Bond, Lee van Cleef and others. And his next picture from 1956, a colorful travelogue thriller in Scope, *Lisbon (below)* (long before the tourist invasion) with Maureen O'Hara, Claude Rains and Yvonne Furneaux.



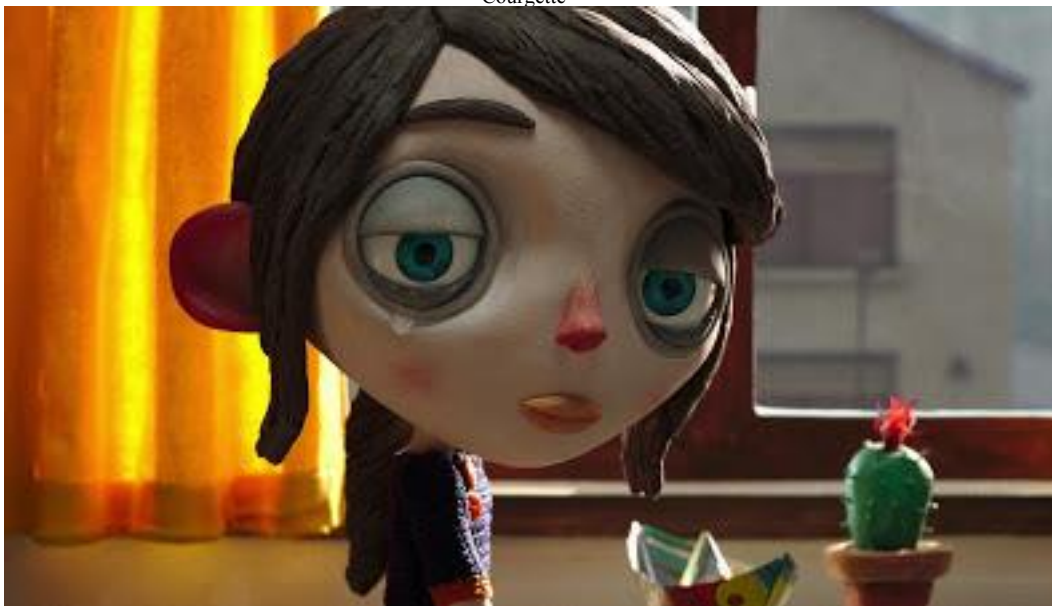
Both movies were made for Republic in their Trucolor system, a dye transfer three strip process like Technicolor which was still being shot with their modified cameras into the mid-fifties, after Tech had gone to monopack Eastman

neg filming. The transfers are impeccable and the movies worth your consideration, if you like *Panic in Year Zero* as much as I do.

**MA VIE DE COURGETTE (Claude Barras, France, 2016)**



Courgette



Camille

Courgette, Camille and Raymond. Two lost children and a lost father coming together through the grace of this wonderful, exquisitely made, profoundly moving, stop frame animation film from Swiss director Claude Barras. Amongst other things Barras studied graphics at the École Emile Cohl in France during his tenure and the scrupulously achieved, direct and unsentimental

uncluttered work of Cohl, the creator of what we know these days as the animated film is deftly translated down a century plus of movie history to make a stunning artistic debut in this small (66 minutes) masterpiece from 2016.





Raymond

The screenplay was written by Celine Sciamma who seems to have been completely tuned into Barras' vision. This is a distinguished addition to her own filmography which includes *Girlhood* (2013), *Bande de Filles* (2016) and the screenplay for Téchiné's big return to form this year, *Quand on a 17 ans*.

The Children's Movie, maybe more correctly movies with and about children, is the greatest minefield for miscalculation in tone and self-indulgence of all the movie genres that have been born in the previous 120 years of cinema history. Setting aside the animated feature (live puppet or drawn), and the Disney and other cartoon/live action franchises, if we allow ourselves to examine a dedicated sub-set of Children's Films we find precious few great works, but at the top several both precious in number and great they be.

*Sammy Going South* (Alexander Mackendrick, UK, 1963) with a boy who becomes a man and loses his innocence

when he faces his nemesis and kills the Tiger. Lang's greatest 50s movie, *Moonfleet* (USA, 1955) with its subterranean universe of caves, passages and treasure troves guarded by the dead in which the orphaned boy comes to learn the truth about his hero/father substitute, himself and mankind. Laughton's only film as director and Agee's best screenplay, *Night of the Hunter* (USA, 1955) which is simply incomparable in the American talking film era. *The Window* (Ted Tetzlaff, USA, 1949) and W.C. Menzies fine *Invaders from Mars* (USA, 1953) whose central child figure becomes the focus and last rational human remains of the entropic noir and science fiction realm. Similarly Spielberg's best movie, *AI: Artificial Intelligence* (USA, 2001), a project declined by Kubrick, in which Spielberg's Jewishness and his central sense of abandonment are brilliantly channeled into a near masterpiece that itself imagines the end of the human race with the robot boy as its only witness.





And the very greatest Children's Film of all, *Zéro de Conduite* (Jean Vigo, France, 1933, above) which challenges the whole world to dispel its unfairness and its hypocrisy and its tendency to evil through the sheer life force of the protagonists, ultimately led by the shy queerboy whose march of liberation Vigo choreographs in an orgasmic slow motion dormitory parade of feathers literally tearing apart social fabric and in a highly sexualized image, bourgeois power.

If children can remind us constantly of our innocence or our potential for goodness, their presence in these movies allows us to enter what might be called a state of grace.

*Ma Vie de Courgette* joins this distinguished list. The screens above are from a new German Blu-ray from Praesens-films. While the German disc carries audio in German and original French, there are no English subtitles. But given dialogue is sparse and the picture literally moves and unfolds its emotional and physical narrative almost totally by visual means, expression, gesture and mise-en-scène, the lack of subs seems a small thing if you have the slightest French language knowledge.

This is my best film of 2016.

## **MAN IN AN ORANGE SHIRT (Michael Samuels, UK, 2017)**

Back over the last forty years or so a number of directors, some straight and tuned in like Stephen Frears, and others mostly gay, have turned the commercial end of queer cinema into a great place to look for new talent, formal invention, completely re-thought twists on primal narrative tropes, and levels of engagement that can cross generations, sexes and audiences.

Some fine examples are Andrew Haigh's *Weekend* (2011), which beats *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) at its own game and the continuing career of Andre Téchiné whose last films have turned a queer eye to non-gay character pieces to estimable effect, perhaps my fave, because he's a commercial underdog. Then there is Sebastien Lifschitz whose *Presque Rien (Come Undone, 2000)* does the classic coming of age love story in a totally honest and anti-bucolic way, and his masterpiece family nightmare film with a trans heroine, the incomparable *Wild Side* (2004). Jacques Nolot, Téchiné's old screenwriter with two features *La Chatte à Deux Têtes (Porn Theatre/The Two Headed Pussy, 2002)* and *Avant que j'oublie (Before I Forget, 2007.)* not to mention gay directors with broad and now historical arthouse careers like Almodovar, Derek Jarman and the now two transgender sisters the Wachowskis.

Last night on FTA Teev in New Zealand the Beeb began a series of programs to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first laws to partially decriminalize homosexuality in the UK in 1967.

Their opening salvo sadly, is the 120 minute feature length *Man in an Orange Shirt*. Director Michael Samuels and writer Patrick Gale appear to have decided the millennial take on even such historical and costume material is to grab Mills and Boon by the throat and spew it all back in gay wrapping paper, throwing all intelligence, taste, sensibility or artistry to the wind. They slap together two hours of pretty boy languishing, swooning and short breathed angst, as the actors keep bursting into tears at the slightest opportunity, perhaps simply to cue the audience to grab yet another box of Kleenex for its own sob-fest, while topping and tailing the whole wretched production with an embarrassingly glib token referential gester from the great Vanessa Redgrave, as the contemporary grannie, and post WW2 bride of the first inter-generational gay character in the story. This insult to a fine actress is even more galling after the part Frears puts her to as the smartarse agent for Joe Orton in *Prick up your Ears* (1987), a story about a gay "marriage" that might scare the pants off the kids these days.

The same story has been told in film after film after film including *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, 1948) and *Brief Encounter* itself, no less. Some of the greatest films in cinema are love stories rent asunder. But not this turgid keylit piece of SandM (Standing and Modelling) in which fashion triumphs over even the shallow emotions on displa



Julian Morris, Oliver Jackson-Cohen, *Man in an Orange Shirt*

Indeed, it's the wartime boys' clothes after demobbing that really save the day, especially considering the factually devastated austerity dominated post war Brit clothing industry whose rationing etc doesn't stop the boys from wearing the year's most fabulous (and presumably expensive) cable knits, loose sports slacks that would fit Astaire, and the titular Orange shirt, itself a Paris catwalk item. Wardrobe of course matches the hero's blue eyes and black hair to perfection and reinforces the umpteenth cliché to pile up on another cliché in this steaming pile of twaddle, gays all have fabulous taste. It's like the darkies all have rhythm and just as offensive and stupid, as is the all gays are saints trope, even the suspiciously nancy-boy Lucien who safe havens the painter BF Tommy upstairs with lashings of motherly care and clucking good advice,

just when they need it. No sign of the menacing working class white trash faggots who blackmail Peter McEnery and Dirk Bogarde in the genuinely interesting and still relevant *Victim* directed by a full throttle social realist crusading Basil Dearden way, way back in the prehistory of 1960.

This is what we've come to folks, slop Mills & Boon undies busters with the emotional density of a wafer and weddings and tat and fabulousness in designer Dockside loft apartments.

Let Bette have the last word: 'I detest cheap sentiment'.

## **MAN'S FAVOURITE SPORT (Howard Hawks, USA, 1964)**



New from Universal, Hawks' last comedy, *Man's Favorite Sport*. Screen (above) here has Rock showing Paula Prentiss how well he can throw a line. Color and definition are good in 1080p but I do not care for the scrubbed appearance, devoid of film grain, something which had previously been a most unwelcome characteristic of older Universal upgrades from its deep catalogue.

The worst of these was their atrocious Blu of Hitchcock's *Marnie* which seems to have been dust busted and then as an afterthought regraded with a ceaseless rain of digital noise/faux grain on the image. I had thought these days of misguided grading and mastering were over at Universal and maybe this unsatisfactory transfer of the 1963 Hawks is from a (much) earlier time. They need to do a lot of these titles again with the current tech team there.

## **Anthony Mann**

Coming fast on the heels of Melville's great hymn to solitude, with Jef in *Le Samourai*, here is the grandfather of existential and moral solitude in American cinema, Anthony Mann. Amongst the solitary men and relatively few women who populate Anthony Mann's universe, the

first three screens are the very beautiful face of Richard Basehart as a sociopathic impulse killer in Mann's second Eagle Lion Noir with colleague and co-auteur, the titanic DP John Alton, *He Walked by Night* (1948.)





The fourth screen (below) from the same movie posits a contrapuntal, equally beautiful, face in solitary repose, of Scott Brady as the cop. Basehart's nemesis. Viewers with sharp eyes might spot in Brady's face the genetic DNA for

the great psychotic badman, Lawrence Tierney, in fact Brady's brother, who played some of the heaviest, most perverse bad boys in Dark cinema, and apparently in life.



Screen five comes in two planes lit with a typically single light source by Alton, showing newcomer geekboy and future *Dagnet* Maestro, Jack Webb (right) fooling around with some nitroglycerine while a drily composed Roy Roberts looks on with Zen blankness. Final two screens

are again lit with a single light source from the 1947 quasi procedural *T-Men*. This was Mann's and Alton's first picture together and the first title released by newly formed and short lived Eagle Lion Pictures.



The last two screens are among the always analytically fascinating two shots of men in Mann's films, with their innate simmering violence, competition, threat and attraction. The only single element in the frame, in addition to the actors, is the light from the floor, and the low angle

which amplifies and enhances it, and the relationship between the characters is inevitably perilous, ultimately lethal, an effect purely expressed with such elemental means.



The steam room scene in *T-Men* relates to a similar steam room killing but one with much more explicit homo text in Don Siegel's great *The Lineup* ten years later in 1958 in

which Eli Wallach allows himself to be picked up for sex by William Leslie before shooting him after extracting the information he needs about a missing drug cache.





Mann's films and especially these first two Noirs are very centrally related to 40s maleness and a male "ethos" engaging with violence, identity submission and power, and they are underlined by their director's thematic obsession, solitude. Just as Melville's great work will resonate two decades later with Delon, Belmondo and Yves Montand in similar leads. Only in Mann's third great Noir with Alton, and my favorite, *Raw Deal* (1949), the great solitary character is a woman, played by the sublime Claire Trevor, one of two women sexually enthralled by Dennis O'Keefe's Joe, a convict who plays *homme fatale* to her and his case worker Marsha Hunt. Mann gives Claire Trevor, one of my favorite actors, the last great Mizoguchian high angle crane shot, filmed by Alton from way above the set with just enough light to identify the now static action as Claire is returned to her solitude, slumped over the body of her dead Joe. *Raw Deal* is one of the greatest Noirs for me, and Claire's is one of the greatest female performances in American movies.

*T-Men* and *He Walked by Night* have just been released on Blu-ray in superb new restorations from prime 35mm elements by spiffing new kid on the block label from the US, ClassicFlix. This outfit has brains behind it like Alan K Rode, Julie Kirgo, Todd McCarthy and other film culture heavyweights and has put out this year's lion's share of Noir reissues in unbeatable transfers. Along with ongoing Noir released from the Fox catalogue through Kino Lorber label this and last year, the Dark Film legacy has had a massive boost in exposure through 2017 much of it on HV for the first time, and pretty well all of it in prime audio-visual quality. These two Manns with be joined by their third and last Eagle Lion title, *Raw Deal* from 1949 which is out on Classic Flix December 5.

The Alton Mann movies seem more and more invaluable to me every time I watch them. For one thing there is

## **MARTHA (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1974)**

Mother (Gisela Fackeldey) hits the bottle in screen one while daughter Martha (Margit Carstensen) unloads her tale of woe, out of a Cornell Woolrich story in Fassbinder's

surely no more symbiotic partnership in American movies than these two. The only other director who appreciated Alton's genius nearly as much as Minnelli, and he engaged him to shoot, in full 3 strip studio lit Technicolor the 1952 *An American in Paris* ballet. The *découpage* of that 12-minute sequence exists in a sphere of its own in the American Musical as one of the greatest chromatic experiences in synesthesia between music and color in the movies. Kelly and Caron partner and swoon between sheer kinetic and fluid volumes of red, blue, purple, yellow and white, coming into and out of pitch black into a Minnellian mix of crane, track and dolly which take the extremes of color expression with articulated light to their peak possible expression in cinema.

***Editor's Note: After the post this was the subject of some interesting comment on Facebook. David added this comment below:***

The biggest surprise is the print source of *He Walked by Night* in quality terms. I read a couple of reviews of it that were faintly praising but I have no such reservations.

Maybe three or four shots are "softer" than the surrounding excellence but it has clearly been sourced from a fine grain 35mm vault print. Some of Classic Flix restorations have come from British 35mm prints sourced from the BFI. *T-Men*'s best previous video incarnation was the 35mm collector's print from Cary Roan released on Roan/Image Laserdisc back in the 90s. But it had a badly processed transfer and the encode has viewing defects like horizontal banding, and murky blacks It's barely watchable. *Raw Deal* was the best of the three Noirs and the clips from it in the Nina Mann doco on the *T-Men* disc looks spectacular. This label is clearly well connected.

amusingly gruesome comedy-drama of SM passion, *Martha*.



Second screen another incomparable composition with Martha and nasty "top" Karlheinz Böhm as Helmut from

Fassbinder's favorite DP, Michael Ballhaus.



Screens are from a new 4K restoration released in German language only (so far) by StudioCanal. I remember watching this at the Paddington Academy Twin

back in first Oz release 1977 or 78 and finding myself the only member of a slowly dwindling audience still cackling myself silly.

**A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1946) (1)**



Kim Hunter

Kim Hunter as June (above top two screens), David Niven as Peter Carter (below), Marius Goring as Conductor 71 with far too much pancake and lippy (further below), muttering in this shot "one is starved for Technicolor up

there". And Roger Livesey as Doctor Frank (lowest) in the new Criterion Blu-ray of Powell & Pressburger's first post-war movie, *A Matter of Life and Death* from 1946.



David Niven

This gorgeous new transfer is taken from a brand new 4K restoration, taken itself from Sony's 2004 photochemical film restoration which itself was, in every video incarnation terribly weak and thin in that encode of the original

elements. The new disc, so far only released in Region A stateside by Criterion with licencing from Sony and Park Circus is the first and only Blu so far. The disc is what can barely adequately be called a total killer.



Marius Goring

The movie is held in huge regard by many P&P enthusiasts, although I have never cared for it nearly as much as several other works from their canon. The top of my own Powell pile sees *I Know Where I'm Going* and *The Red Shoes*, with *Blimp* and *Peeping Tom* close behind.

But I won't bang on about that, although I do feel the sheer emotional weight of post-war drama and recovery, and the need for encouragement for Britain in the face of a forthcoming decade of austerity is what grounds, but also overwhelms AMOLAD's screenplay.



Roger Livesey

One of the most interesting conceits in the film is, in fact, Powell and Pressburger's tactic of portraying the war torn here and now in near-delirious three-strip Technicolor, and the imaginary "after life" or "heaven" to which Niven as Peter Carter is being pulled back to as relatively Public Service black and white, furnished nonetheless with pre chromatic white telephone style art deco design.

It's rarely mentioned, even in the context of this movie but Powell has been described politically, even by himself as a Tory in Labour clothing. God knows why after how many run-ins with Churchill during the war, not least the cuts Churchill demanded and got of "German-friendly" material from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. And thus does Powell accommodate his split social personality in *AMOLAD*, with a luscious present tense set in the domain of the high chromatic color movie, and a near future social order from incoming Labour socialist Clement Atlee, drawn in HG Wellsian Black and White for the new Prime Minister, who would take Britain beyond and away from both Churchill and the war. Along with Atlee of course came the beginnings of Welfare State

Britain - one of the greatest of all social passages in modern history as it turns out, including the establishment of the NHS.

For the rest Pressburger's screenplay for *AMOLAD* feels to me unduly speechifying, and this tendency creates a very leaden last act with the dramatically porridgy Heavenly "courtroom" sequence in which Peter's fate is decided by a quasi-United Nations of figures, all long gone, in various layers of historical drag. Passages like this sit like dead weight when compared to so many other genuinely felicitous, even sublime passages written by Pressburger over the years, such as the long single take with Anton Walbrook in *Blimp* during which he is interrogated by the immigration officials and explains what it is to be a "refugee". That five minutes of screen time never leaves a dry eye in the house, for very good reason.

But for *AMOLAD* fans, and they are legion, this is a completely flawless new restoration of a very much adored movie that is going to make for very, very happy viewers.

## **A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1946) (2)**

*First published as a program note for a screening of the film at Cinema Reborn, Sydney, May 2019.*

The historic director-writer collaboration of these two great artists began in 1939 with *The Spy in Black* and continued with two more movies set at the beginning of WW2, *Contraband* (1939) and *49th Parallel* in 1940. Powell and Pressburger subsequently formalized their creative partnership as "The Archers" with their next picture, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942) and would continue through the fifties and sixties with another 15 films as the most distinctive writer-director team in British cinema.

Their peak period runs from 1943 to 1952 when they were responsible for some of the very greatest British movies ever made, sharing Pantheon status with only a handful of other UK directors, notably Robert Hamer, and Alexander Mackendrick. They seem today like titans of poetic,

imaginative cinema, in stark comparison to the relatively prosaic work of then Academy darlings like David Lean and Carol Reed. Their collaborations temporarily ended in 1960 when Powell made his solo masterpiece, *Peeping Tom*, but were rekindled in the buoyant sunshine and optimism of 60's Australia, of all places, where Powell directed, and Emeric wrote – pseudonomously as "Richard Imrie"- *They're a Weird Mob* (1966). Their very last work was the short children's fantasy feature, *The Boy who Turned Yellow* in 1972.

### **THE FILM**

Powell had made *A Canterbury Tale* in 1944 at the request of the British Information Ministry which was trying to encourage wartime "fraternization" between locals and the visiting American servicemen, where frictions and rivalries were running hot. The film was contrived to embed the message within a droll mini-adventure seeking



the notorious “glue man” who is doing despicable things to girls’ hair on the trains, and a budding romance between a Yank servicemen and an English girl.

It is instructive to note that Powell had earlier clashed with then PM Churchill in 1943 over a number of scenes to their sublime *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. Churchill insisted on cuts of scenes, some of them read and played by Anton Walbrook as Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff, as too German friendly for a wartime picture. At this point it’s worth noting that Powell has described his own politics as High Tory with a tilt to Labour. It may well have been the dictatorial highhandedness of Churchill which mellowed his tone.

It was from this movie on that the duo wrote and directed a series of incomparable films about Britain and the British, as an Island, the home of mythical, even magical history and a primeval past. No more British a director has ever made a career of such a series of love songs to his patrimony and these Archer films, collaborations of Powell and his friend, the Hungarian “refugee” Emeric are among the greatest in English language cinema. *Blimp* is my own masterpiece but the following half dozen films are so close as to touch its wings.

By the end of 1945, finally free from war and able to get the big Technicolor camera rigs back from Larry Olivier who had been using them to shoot *Henry V*, the partners went to work again on an informal suggestion from the

Information Ministry to do another picture encouraging fraternization.

The result is *A Matter of Life and Death*. The movie blends a number of binaries, the first is the apparent survival against the odds of a young airman who dives without parachute from his burning plane to land on the coast, still alive where he is joined by an American girl working at airport control and a local doctor, played by Powell and Pressburger’s most commensurate actor, Roger Livesey.

The movie’s narrative falls back and forth between “reality”, “hallucination” and visions including a representation of what might be some sort of afterlife. The present day is filmed in literally gorgeous three strip Technicolor by new Director of Photography Jack Cardiff, on his first feature, and in a stroke of genius “the other side” is filmed in totally desaturated Monochrome. Powell’s politics are mischievously at play here, with the black and white “Heaven” designed by Archers’ Production Designer Alfred Junge as a Deco-Moderne infinite city in the style of W.C. Menzies’ sets for his 1936 movie of H.G.Wells’ *Things to Come*.

This monochrome paradise feels like a kind of near-flawlessly ticking model for a future civil service Britain, one which indeed was to come into being in one way and

another with the beginning of ten years of post-war austerity, the redemptive succession of the great Clement Atlee Socialist government in July 1945, and the creation of the British Welfare State and Aneurin Bevan’s National Health.

Even an avowed Tory like Powell was content to signal, with the presence of Kathleen Byron as the Head Counter Check-in Angel that the place couldn’t be all that bad.

The movie plays with the idea of a death escaped, perhaps not deserved and counters it with a death from a civilian that may answer that contention. Or not. There is a key scene to begin the second act of the film in which every aspect of the filmmakers’ imagination comes to life. Airman Peter Carter has come to meet June and Doctor Frank at a local hall.

The sequence begins with the business of an amateur theatrical company enlisting both US Servicemen and local girls and boys who are rehearsing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Mendelssohn’s incidental music is on the soundtrack. Peter and June sit down, Peter still uneasy from a recent encounter with his Heavenly “visitor”.

The score (by house composer for the Archers, Allan Gray) suddenly turns atonal from the Mendelssohn to a solo piano. Powell cuts from the master wide shot of Peter and June to a montage of images in close-up, all dominated by Black and White composition, referring to the non-colors of “heaven”: a piano keyboard which begins pounding Gray’s four-four “announcement” score, then a black and white chessboard, then he cuts back to the wide shot with its full colour. Frank asks Peter about his headaches and visions and asks him (and us) to carefully gaze at the back of the hall (and the image).

There, in layers of decor are keynotes of burning red, and orange, the same colours that signalled the impending fiery death of the burning plane at the movie’s beginning.

#### THE RESTORATION

This new digital restoration, supervised by Grover Crisp, was created in 4K resolution at Sony Pictures Entertainment. The original 35mm three-strip Technicolor negatives were scanned at Cineric in New York on the facility’s proprietary 4K high-dynamic-range wet-gate film scanner. An earlier photochemical restoration — by Sony Pictures Entertainment, the British Film Institute, and the Academy Film Archive, with the participation of Jack Cardiff — was used as a colour reference. The original monaural soundtrack was remastered from a 35mm nitrate variable-density optical soundtrack print at Deluxe Audio Services in Hollywood, using the iZotope mastering suite in addition to Capstan for music wow.

## MICHAEL (Carl Th. Dreyer, Germany, 1924) (1)



(Pre Blu-ray) The screen above features Zoret (Benjamin Christensen) and Michael (Walter Slezak) an older man and younger lover about to break up in Dreyer's sublime *Michael* from 1924.

This masterpiece and my favorite Dreyer has apparently been given a 2K restoration, provenance as yet unknown and Masters of Cinema will be releasing a world first Blu-ray next year.

The resurrection of this masterpiece (one of my top ten) is something I never thought I would live to see.

God knows how many years ago I posted this pencil note about the film in another venue:

*"It's one of his two greatest masterpieces. Along with Gertrud with which it forms one of the two bookends to reflect and contain Dreyer's total oeuvre, into infinity. One of them is set in a homosexual milieu, the other in a heterosexual milieu. Both of them completely defy any then (or now) current "conventions" of what was possible*

*in being a free soul, even within the relatively liberal milieu in which they were set (20s openly gay Berlin and 50s repressed hetero Denmark) They are both incomparably beautiful and beyond description for their times, or even our time. Like Sternberg, and very few artists Dreyer's Michael and Gertrud are both temporally specific and timeless. They are completely, totally beyond any contemporary social or political discourse for people nowadays, least of all in the gutter of gender politics. These two movies simply exist forever in a potential eternity of cinema. Their artistry and the guiding force behind them is unique and unparalleled in the history of movies.*

*"The ignorance and the general dismissal of Michael over the years is regrettable. Along with the fate of the (now old and OOP) MoC disc and all the hard work that went into that. I recall hearing about all the remaining warehouse discs of that DVD which were destroyed during those London/Sony warehouse torch riots by the feral mob ten or so years ago."*

## MICHAEL (Carl Th. Dreyer, Germany, 1924) (2)

(Post Blu-ray) Dreyer's only German UFA film, *Michael* was shot at Neubabelsberg in 1924, and brought him into contact with the great cameraman Karl Freund whom he also cast in an inspired brief comic role as a critic in the picture, together with screenwriter Thea von Harbou, who was, at this point in history, Fritz Lang's wife. The material for *Michael* comes from a novel by then openly admired gay writer Herman Bang who was one of the pioneering figures of Weimar era gay lib in Germany along with Magnus Hirschfeld whose 1918 picture *Anders als die Anderen* (*Different from the Others*) with Connie Veidt was

directed by Richard Oswald (Gerd's dad) in 1918 and remains the first groundbreaking film to deal with homosexual characters and issues. Among many other things, *Michael* is in effect only the second such path-breaking film.

Bang's novel comes from a popular genre of tragi-romantic, sentimental writing of the period and the novel focuses on the end of a gay romantic association. But the screenplay takes this material into fascinating new ground by switching the tragi-Romantic era *liebestod* ending of an

illicit romance to a heterosexual parallel couple, in the movie the Duke du Montheuil and another man's wife,

ending à la Schnitzler in the Duke's death by duel.



Dreyer's movie opens at a point where the sexual relationship between Michael and his patron and lover Claude Zoret ("The Master") is ending. The movie itself starts with a title card proclaiming "Now I can die content,

as I have known a great love". The movie also ends with this line, spoken by the dying Zoret, just as Dreyer's last masterpiece *Gertrud* will also end with the heroine of that film saying the same words.



So, Michael is for a start a groundbreaking Weimar German gay film of incredible sophistication even for a society like ours nearly a century later in which the sheer unapologetic and extremely dignified matter-of-factness of the homosexual milieu of Zoret's salon is a given. Indeed, most of the movie and its characters in this artistic circle are essentially expats to Berlin from places as far afield as Eastern Europe.

The film's completely blithe presentation of gayness is so embedded into the fabric of the movie even a modern day

commentator like cinephile Caspar Tybjerg cannot seem to quite bring himself to overcome his obvious embarrassment at the films' subject matter in a commentary track for the 2005 MoC DVD which is carried over to the current Blu-ray upgrade. I could live without ever again having to hear Tybjerg floundering for some "justification" to even mention the homosexuality, as though ascribing such "vulgarity" to a film by Dreyer might tarnish his reputation as some kind of Sainted Exemplar of Transcendental Beatitude.



Dreyer in 1924 was already a man of the world. And it becomes almost mandatory at this point in such a great artist's career to note some comparability with none other than Shakespeare. Dreyer's own small filmography includes pictures whose heart is with such central characters as a witch, a deluded religious fanatic dying a martyr, an ageing widow who supernaturally watches over a young married couple to guide their passage, a neurasthenic cocaine-addicted aesthete, thrill-seeking

vampires, murderous religious crazies, a saint and halfwit witnessing a miracle, and a woman who has lived her life alone for the sake of an undying and unfulfilled love affair.

*Michael* adds to this astounding role call an ageing homosexual artist who accepts the loss of his male lover to an enterprising and glamorous woman on the make, and who dies, like Gertrud, from a broken heart, yet like Gertrud without any regret or trace of antipathy.



Dreyer's association with Freund, who shot almost all the film, with Rudolf Maté coming in to finish when contractual commitments took Freund to another job (possibly Murnau's *Die Letzte Mann/The Last Laugh*) gave Dreyer the perfect chance to enlarge his mise-en-scène, revolutionarily indeed - thus for the first 20 minute exposition of *Michael* he takes the relatively new narrative format of shot/reverse to its highest possible level with Freund in extended decoupages of growing complexity, thus varying shot lengths, and even more prodigiously he

utilizes a plot device like Zoret asking Michael to fetch the floodlight to illuminate the salon's nude painting of Michael to the Countess.

Michael's bit of business here with the floodlight initiates a series of shots in which the light takes its own part in the mise-en-scène, within the cross-reverse cutting within which Dreyer and Freund literally shift focused light from face to face, closing and opening the image up within the frame without an iris or any other "external" device,

obliterating not only other background details but even other faces in the two shots.

Thus the static decoupage becomes entirely kinetic, and immensely more expressive. He also instigates a visual mode of isolating the faces in close and two shot from the cavernous, stifling sumptuousness of the set and background. Thus he retains an ongoing backdrop of literal spectacle while pushing the film formally into the tighter frame and the mood of *Kammerspiel/Chamber* drama. You can see Dreyer's formal genius literally taking off here, where he visibly engages with more and more technical expansion.

The film at these points literally pulses with both the excitement of visual discovery and the engagement with narrative pacing. Early in the second act Zoret who has agreed to paint the Countess' portrait is nearly finished but is unable to bring the eyes to life. Dreyer sets up the sequence with the same shot/reverse decoupage as before, but with his first shot of Michael stepping in to help, Freund instigates the film's very first travelling into close as he dollies in to Michael approaching the unfinished painting for which he completes the eyes. Freund dollies out when Michael finishes and turns to face the camera and Zoret, and pulls the lighting suddenly back out from the close facial framing to recover the set and background into a flat wide shot of the studio. All in one shot.

Of Dreyer's early work I've always loved *The Parson's Widow* from Denmark as his first great film and *Michael* always seems to me his first masterpiece. Every other film from that point is also a masterpiece. And at this stage of life it's impossible not to link *Michael* with *Gertrud* as the great bookmarks of his career. Even more staggering to

me is the sheer inclusiveness and breadth of a vision of humanity that can span from a homosexual milieu for the narrative and character setting in one picture to a heterosexual one in the other without ever dropping a beat. There is nobody else like Dreyer in movies. Only Mizoguchi comes close.

Some critics, notably David Cairns in his superb 17 minute video essay on this disc go to great lengths to discuss Dreyer's formal immersion in the material. The new 2016 "restoration" of this film finally gives it the astonishing visible detail, contrast, depth and clarity it has never had before to be able to actually see in all its magnificence Dreyer's and Freund's genius at work. The new transfer, at its best now faithfully presents one of the great visual masterpieces of late silent cinema, like Sjöström's *The Wind* and Sternberg's last three silents at Paramount. One of my top ten of all time.

MoC's new Blu Ray is taken from a 2016 restoration out of Murnau Stiftung and several other parties. The prime source used is the 35mm 2005 reprint restoration also from FWMS, and the new 2K could have clearly benefitted even more from a large cash injection to allow a substantial amount of photochemical work, especially with shrinkage-related tearing, print damage and frame jumps.

But what really counts here is the literally complete illumination the new 2K brings to the film for the first time since its premiere in 1924, along with all the clarity, pristine resolution and visual nuance. Thus it rescues this masterpiece from over 90 years of censorship, notoriety and neglect.

## **MOONRISE (Frank Borzage, USA, 1948)**

Screens of Dark, Light, Pain, Love, Guilt, Innocence, Grief and Rapture. The movie could only be Frank Borzage's last total masterpiece, *Moonrise* (1948), adapted from a then popular "redemptive" novel by Theodore Strauss. This is a movie that grabs you by the throat with the

opening shot of a man about to be hanged played in both life and shadow play, and doesn't let you go for more than six minutes until it's punched its way through every conceivable emotion, wrenching you with it into some sort of stunned, heightened state.



Dane Clark, *Moonrise*

Borzage's astonishing mise-en-scène begins with a low

angle and high contrast shot of a pending execution. The



background then morphs into a surreal undulating shadow play of nightmare, and lap dissolves into the child of that hanged man first shown from above as a baby crying in a room with a hanging doll, then as a boy, now photographed even higher from the top of a high crane for

over a minute in a single travelling during which he's tormented for the "sins" of his dead father by the other boys, in a shot that can only be described as the POV of a "higher being".



Lloyd Bridges, *Moonrise*

Then begins the narrative of this astonishing film. The image goes to an optical and comes back for the first time to level ground where a now adult Danny Hawkins (Dane Clark) is taunted and fights with Jerry Sykes (Lloyd Bridges) in what must be the most violent sequence played out in a Borzage film. The fight is staged with a découpage that cuts from full face to full face, a visual

style that from now completely replaces the shot/reverse trope for the remainder of the film, as every other encounter in it becomes a confrontation, or a dialectic but only until the sublime CUs and two shots, all lyrical expressions of relief from the underlying bleakness of Danny's separation and solitude.



Dane Clark, Gail Russell, *Moonrise*

Danny is one of Borzage's cursed, beautiful innocent sinners, and his image, sublimely photographed by John L. Russell (fresh from Welles' superb *Macbeth* for Republic the same year) donates the constant possibility of grace to him, with Gilly, the woman who loves him (the

breath-taking Gail Russell) and the simple mute man with the angelic face, Billy Scripture (Harry Morgan) who also loves him unconditionally bringing him light.

Borzage's dramaturgy takes the picture away from an

original concept of a Noir style film which Republic and producer Charles Haas originally wanted. Borzage crafts the narrative line into a range of moods and tones to allow the picture to breathe, after the unparalleled intensity of

the opening sequences. In fact, what he gives us is an ecstatic film composed around a small number of what the cinéophile world used to call "privileged moments".



Gail Russell, Dane Clark, *Moonrise*

Those moments, which run for several minutes of completely sublime screen time, come with the appearances in the picture of Gilly herself and the deserted house where she and the boy meet twice, in what can only be described as the most rapturous love scenes in American cinema. Danny later meets Mose, played by the great black American actor Rex Ingram, and

shares the joy of new life with the birth of a new puppy to Mose's hound, Daisy. Then there is another late encounter with the mute boy Billy Scripture (Henry Morgan) which is the staggering epiphany, and a glorious meeting with Gilly in the deserted house in which they dance together in the shadows against a ghostly score, sounding like a supernatural orchestra outside of time or space.



Rex Ingram, Dane Clark, *Moonrise*

These must be among the most sublime scenes of transformation and redemption in the movies. Certainly

they are among the most beautiful expressions of mood, feelings and ideas in all of Borzage.



"...they dance together in the shadows against a ghostly score..."

There has never been a more direct or straightforward director in the depiction of love (of all kinds), and the possibility of transcendence – a dread word, and one which in all honesty as a non-believer I however feel

compelled to use to describe very few artists. In the movies I can only extend the honor to Borzage and Mizoguchi.



Henry Morgan, *Moonrise*

Is there a more beautiful black and white film in the American cinema than *Moonrise*? Watching this new Criterion Blu-ray which was sourced from a new 4K scan mastered and graded to near perfection is hypnotic. The tonal qualities of the original nitrate negative seem to sparkle and shimmer in the new image as they must have in 1948. Matte blacks give way to the gloss of wet shiny blacks with an infinite gradation of grays in shot after shot. While Borzage may shoot darkness for a greater part of the movie, he enlivens darkness with the endless

possibilities of life and action.

The Blu-ray delivers a flawless image of this masterpiece which, like most people, I first saw back in the late 60s, in 16mm. During the dying days of Laserdisc Republic itself published a line of Lasers including this and Borzage's earlier *I've Always Loved You* (1946). The image was serviceable but dull and the film has effectively been a "lost" item for 50 years in repertoire programming. Until now.



Dane Clark, *Moonrise*

Although the new Criterion disc may be disappointingly short on bonus material (there is only a 17 minute interview with Herve Dumont) I urge everyone with the

slightest interest to buy. In a year of several incredibly great releases this is now at the top.

### Jeanne Moreau - Vale



Lino Ventura, Jean Gabin, Moreau, *Touchez-pas au Grisbi*

The first movie I saw with Jeanne was Becker's *Touchez pas au Grisbi* (*Don't Touch the Loot*) in which Gabin gives her a ferocious face slap. She doesn't even flinch. Who else could ever have played Doll Tearsheet? Who else

could have brought so much humanity to her part in Antonioni's *La Notte*? Her filmography is enormous and watching her remains an inexhaustible pleasure.

## MR KLEIN (Joseph Losey, France, 1976)

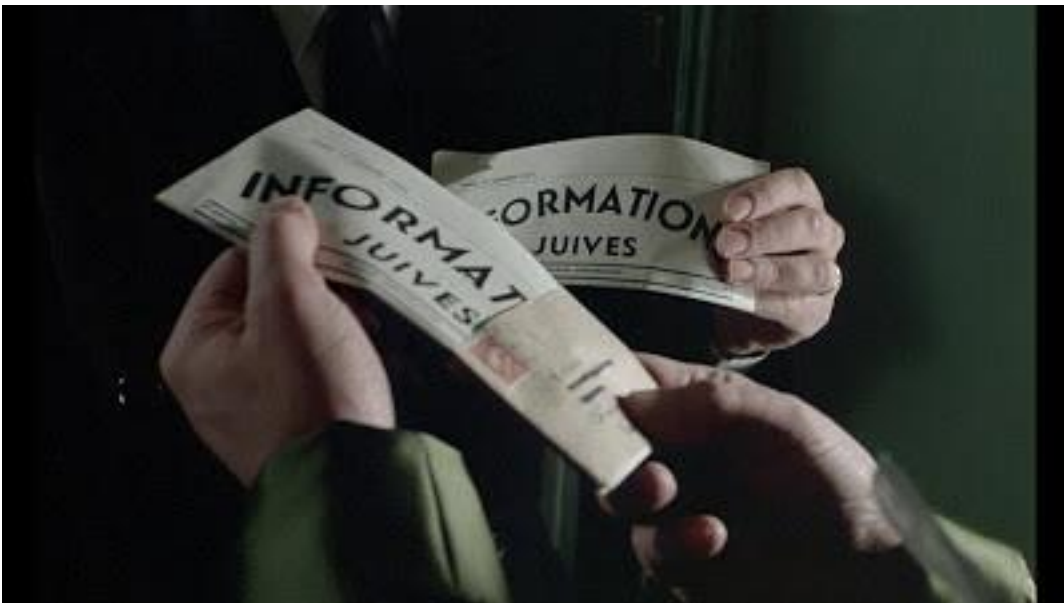
Alain Delon as Mr Klein has just extracted a bargain price for a major artwork from a desperate Jewish seller in 1942 Paris, just before the notorious Val' d'Hiver roundups of 16

and 17 July which would send tens of thousands of Jews still in Paris to their deaths.



Klein regards his reflection in a long mirror and ponders the possibility of a "double" after receiving a fatal missive

(below) that fingers him also as a Jew in Losey's superb (best?) late period French movie, *Mr Klein* from 1976.



Screens are from a new Japanese Blu-ray on Kadokawa label. No English subs, only Japanese. The source, from rights holder StudioCanal, may look pale-ish to modern tastes but this reflects a certain luxurious 70s Eastman

gloss which was typical of the era. Shot by maestro and Losey regular Gerry Fisher with decors by Trauner, the movie looks like a pristine first release print. They don't look like this anymore. Here's hoping Canal takes this on for the Anglophone world.



**30s SCREWBALL COMEDY – MY MAN GODFREY (Gregory La Cava, USA, 1936)  
& THE AWFUL TRUTH (Leo McCarey, USA, 1937)**



30s American cinema remains my favorite era in the movies. And it would not be the same without the great King of Wardrobe at 30s Paramount, Travis Banton. First three screens (above and next two below) here are the

divine Carole Lombard, with Banton outfits, uncredited, in Gregory La Cava's *My Man Godfrey* in which she and William Powell rescue each other from their own social and personal prisons.



It's one of the first two masterpieces to initiate the age of Screwball Comedy in 1936. It was produced at Universal, to whom Banton was loaned out by home base studio,

Paramount. The new Criterion Blu-ray of this from new Universal 4K ex-first gen 35mm elements is a complete joy.



The next four screens (below) are from Criterion's earlier release this year of a new 2K of Leo McCarey's wonderful

*The Awful Truth*, the second and major progenitor of the Screwball movement, made at Paramount in the same year where the director was on contract.



The picture is I think one of the greatest handful of movies about marriage ever made. Others in my book of lists, Mank's great underrated *Cleopatra* (1963) which contains the best running conversation between a husband and wife ever written for the movies, here Liz Taylor and Rex Harrison, reading Mank's own transcription of Shakespeare's own best of the genre, "Antony and Cleopatra".

Also on top of the list Becker's light as air *Edouard et Caroline* in which a couple progress through one fearsome night from a small row over a dress to a showdown with

the rich in-laws and a class war which climaxes with a terrible fight, then a rapturous resolution. All underpinned by a 90 second Chopin Prelude in A flat.

Getting back to McCarey, Banton's wardrobe for *The Awful Truth* on home turf almost seems to run the visual gamut of black to white and then some, aside from set and production design, with its sheer post-depression blitz of high fashion, and opulence. His wardrobe for Irene Dunne is astonishing in range and often times, absurdity.



Banton pioneers the insane abstract Brancusi hats (above) he would later display to dramatic perfection in Leisen's masterpiece, *Midnight* in 1939, in which some of the chapeaux seem to be threatening at any moment to dislodge the sets. Not only Dunne but even an actor as seldom used so well, Ralph Bellamy who, despite playing

a wealthy bumpkin, is dressed with things like flared pitch fluted and tight-waisted pants with Fred Astaire ribbon belts, silk cravats (below) and shirts that only one of the most butch specimens of Hollywood might have carried off without looking ridiculous.



To complement the eye popping wardrobe McCarey gives Bellamy a scene in which he takes Dunne to the dance floor, while ex-husband Cary Grant looks on with contempt. The band heats up and so does Bellamy who

reveals a deft dance skill with which he nearly sweeps Dunne off the floor. The movie keeps working on these turnarounds of expectation.



Dunne is constantly accompanied by her aunt, played by Hollywood's favorite 30s Lesbian, the great Cecil Cunningham (above). Cecil was routinely typecast as the growling bulldyke, barking out one liners with the authority of a steamroller. In this picture however, Banton gives her a surprising wardrobe which amplifies her range to create a major part. She's also in *Blonde Venus*, where she's given some greater dimension by Jo as a bordello Madam who throws off a line to Dietrich at a key point, "I know how it is dearie, I've gotta kid of my own."

In Leisen's *Swing High Swing Low* (1937) she plays the

Panama nightclub owner who hires both Lombard to sing and MacMurray to play the horn. And again the picture is literally graced, not only by a Banton wardrobe, but Leisen directs DP Ted Tetzlaff to light and photograph her with warm affection and admiration, as a lesbian and a woman and a real character who has been "protecting" Lombard from MacMurray to that point. Nobody else but artists of the calibre of Leisen, Sternberg, McCarey and Banton would have ever bothered.

And that makes all the difference, doesn't it?

# N

## NOTORIOUS (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1946)



A production still (above) from one of many bonus features on the new Criterion Blu-ray of *Notorious*.

Taken from a new 4K scan of MoMA's nitrate O-neg, a high quality nitrate dupe pos 35mm, and a fine grain safety pos 35mm which was used to recapture and scan several dupe sections from the O-Neg which have been a

persistent weakness for decades.

The movie now looks better than it ever has. And the new disc adds kudos by carrying several new supplements, plus most of the bonus features from Criterion's old DVD and MGM's quite good but now superseded Blu-ray from six or seven years ago.



I have long agreed with Truffaut (with whom I don't agree that often) that this is Hitchcock's greatest B&W film, despite very stiff competition from the rest of his oeuvre.

The final break from Selznick enabled him to escape to RKO where he was able to effectively produce the movie



himself, although he's not credited as such. Everything once again feels like one of his late British pictures, but with big Hollywood production values in the way it seems to spin on a perfect set of playful vibrations, starting with

the casting and the incomparably mysterious figure of Cary Grant's Devlin (above), seemingly a man without a back story whose emotional life may well be as stunted as Cary's superb, quietly burning performance suggests



Bergman (above) is in peak range, and has never been more physically moving. Her performance is urgently emotional. And Hitch's most sympathetic villain, is the oppressively oedipal Claude Rains as Alex Sebastian.

Every bit part is also perfectly crystallized, from Louis Calhern's smug, misogynist FBI manager, to Reinhold Schunzel as the compassionate, "kindly" Doctor Anderson amongst the Nazi cabal in Rio.

Indeed, writer Ben Hecht gives Hitch a flawlessly detailed screenplay populated with quickly sketched but highly effective character ciphers for the secondary cast, a strategy which enhances the leads. RKO also gave Hitch their great, unsung music director, Roy Webb whose library sourced score is matched impeccably to mood - the "waltz" piece playing through Alicia's first big party scene. Climaxing with the key switch is an RKO musical staple which turns up again if not so strikingly in *Out of the Past*, among several other 40s RKO pictures.

Ted Tetzlaff who had shot over 100 features before making this as his last job as DP, before becoming a director with the childhood nightmare noir, *The Window*, shows he can top even as technically speedy a DP as Sol Polito or Stanley Cortez with fast tracking, multiple lighting setups in depth, and apparently virtuoso mega takes, like the famous Ballroom key shot which seems to be a massive travelling crane from the chandelier above the reception room to Alicia's clenched fist concealing the key

to the wine cellar.

That shot is partly tracking, but also substantially telephoto process lab work, like a number of other throwaway but brilliant shots which combine physically impossible components. Another example is the second shot from the movie's opening which views the closing words of Alicia's father's trial shouted through a door, from the POV of the media scrum outside the courtroom. In this new 4K, perhaps for the first time the lines between doorway, POV positioning and the distant courtroom still in focus visibly reveal the shot as a set of almost imperceptible optical mattes, with a glimmer of shudder from the labwork.

The new 4K scan quality is revelatory not only for such felicities of camera trickery, but for sheer physical detail and expression, especially in the unbelievably beautiful close-ups of Grant and Bergman. The single take 360% clinch and kiss on the balcony with Rio in process in the background is more rhapsodic in sheer physical presence than ever before.

Once again I only wish Criterion had already made the leap to 4K UHD disc format for these new treasures that are literally rebirthing so much great cinema. The work on this gorgeous new 4K was performed in concert with Walt Disney (which has been a copyright holder of some of MGM's library over the years including the Selznick titles), Warner's titanic MPI facility in Burbank, and Lee Kline from Criterion who supervised the scan and transfer to 4K.



## ONE-EYED JACKS (Marlon Brando, USA, 1961)



At this point in the movies I think Brando was the most beautiful man who ever walked the earth. The screen of course is from the new 4K restoration of *One-Eyed Jacks* which premiered at Cannes this year. now on Criterion Blu-ray. I only wish the company was already at the 4K/UHD disc stage of releasing so we could get this in a totally ultra-premium format.

Meanwhile I have to make do with the fabbo new Panny UHD TV uprezzing the image and giving it the caboodle of HDR and other magic tricks. The 4K was taken from scans of the original 8 perf Vistavision element, so they started with the best, and even beyond the sheer effort of restoration the disc is like a long lost treasure trove of extra material including 33 minutes of extracts from Brando's own daily voice recording shooting notes during the filming. There's so much more, and I have barely had time to scratch around the perimeters.

Technically the BD is superb, mastered at a steady 30mbPs bitrate which gives the image completely optimal presentation in terms of grain, sharpness, stability, depth, dynamic range, tone and density. It's perfect. And the color palette which had initially bothered me slightly from screens, is meticulously rendered.

I have only the haziest memory of seeing this before once in my life, in 35mm and almost certainly a Tech IB print, at the Gaiety Theatrette in Sydney's Kings Cross back in the late sixties. At that stage the manager of that establishment was doing both unpredictable programming and also things like re masking everything regardless of original provenance to a pseudo Scope ratio with top and bottom curtains. While it operated like a mini-cinémathèque the projection was abysmal, wildly unreliable at the best of times.



The Kings Cross Gaiety, circa the 60s

The fondly remembered Gaiety also served a broad church of action movie loving audiences those days, including spivs, petty crims, cruising gays, drag divas, hookers, school kids like me playing hookey, and that weirdest of living forms, the lone cinephile. And I confess I shared the audience's bewilderment at the time in large part at the movie along with a kind of breathless awe at the sheer beauty of such an intensely personal spectacle (Brando's own riff on Garrett and Billy the Kid) given within

such a sumptuous and staggeringly beautiful large form.

I am going to watch this tonight very eagerly. And while I look forward to comments from anyone old enough to remember sixties era screenings and color qualities, I hope to become sufficiently immersed to forget about such trivia, along with earthquakes, the vile Trump and other disasters.

## ORPHÉE (Jean Cocteau. France, 1950)



Released recently, with English subs from the BFI is another new 4K restoration, here of Cocteau's 1950 *Orphée* (above). The previous Blu-ray released by Criterion from a superlative 2K from ten or so years ago is so good. It initially seems churlish to have gone out and done it again. But the new work, from scanning in the higher rez 4K to superior detailed grading, deeper black levels and a flawless lossless audio to showcase Auric's fabulous score delivers an incomparable experience of the movie. BFI's extras also command attention including a 51 minute study, "Les Rêves de Cocteau en numérique" and a commentary track from Christopher Frayling.

Cocteau's fortunes have waxed and waned in the public view since he died. But for such an original, trailblazing multi-media artist his movies, as director, writer and as amanuensis (Melville's superb *Les Enfants Terribles*) have never been matched by any other "dabbling" filmmaker. It seems more than absurd now to write Cocteau off as did so many contemporaries, including his fellow 20th century famous homosexualist, André Gide.

But how many people, even radicalized gay youth, still read Gide as they once did. Both men interestingly

enough managed in their day to transcend the pre-80s French distaste for "les pédés" through sheer cultural estimation. They were otherwise entirely antipathetic to each other in art and life.

Cocteau is the artist still for every new viewer who watches him for the first time, L'Étonneur; the astonishing creator of myth, spectacle and mystery buried in the everyday.

The astonishing thing about his adaptation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth is not only the multiple deaths theory to denote the gestation of poetry, but the way in which Cocteau anchors the setting in the embrace of a contemporary bourgeois marriage. The addition of other quasi mythic characters - Cégeste, Aglaonice, and the sad, handsome Heurtebise, played by a deliriously beautiful François Perier (below), is answered in setting by the involvement of contemporary popular culture myth makers like Juliette Greco, Roger Blin and Edouard Dermithe. And Maria Casarés. Casarés is not merely Orpheus' death, says Cocteau, she's one of Death's many emissaries.



She also becomes with this masterpiece an axiom of

cinema. The new BFI disc is completely essential.



# P

## THE PARADINE CASE (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1947)



Louis Jourdan, *The Paradine Case*

Lee Garmes was the greatest photographer of close-ups in the history of the movies and here are two of the most gloriously beautiful faces from *The Paradine Case* (1947), in the process of their own self destruction, dragging Gregory Peck, a third very beautiful face down with them.

The whole meaning of the movie increasingly seems to me to belong in the close-ups. Indeed, the central act of the film is 20 minutes within nearly two hours of useless non-expository talk, little action and you can hear Hitchcock tapping the camera waiting for something interesting to do.

The movie often lurches with the brakes on during narrative sections. But it then becomes transfixing in its meditative and confrontational sequences, largely shot in Close. It's like two movies at war with each other, one personal and "abstract", the other, literal and wide. The camera movements Hitch stages around Valli are also some of the most lyrical and expressive in his career. They look forward to the ten minute takes of *Rope* (1948) and the serpentine cranes and dollies he got Cardiff to execute for the totally wonderful *Under Capricorn* (1949) and I think *The Paradine Case* needs to be seen as one of that trio of late forties, high *mise-en-scene* based works.



Alida Valli, *The Paradine Case*

Whether or not you think similarly the new Blu-ray from Kino Lorber is one of the first Selznick 40s titles out of the MGM library to be released on Kino Lorber and has always presented as a "problematic" Hitchcock. A big part of the problem is the whole British class malarkey thing upon which Hitch himself overly relies for the setting, and all its idiotic balderdash, especially with Charlie Coburn as Senior Counsel, "Sir Simon". Hitch takes the malarkey over the top of absurdity in the first sequence he shares with Alida Valli in which she repeatedly addresses him with the honorific. "Yes, Sir Simon, No Sir Simon... I think so Sir Simon."

The one interesting aspect of this class nonsense is the way the men from the higher orders fetishize a sexually

active woman like "Maddelena Anna Paradine" and her Neapolitan past. Even on the bonus material during audio grabs Hitch keeps referring to her as "the nymphomaniac."

Nympho or not I was pleasantly surprised to see how much more I liked Peck this time around. I think Hitch is all wrong about him, and certainly about Jourdan whose own performance is without blemish, and a very fine one indeed. Maybe Louis and Peck don't fit Hitch's relatively comic book stereotypes for the Chatterley-esque project he had in mind. In any case Hitch does reign in some if not all of the usual Selznickian excess and the longueurs and slabs of totally redundant diversions the producer interposed into everything he touched. And often ruined.



Gregory Peck, *The Paradine Case*

One outstanding impression from this viewing is the phalanx of incredibly compelling women the film presents. Every single female part and its actor is a great and moving character, even Ann Todd whose part is written dangerously close to near simpleton. But Hitch and Garmes throw everything they have into building her up visually. In fact, Garmes gives her more close-ups than Alida. Also wonderful to watch, Ethel Barrymore as the appalling Laughton's suffering fragile wife whose heart is obviously broken by everything she sees in life, and Coburn's feisty daughter, Judy, a terrific Joan Tetzl.

The new Blu-ray transfer is presumably taken from the same element used for the older Artisan Pal DVD releases of the movie. In those low-rez versions a number of visible flaws in both the source and the scan were less obvious. In the new Blu some sequences show what looks like but isn't aggressive grain, more likely high frequency noise from attempts to "sharpen" and give depth to weaker sections of the reel. Overall the image quality for the new Blu is fair to good, but this is definitely a Hitch title I would like to see given full cleanup restoration with a new 2K if not 4K scan. Meanwhile buy and enjoy with pleasure. Region free

## **THE PASSENGER (Michelangelo Antonioni, USA, 1975)**



First two screens show Jack Nicholson and Maria

Schneider in situ of a seemingly lunar landscape, in fact the rooftop of the Casa Mila ("la Pedrera") in Barcelona.



The last two screens are the beginning and the end of Antonioni's devastating seven minute take which ends his

last American film, produced by Carlo Ponti, *The Passenger* (1975).



The beautiful new 35mm source provided to Indicator (UK) label from Sony looks like near pristine Metro Eastmancolor, and the 1080p grading and encode for the new Blu-ray is flawless. One could only hope to see this turn up one day in 4K/HDR. The near to final shot seems to be suggesting a parallel dimension in which life itself disappears or is replaced by an alternate life, while an apparently indifferent universe simply fills the void around pointless human endeavor. This and the final montage of unpopulated streetscapes in *L'Eclisse* are Antonioni's most radical and formally arresting excursions into pure science fiction.

Only Resnais and Marker come close to matching this thematic preoccupation with the abstract as reality with so

much sheer sensual beauty.

MA was a giant, his like will never be seen again. For one alternately branded by detractors over the years as "modish" or even "shallow" his films today resonate into an infinite future in which, if the human race survives viewers will continue to be seduced by his gaze and his impeccable sense for image.

The disc comes recommended without reservation, noting only in passing several truckloads of extras down to no less than three audio commentaries, including the 2010 track recorded by Nicholson for Sony's DVD release that year, another by writer Mark Peploe and another brand new commentary by Oz expat critic Adrian Martin.

PHANTOM LADY (Robert Siodmak, USA, 1944 )







First thing to say after celebrating the debut of this movie on Blu-ray is to note the sources for the older DVD and the new BD are completely different. Arrow's print from Universal shows the credits with a persistent, tiny gate hair baked into the right hand frame. There's no gate hair however in the Carlotta print. Similar disparities abound. Arrow's source tonally looks like very high quality safety 35mm, a very good vault or exhibition reissue 35mm from post 1950. Grain is fine and expertly handled, blacks are deep and contrast is very nice. It's basically terrific.

Both do good service to Woody (Elwood) Bredell's photography but I still suspect the Carlotta's deeper black levels are more true to the original.

The Carlotta DVD (I no longer have the case only the sleeve) used to note that their source was "originale" and the image with its much deeper blacks and a kind of pearlescent grain (given the limitations of 576i Standard def rez) suggests a possible nitrate 35mm source. The Carlotta image is persistently disturbed with minor instability, either frame jitter or shrinkage related wobble, but the print is relatively free of surface emulsion flaws, like the scratches, tramlines and tics that are far more

frequent on the Arrow source.

A small part of me wishes Universal had been able to supply Arrow with the nitrate used by Carlotta, but things are always a trade off in this business and the generally high quality of their newer, if unrestored 35mm master enables a near to flawless transfer for image, sharpness, grain, stability and depth. Not to mention a great lossless mono audio in which one can finally hear the warbling cornets and pizzicato strings from Universal house MD, Frank Skinner.

As for the film, this now only leaves us with *Christmas Holiday* as the last missing Siodmak Noir to make it to Blu. *Phantom Lady* has had volumes written singing its praises, and I too salute the sheer perversity of its oneiric atmosphere of decay and madness. With the sublime Ella Raines, one of the most glorious women to play all too seldom in Hollywood movies, providing a kind of absurd purity in a decaying world in which almost everyone is crazy, or corrupt.

*Christmas Holiday* takes the nice girl trope even further with Deanna Durbin and cuts her loose in perhaps an

equally horrifying nightmare, in which she has the bad luck to marry a psychopathic, repressed gay, momma's boy

and woman killer, played by virulently scary Gene Kelly at his most lethal.





**PHANTOM THREAD (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA, 2017)**



"brittle recreation of 1956 London", *Phantom Thread*

Random grabs from the astonishing 4K/HDR Universal Blu-ray disc of P T Anderson's *Phantom Thread*. The disc is total reference quality, demonstrating a seamless transition from 35mm filming on Kodak Vision stock to the digital 4K domain. (Click on the images to enlarge them or run a slideshow.)

I have admired PTA greatly over the years. I found *The Master* (2012) masterly and I suspect I am the only person I know who was enough of a stoner and acidhead to "get" *Inherent Vice* (2014). But I am trying to avoid the feeling with *Phantom Thread* he's now simply pulling a fast one. Anderson is surely a major documentarist of post war America. But this brittle recreation of 1956 London gets so much seemingly wrong, or maybe that's his intention?



Vicky Krieps, Daniel Day-Lewis, *Phantom Thread*

Let's start with the frocks from the supposed Perfectionist, Reynolds Woodcock played by Danny Day Lewis in a multiplicity of keys, a couturier to the higher orders designing frocks which are all completely hideous. Even Woodcock says, when he's first affected by poison and in the throes of a clear-sighted delirium, "it's ugly." I have to comment en passant I was watching this between screenings, ever joyous, of Cukor's *Les Girls* (1957) in which Orry-Kelly's wardrobe fights the three stars for screen time and usually wins, in a sublime display of form elevating substance.

Formally *Phantom Thread* buries its subject in what feels like a quicksand of visual and audible detail, down to the insistent, teeth grinding wallpaper 50s anti-jazz score by Jonny Greenwood. Every single detail of Anderson's setting is a contribution to a sensibility which I ultimately find overwhelmingly ugly and frankly middlebrow. I am assuming the irritation factor from this disjunct between form and substance is intentional, and that somehow the movie is casting its mise-en-scène over the material for purposes of irony.

So at this point I am just not sure of Anderson's intentions about the nature of Woodcock's salon or even his

personality. As entertaining as it is, Danny's creation of Reynolds Woodcock (surely the bodgiest of spiv adopted posh names ever cooked up for an American film about the Poms) is in essence no more than a composite of perhaps the grand total of actually heterosexual couturiers in 50s Britain. Not many surely, but enough to keep Danny on his feet. God knows, for a film about fashion and frocks, the movie is more than conspicuous in its failure to include a single gay character or reference. It's a bit like making a movie about the ballet without any homosexuals. Not only absurd but consciously evasive. But this might have challenged PTA's comfort zone perhaps?

The movie is finally a failure, not only for this detail but because it fails to achieve coherence for a picture which strives so hard for the texture of overwhelming verisimilitude (the dreaded "Vera" as the queens used to call it.) At a late point in the narrative, one of his customers defaults to another, new designer to whom Cyril refers as "chic." The word and concept enrages Woodcock who throws yet another tantrum. We suddenly get a glimmer of the stolid and ultimately bourgeois nature of his obsessions and neuroses, his creations and ultimately the film's entire stylistic and formal base, if not its meaning, which remains as ever elusive.



'the star of the show', Lesley Manville as Cyril  
*Phantom Thread*

The salon and its world of minor Royal list dipso clients is beyond even middlebrow. Anderson does have a lot of fun with one of them, the dowager, played by a wonderful Gina McKee. But the star of the show of course remains the wise owl, Cyril, played with benign gravity by Lesley Manville. Here, unapologetically resides the beating heart of the film, if indeed it has one.

The final act proposes a kind of Slave/Master marital arrangement which attempts to resolve the battle of wills between Woodcock and Alma (Belgian newcomer Vicky Krieps). The solution seems rushed and as a friend

commented, the dramatic arc falls apart at this point. For all the detail and sumptuous production values - and they look and sound completely stunning on this new disc - the film remains at a third viewing for me a fascinating thing of bits and pieces, never not worth watching, but completely unsatisfying artistically.

But I doubt there's any other director working today - maybe Refn or Michael Mann - who can put so much - dammit - sheer unadulterated, tactile beauty into a movie, even while the actual simulacrum of the milieu is actually rubbish.



## POLYESTER (John Waters, USA, 1981)



Elmer Fishpaw (the be-rugged David Samson) with trophy wife, Francine (Divine) (both above) who's praying for forgiveness for Elmer's porno movie theatre business and its ill-gotten gains. It's all in John Waters *Polyester* from back in 1981.

And Divine (below), later, with Cuddles (the great Edith Massey, "Egg Lady" of *Pink Flamingoes*). For a special lunch of Pepsi and cake. "Oh Francine, your house is something out of Architectural Digest". She's right.



From the new special edition Criterion Blu-ray, complete with Odorama Scratch and Sniff card. It's good to remember this was Tab Hunter's comeback movie after years in the boozy twilight. My fave scene, genuinely Sirkian in its lyricism, is their visit to a Marguerite Duras Triple Bill at the local drive in.

The new Criterion is probably worth it if only for the copious extras, although I think the movie is the last genuinely Waters-esque picture he made, in both tone and a cast who all sport flawless Baltimore twang accents. Especially sock sniffing juvenile delinquent played by the exhilaratingly named Stiv Bators as Bo Bo.

## THE PRIVATE AFFAIRS OF BEL AMI (Albert Lewin, USA, 1946)

On a coach ride after their first night out, the youthful widow Angela Lansbury (Clotilde) says to de Maupassant's supreme cad, George Sanders (Georges

DuRoy): "At carnival time I want to dress up... as a young man in a full dress suit. You have no idea of what a charming young man I can be". In a voice that might have

scored him the Oscar for 1946, George curls his lips and throat around the words "Haven't I?!" while fully vocalising both the question and the explanation marks. Of such delivery is a star made.

The cap below of Sanders is from a gorgeous new Blu-ray from Olive films of Albert Lewin's *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami*, taken from a superb fine grain archival 35mm master, restored by Scorsese and Film Foundation and others with

immaculate skill. The movie now looks like Russell Metty just wrapped filming yesterday, and indeed it sounds like Darius Milhaud has just put down the music track with its completely breathtaking quartet of woodwinds, whose voices tootle and hum in constant reference to the major characters, while the strings and bass provide the ballast to one of the great, unsung movie scores.



I have to say Lewin has never been one of my enthusiasms, and indeed this movie doesn't escape some of his barely competent mismanagement of basic *decoupage* and *mise-en-scène*. The first eight minute dialogue between Sanders and John Carradine, with one wide set up and two, and later three angle/reverse setups for the duration has more pointless and distracting cutting and editing than the shower scene in *Psycho*, all to absolutely no purpose.

But the pedigree for this film, even more than any other Lewin picture I feel, is so great - the cast from paradise, the screenplay by the director himself - a masterwork of censor dodging which he largely covers with barely held reaction shots, or curls of the lip, and simply terrific lighting cues that meaningfully open and close so many sequences from Metty. The material is great because the original Maupassant was great, and the nominal

"scoundrel" himself is irresistible because he brings undone so much towering hypocrisy and evil all around him to the point that his own inevitable demise, in another, last wonderful carriage ride, calls for all our sympathy. It's one of Dame George's five best performances to be sure.

And lest I be assailed by the sisterhood for neglect, this is a movie and text in which women are sexually responsive, indeed they more often than not initiate the encounters and affairs and marriages that drive the narrative. Although the picture was made in 46 and not released until April 1947, it still seems too "grown up" for most people these days. It needed a director of Lewin's sophistication to keep the drama running with such mordant comedy.

Far and away Lewin's best picture.

## PSYCHO (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1960)



The frame above is part of the trim in length of the shot which Universal made to its US master negative for *Psycho* back then. Also trimmed were some of the six audible slashing sounds and at least two of the visible slashing knife shots from the shower scene. The full uncut print was obviously archived in Europe as the quality shows nary a drop in detail in this new German Blu-ray released on Turbine label in Germany as part of the Masterpiece collection.

The existence of the longer sequence has always been accepted outside the USA where it never played uncut. Even back in Oz, for some miraculous

reason possibly Hitchcock's own trip to Australia to help promote the film in 1960, it was passed uncut by the then ferocious Oz Censor, (before the "One Armed Bandit", Dick Prowse took the Chief Censor job in 1964.) And when it was being prepped for screening on Oz TV at the newly opened Channel 10 in the early 70s, it just so happened I knew the guy from Ten who did the editing and commercial cue work for the network. In those days they usually screened 35mm prints for broadcast.

That transmission was the uncut 35mm too, as was a 35mm theatrical print some of us saw one day at a kid's matinee in suburban Oatley. The print was clearly a first generation, ten years after release.



## Q

**QUEEN OF OUTER SPACE (Edward Bernds, USA, 1958)**

"I HATE that Kveen!" A sentiment oft stated by so many of us over the last century or so, but none so fervently, perhaps as Zsa Zsa Gabor (above with Eric Fleming) playing a Venusian Space Woman in Warner Archive's lovely new Blu-ray of the 1958 Sci-Fi camp classic, *Queen of Outer Space*. Filmed at everyone's favorite 50s B to Z pic studio Allied Artists.

Despite having the luxury of Scope and De Luxe Color the movie seems to have been reduced by the indelibly invisible direction of hack, Edward Bernds to one set with two changes of decor and a wardrobe assembled from the studio cleaner's closet.

The movie itself is a very late entry in the now cooling Cold War sci-fi genre which was a product of post-nuclear panic. Movies from the era were routinely assigned some further "war of the sexes" subtext which more often than not prevailed over the open text.

In this case, a screenplay suggested, according to the credits, by Ben Hecht, it's the threat of feminism, here exemplified by the all-female race of man-hating Venusian

Women who are ruled by a fascist-like masked "queen" whose facial scarring from repeated nuclear exposure has embittered her to men and their evil warfare.

All this pettifogging sex stuff is quickly reduced to dust by the arrival of the ever reliable butchness of all American manhood, here represented by the spectacularly plain Eric Fleming whose space suit was definitely not cut to the gib. Mr Butch eventually unmasks the unhappy "Kveen" for a climax in which girls can go back to just having fun, and being pretty, to say nothing of Zsa Zsa collecting another round of jewellery from the next husband.

Bernds' career is possibly worth cruising through for perhaps one other film, the previous year's *Reform School Girl*, also for Allied Artists, with Edd Byrnes ("Kookie" from *77 Sunset Strip*) trying and failing to make the move from TV series to the big time. He wasn't as lucky (or as talented) as one or two of his series co-stars, including Efrem Zimbalist Jnr (*The Chapman Report* for Cukor 1962) and the very handsome Richard Long, who both became familiar faces in the late 50s Warner stable.

**THE QUILLER MEMORANDUM (Michael Anderson, UK, 1968)**

"Excuse me, do you have a light?"

"Certainly."

"Do you smoke this brand?"

"No, I don't think I know that brand."

"Perhaps I might introduce it to you?"

"Thank You"

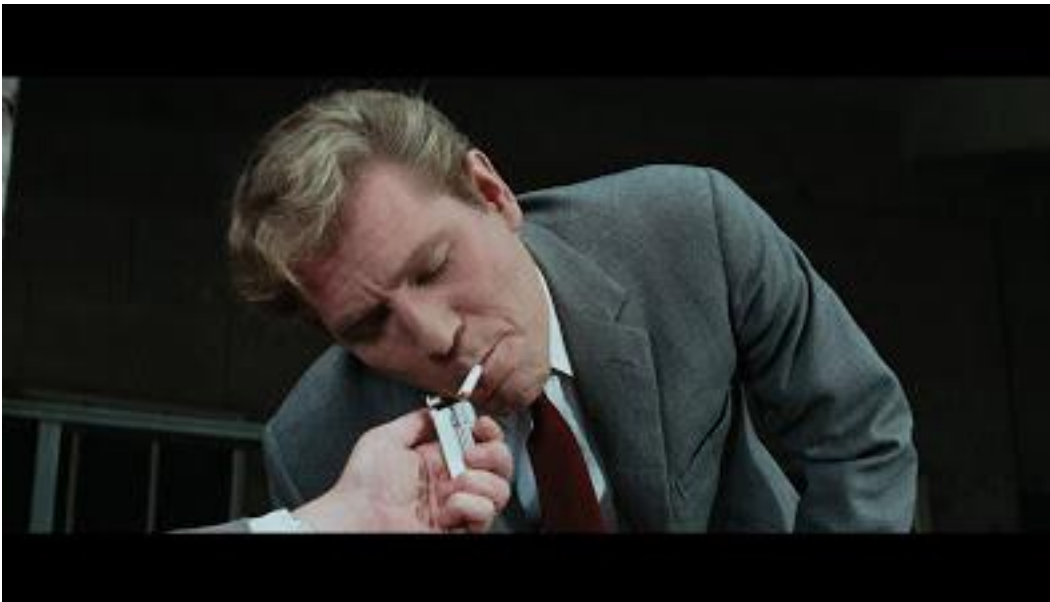
This inspired twaddle from screenwriter Harold Pinter and presumably the original author of the novel by Trevor Dudley Smith, AKA Adam Hall, is the code used in *The Quiller Memorandum* from the year 1968 with which assorted "agents" from "Our" side signal recognition.



This is only the beginning of a movie set in 1967 Berlin which never once alludes to the Cold war, or the Wall, or the Communists and the quarantined East Berlin regime.

In fact, the notion of cold war which might have been the movie's signature, is instead buried beneath a kind of re-invented espionage thriller apparently dealing with hidden "neo-Nazis", although even that definition is largely unspoken in favor of the adjective "extreme."

Pinter's completely extraordinary screenplay for this very smart movie not only deconstructs the spy genre but purposefully drains it of most, if not all, tension, and the usual nailbiting that goes hand in hand with the genre. There is one car chase and one very mutely conducted drug induced inquisition from the wonderful Max von Sydow in close-up, along with only one killing at the beginning, and two aborted killings later, in what is more or less the climax of the picture



Pinter really goes to town with his trademark "pointless" dialogue for supporting players George Sanders, Alec Guinness from the opening and at the end, as well as Bobby Helpmann through the picture. Each only play three scenes. The three of them are flawless performers for Pinter's universe of non-communication, a curse of the civilised human condition with which he joyously plunders the spy genre.

Michael Anderson who directed this with great efficiency and attention to detail, was never going to set the temple of auteurism on fire. Anderson's 1956 *Around the World in 80 Days* is surely one of the most turgid motion pictures ever made. But it feels as though Pinter's elusive and evasive writing leads Anderson into highly personal *mise-en-scène* territory.





Two examples: He films the opening sequence of the first agent being murdered with one long 90-second wide shot and a single cutaway to the telephone booth. In the last ten minutes, to open the penultimate sequence he uses precisely the same set-ups down to the time cue but the screenplay aborts any killing, and denies us the obvious expectation.

Similarly, in the one big love scene between ever luscious

Senta Berger and overly unctuous George Segal (whose haminess seems supremely if contrapuntally apt for this endlessly amusing picture), rather than simply stage and film the love scene with medium close, close and reverse close shots, he arranges four setups/angles for the two shots and continuously cuts between them during real time, effectively alternating and multiplying the point of view and disrupting any predictable immersion in the sequence. The distancing effect is outstanding.



Somehow or other I missed this movie over the decades although I'm as much a fan of espionage as the next overgrown boy-man. Anderson's achievement here, with the very personal ring of Pinter's world view, is a unique entry in the field I think. While not generically similar I would rank this picture as highly as another unnoticed and rarely praised British masterpiece from the crooked

cop/kitchen sink school from the same year 1968 as David Greene's *The Strange Affair* with Jeremy Kemp and Michael York, from a Jeremy Thoms novel.

The screens are all from a very fine Twilight Time Blu-ray which easily beats the UK Network release for superior grading, color, and picture quality.

# R

## THE RECKLESS MOMENT (Max Ophuls, USA, 1949)

(Pre-Blu-ray) "I liked Mr Donnelly" says Sybil, played by the superb Frances Williams (screen below) to Joan

Bennett, with a dying James Mason in Max's last American picture from 1949, *The Reckless Moment*.



(Blu-ray) This masterpiece, Ophuls' last in the USA before returning to France in 1950, is now available on a superb Blu-ray from Indicator in the UK.

Having previously spotted a 1080p download in the backchannels I gobbled it up greedily. I've since watched it through, then back to back with the PAL Second Sight Brit DVD which - hold your hat folks - was released way back in 2005. That was the film's first and still its only release on home video which makes the latest incarnation even more unexpected.

Let's get the technical stuff out of the way. The source for the 1080p is I am certain the same, very good - I am guessing here - 35mm fine grain inter-positive or archive print from Sony as it has the exact same tiny emulsion flaws down to one small gate hair in exactly the same spots. It also has the same very nice density and black levels with quite a glossy white tone and good contrast as the old DVD.

The new 1080p however displays one dead giveaway for an uprez rather than a native HD encode, the facial details are waxy even while the contrast and detail are quite

sharp on background. But they also are in the 576i PAL transfer on Second Sight so I believe this is not a native 1080p master. I was hoping it would be because these things sometimes signal a forthcoming Blu-ray. But this, which is a Sony property, along with Universal's *The Exile* are just sitting in the vaults biding their time until perhaps everyone just forgets they're there.

TCM USA broadcast an excellent high quality transfer of *The Exile* maybe five or so years ago, including the alternative ending, but this too seems doomed to remain in back channel p2p hell until somebody at Sony and Universal finally gets their finger out and at least issues the titles on VOD. So this leaves us with only *Caught* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman* from Max's American period available on Blu-ray and in reasonable to very good 2k and 4K DCPs respectively.

I had not previously reconciled the ending of this and its double whammy of paroxysms for Joan Bennett's characters as having some parallels with "Bab's" role also as a mother in *Sans Lendemain* .10 years earlier. It's the imprisonment of family duty which leads both women to a fatal climax.



The second last sequence of *Reckless*, shows Bennett weeping copiously onto the dying Mason's hair (right), yet she is still so inhibited by her moral rectitude and her enslavement to "propriety" she can't touch or even kiss him. In the last sequence, Bennett still overwhelmed with grief is called to the phone, yet again, by the all-consuming family to attend to the father who has been absent, in fact invisible throughout the picture, like some kind of ghostly, even malevolent superego, or abstracted moral arbiter. Joan's babbling through a wall of tears is entirely for her and for the loss of Mason, and has absolutely nothing to do with her husband or her indifferent family.

This final image is one of the most powerful of domestic and human reality, not only in Max's films but in the movies generally. Having recently come out shaken from a Blu-ray screening of Zvyagintsev's astonishing, icy cold, magisterially terrifying and disturbing *Love/less* from 2017, that should have been a tough call, but Ophuls' vision easily meets and even overtakes Zvyagintsev for sheer power of emotional authority, although any other comparisons between the two films must of necessity be slight. What an incredible transitional film to the last French period, and what a farewell to American cinema!



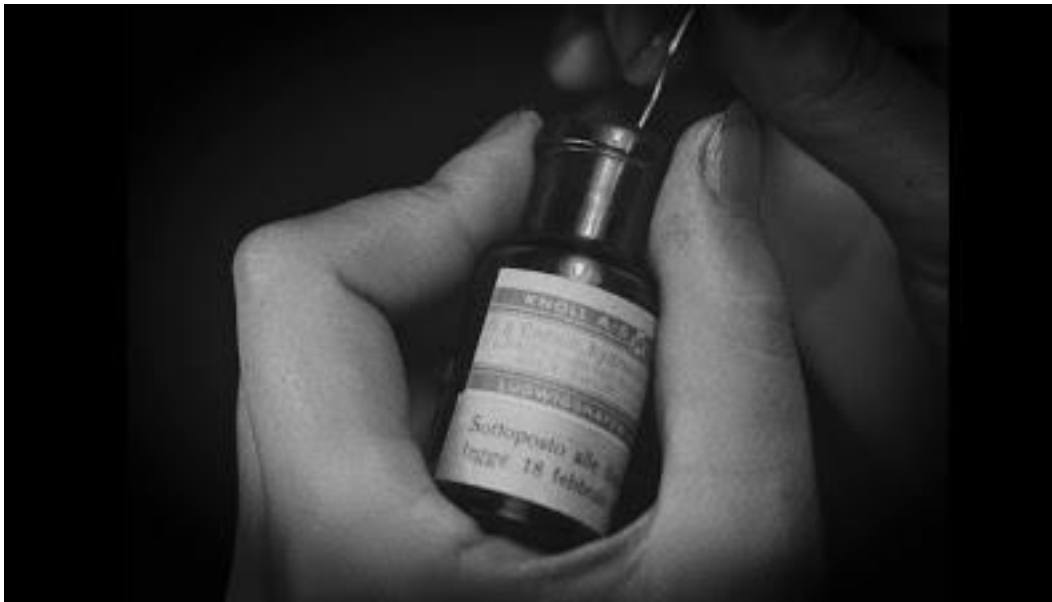
## ROBERTO ROSSELLINI'S WAR TRILOGY



Marina (Maria Michi) is about to administer medically enabled cocaine hydrochloride in Rossellini's wonderful 1945 melodrama *Roma Città Aperta*. Lucky girl!

The screens are from the new Criterion Blu-ray box set of

*Rossellini's War Trilogy* The set largely replicates the contents of the BFI's excellent Blu-ray box from a couple of years ago, including a long video essay on the films and the director at this period of his career by Tag Gallagher, *Into the Future*.



"cocaine hydrochloride"

In a major difference however the transfers are all in various ways superior to the HD masters which the BFI used for its own box, all very good but here I believe, surpassed as they only rarely are by a superb 4K restoration of original elements for *Roma*, and a masterful Bologna level quality 1080p encode by L'Immagine

Ritrovato. The BFI were not able to access this particular 4K in 2013 to encode for their set, owing to copyright and other pettyfoggging entanglements which were absolutely no fault of their own, but which they had to live with.

Among these compromises was a less intensively restored

2K to 1080p master for *Roma*. There is less discrepancy however in the visual quality of the two remaining pictures, *Paisa* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (1948).

So if you are purchasing for the first time take the Criterion

option which is Region A fixed.

I think the films firmly belong in every serious collectors' library.



Last screen saved for the Baddies (above) notably Harry Feist as the apparently gay Gestapo officer, Major Bergmann and his evil lezzo companion in crime, Ingrid Bergmann and his evil lezzo companion in crime, Ingrid (Giovanna Galetti, left). These two gay characters, while admittedly used stereotypically and within the context of a larger than life melodrama provide what to me is the one slightly off note to total endorsement of the movie. I know both Tag and cineaste Jim Quandt make a very fair stab at addressing Rossellini's perceived homophobia within these two characters. Quandt's essay is included in the booklet that comes with both boxsets. They are small players in a bigger picture of course.

Quandt again comes to the party later in defence of Rossellini with his comments on *Journey Into Italy* in the Ingrid Bergman boxset where he points out the fairly reasonable deduction that Ingrid's "uncle", whose house they are trying to sell in Italy after his death, by virtue of his single status and his impeccable taste in decorating the house, must be a homosexual, someone whom Ingrid and certainly Dame George Sanders would have admired.

It seems a reasonable ploy to me and Tag has made the comment often and privately that Rossellini was no bigot when it came to sexualities.

## **ROMA (Alfonso Cuaron, Mexico, 2018)**

We finally watched *Roma* last night and I was surprised and relieved to find I didn't hate it.



I don't think it's the greatest film released in 2018 by a long shot. At least three other films take that prize for me, notably Paul Schrader's *First Reformed*, *Loveless*, which

can bear some comparison with Cuaron's film for dialectically opposite strategies and subject matter, and –



of all people - the Coens' superb six part homage to *How the West was Won*, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*. There are more in my top ten list including Cuaron's, but I have missed too much else to make any more of that.

The Cuaron has been most notably dissected and done over for frying in Richard Brody's New Yorker piece from



I find these vanity exercises in criticism (and I have done a few of my own) pointless and unfair in the failure of duty they owe to what the movie does in fact achieve.

Where Brody laments the highly rehearsed, staged and directed long travelling shots, and the sheer pictorialism of the sequences, I celebrate them for their formal consistency. What Cuaron adds to this formal approach is, whether you like it or even think it's successful, the brightly lit and exposed high end, high rez (6.5K) digital photography which doesn't lend the image much latitude for close ups. Indeed, there are very few of these, the principle one on Cleo's face in the hospital ward for the duration of her ordeal there.

The photography in fact encourages a defocusing from the personal to the 'Scope group spectacle which the Arri Alexa cameras capture with startling, even forensic, and grain free resonance. The only sequence in which he plays meaningfully with darkness alternating with light is in a single frontal group wide shot of the family, with Cleo watching a TV comedy, in which Plato's 'philosophers' cave is referenced with the reflected binary of light and shade from the television screen. Tellingly the predominant sound on the track is the family's laughter.

The moment is pure and distilled.

In fact, the digital photography is probably to me the single issue that sometimes detracts from a complete and more or less unreserved response. I understand his tactic, and I think it relates to what he is actually giving us, an entirely Proustian reverie in which the sheer persistence of highlighted memory itself, ever so jointly unreliable, but also prescient is formally underlined by the almost hyperreal quality of the photography. Sometimes this works superbly, sometimes less so.

this week's edition. As Brody's writing goes I'm rarely in tune, except in some cases with him on Godard. In this case he seems to be attacking Cuaron for not making the film he wanted to see, presumably a personal memoir constructed within a political discourse and a full scale character and contextual development of Yaritza Alparicio's bougeois family maid, Cleo (below).

It probably says as much as I otherwise need to say to simply recount that the second half of the picture intensifies the narrative pulse and strategy by setting up three gut wrenching sequences in a row before the coda.

Here Cuaron's formal tactics pay off in spades and he achieves, with magnificent simplicity exactly what he had wanted to do, which is to move us, deeply and profoundly, with the heart of these three sequences. Politics, society, even characterization and class are totally outside consideration here, for all the resonances that inevitably bounce off the centrality of the maid, Cleo to the material. But the sequences all achieve in their own right reality, and absolute value in the cumulative impact. And the film ends. Forcefully and totally rooted in the remembered past. As present.

Cuaron has not needed or wanted to make a grand metaphysical statement, or some quasi-60s Left revival commentary on corrupt 70s Mexican politics and the immersion of the CIA in the whole dirty regime. He is starting with the Proustian madeleine, in this piece the boiled eggs, which Cleo sublimely and effortlessly taps and spreads into the children's plates. Everything else is subordinate to the sheer overwhelming power of memory, and pleasure.

*Roma* is not necessarily the greatest work of this year or any other year but it doesn't need to be. It attempts to express a formal presentation of an artist's memory of a year in his childhood, a time when everything changed. This is something much more modest and in the end far more satisfying than the big gestural pictures. And he moves us, very deeply.

I cannot ask any more from the movies than that. In a year of heartlessly if expertly made, hollow dreck this film towers above most of it.

## S

LE SAMOURAI (Jean-Pierre Melville, France, 1967)Alain Delon's hand, *Le Samourai*

Criterion's new Blu-ray of perhaps many fans' favorite Melville picture, *Le Samourai* (1967) comes to us as a sort of mixed blessing.

The new 1080p encode is taken from quite an old master for Criterion's now prehistoric DVD, released way back in 2005. Criterion consciously dodged a bullet here for the Blu and avoided having anything to do with Pathé's relatively recent 4K restoration of *Le Samourai* from 2012. For those who don't already follow these things, the Pathé 4K and subsequent French Blu is one of a number of Pathé restorations which were finished and completely

wrecked (there's no other word for it) with excessive filtering and DVNR (digital noise removal) in the grading and mastering process.

In other words it was a waxy, over-scrubbed image with virtually no fine definition or grain management, or deep shadow detail. Pathé tried to make amends with a Blu-ray re-jig from a slightly less DVNR'ed master in late 2012 but both versions are hopelessly compromised by the extremely poorly executed 4K scan itself and the woeful grading on that - performed as so many of these fuckups were and still are by the French Post House Lab. Eclair.



Alain Delon, *Le Samourai*

So Criterion has gone back to a reliable but less than ideal source from 2005. It had no alternative, certainly given the enormous expense of mastering a new 4K, as Pathé is the sole copyright owner and Criterion would never recoup the expense. The transfer has a couple of issues which I will comment on without getting too technical.

The new color timings and grading is, like their 2005 DVD understandably, far more "neutral" in temp and less blue in tone than the original DVD release of the movie from 2002 on René Chateau video (which was also English subbed.) Overall I think the René Chateau's color temperature and cooler blue edge is more accurate to the original 35mm prints.



Alain Delon, pet yellow canary, *Le Samourai*

And god knows Henri Decaë and Melville himself are on the record over and over about how they wanted to execute a virtually "desaturated" color film as though it were black and white. They may even have gone to the extent of "flashing" the negative before exposure and filming. The experiment in paler contrast is even more pronounced in their photography for *L'Armée des Ombres* (France, 1969) which had a very successful Blu-ray release on StudioCanal.

The cooler blue temp which Decaë favored is also

apparent on the exemplary Studio Canal Blu-ray of *Le Cercle Rouge* (1970). And not surprisingly the blue tone is correctly replicated on the otherwise atrocious Pathe 4K of *Le Samourai* from 2012.

So here's a good but not definitive new Blu of a major French title. I guess Criterion made the wise choice to do it now or never, in line with their ongoing program of revisiting all of their old DVD only titles in the HD format. And despite what I think is a too "neutral" color spectrum, it delivers a very nice viewing experience.

SANS LENDEMAIN (Max Ophuls, France, 1939) & YOSHIWARA (Max Ophuls, France, 1937)





The four screens (above) are from Gaumont's gorgeous new Blu-ray of *Sans Lendemain* from 1939, from a 2K restoration made in 2016. The screens show Edwige Feuillère as "Babs" and Georges Rigaud as Georges, as well as one of Bab's regulars at La Sirène where she does

nude dancing to Allan Gray's amazing hotcha score.

The last six screens (below) are from Max's almost unknown *Yoshiwara* from 1937, another of the three Gaumont Ophuls rescue-retros, this one completed with CNC in 2017.









In Max's very loose Butterfly adaptation/variation, Michiko Tanaka plays the lead as Kohana, Pierre Richard-Willm does the "Pinkerton" part as Serge, and the great Sessue Hayakawa is Ysamo, "a Coolie".

These two movies, plus an equally beautiful new 2K of Max's last film in France before the war, *De Mayerling a Sarajevo*, form a sublime trio, being half his 30s pre-war

French output. Sadly for Anglophone viewers the discs are not English subtitled, but only with français Hard-of-hearing titles (descriptive).

Perhaps, one day, a British label or even an American one might pick these up. They are Max Ophüls (below), after all, or doesn't that matter anymore?

## Paul Schrader



Paul Schrader

Paul Schrader's career, as one of the so called 70s Brat generation began in 1974 with his first screenplay, *The Yakuza*. This was eventually directed, in a plausible but uninflected fashion, by Sydney Pollack. If ever you need an object lesson in differences of approach and expression through *mise-en-scène*, it would be instructive to spend a weekend re-imagining *The Yakuza* as directed by Schrader himself.

Far closer to Schrader's heart in spirit and in expressive lyricism, the comparably baroque Scorsese directed *Taxi Driver* (1976). It's a film of bejeweled, chromium rainy nights in hell which has its own Scorsesian spin on masculinities, revenge and violence, after the Vietnam War. A kind of blithe irony downplays the lead's psychopathy in the climax in favour of its own operatic lyricism (and a great Bernard Hermann score).



*Blue Collar*

Schrader's directorial career begins with a totally accomplished debut, *Blue Collar* in 1978 on which he nearly killed himself taming the huge, coke-addled ego of comedian Richard Pryor. The movie was produced without interference and on a low budget by Universal. It has not been adequately seen or received anything like widespread acclaim but for all too rare Schrader scholars

like Brad Stevens, who contributes a fine and lucid booklet essay to the superb Brit Indicator label's Blu-ray, which was released at the beginning of this year. Schrader, as is happily his wont nowadays contributes a feature commentary track which, while as discursive as his commentaries always are, is completely riveting and full of insights into the process, the industry, his own life and

background and the whole schtick of becoming a director.

I have recently binged through another four of his pictures from the period to 1992 and *Light Sleeper*, by-passing for reasons of time two exceptional films, *American Gigolo* (1980) and *Mishima* (1985). I am not reviewing *Gigolo* until

Paramount gets around, if ever to replacing their atrocious Blu-ray of this with a transfer worthy of the film.



*Hardcore*

After making *Blue Collar* Schrader moved straight into autobiographical territory with *Hardcore* (1979) in which he managed to again tame a by then profoundly alcoholic George C Scott into a fine performance in a part seemingly lifted from Wayne's role in Ford's *The Seachers*. Having learnt his lesson in expending too much time and energy on one actor, with Pryor the year before, Schrader was able to rely on Scott to bring his own considerable experience to play not only on performance, but blocking, staging, framing and timing. The movie is more schizophrenic than any of his others, and while I have a lot of time for it, Schrader himself is not happy with the film.

One objection he maintains is the extremely bright lighting that the majors (in this case Columbia) were asking their

directors to use in that decade's feature film aesthetic as television was beating down the movies' popularity. So he and DP Michael Chapman are obliged to mega light cheap motel rooms, tiny sex-on-premises booths, bordellos, private snuff film screening rooms, and worse in what seems like a 3-strip Technicolor flood of arc lamps. Schrader complains long and hard as he also does about the producer imposed "happy" ending (which is in fact parallel to Debby being returned with Wayne in *The Searchers*) where he notes his own preference for open and ambiguous endings, in this case one in which it's discovered Scott's daughter has died months before he even searches her out. The disc is a slightly older Twilight Time Blu-ray and comes from Grover Crisp's team at Sony so as expected PQ and quality are superb.



*Cat People*

*Cat People* from 1982 is ostensibly a remake of Tourneur's masterpiece for RKO and Val Lewton in 1942. The screenplay credit for De Witt Bodeen is retained although Schrader's hands are all over the material. This is the second, after *American Gigolo*, of the four luxe-designed and dressed of his so called "Highly Polished

Apple" films (the next two were *Mishima* and *The Comfort of Strangers*, 1990). Schrader lays on super-saturated color, plus high contrast photography by John Bailey again, a big, big Giorgio Moroder/David Bowie score, all using a good budget from producer Jerry Bruckheimer.



*Cat People*





*The Comfort of Strangers*

The second most recently released disc is the semi missing-in-action Italian/UK/USA production of *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990). From a completely amazing

novel by Ian McEwan-to draft by Harold Pinter-to final screenplay by Schrader



*The Comfort of Strangers*

As the director himself describes this four hander, he had two layers of style and meaning upon which he could add a third. McEwan's novel has an entirely different socio-economic context for the Chris Walken-Helen Mirren couple, and explores sexualities there through both class and the eyeglass of the ultimate irreconcilability of men and women. Pinter's own text as always explores how men and women keep each other apart by talking.

Schrader adds to this boiling pot of Freud and Leviticus, homosexuality as the more or less unspoken third element. The text is a four hander and as in his other three "De Luxe/polished apple" films, we have the ultimate tendency to deep contrast lighting, artificial, gorgeously staged settings with painted backdrops and highly concentrated locations shot mostly in close and two shot.



*The Comfort of Strangers*

Once again Schrader does a feature length commentary, this one even more discursive than usual (we're all getting older). But it's worth playing at least once if only for the hilarious early description of the production genesis. Here Schrader informs us that Angelo Rizzoli, both a major figure in Italian cinema and a consummate crook was, as a friend of Berlusconi, out of jail yet again after going in for (the usual) fraud charges. Hearing this, Schrader made a beeline for Rizzoli in Rome and did an obviously

successful pitch which got the film made.

For reasons that may or may not have to do with copyright, *Comfort* has had far too little distribution. I think it's one of his best movies and the trio of *metteurs-en-scène* engaged in its deliverance creates a movie in which he has rendered Venice more like Istanbul to extend the boundaries of suggestion and reference.



*The Comfort of Strangers*

Chris Walken was his one problem early, in his accustomed two-week rehearsal prior to shooting. Schrader had admired Walken since *The Deer Hunter* and wanted him to play the older male lead. Schrader requested he do an upper class Italian gentleman. But his demeanor and accent initially were more Joe Pesci out of New York-Italian than Schrader wanted, so he had to explain this to Walken who was mortified to discover his readings were not going well. Schrader suggested he

should take a few days off and cast his mind around for an "Italian upper class poof who had been educated in London". It worked, and two days later Walken was ready for filming.

The new BFI Blu-ray of *The Comfort of Strangers* is a thing of great beauty. Again it has a full length director's commentary and a transfer that has obviously gone back to O-neg and first gen 35mm fine grain. If I have any

technical criticism it's a slight tendency of the upper mask (from 1.85 standard widescreen ratio) to chop heads in medium two shots on about half a dozen shots, all exteriors of Rupert Everett and Natasha Richardson

(together above), who incidentally were, and are photographed as, two of the most gorgeous creatures to walk the face of the earth.



*Light Sleeper*

Finally, a new Blu-ray released only in Australia to date by current rights holder StudioCanal of Schrader's 1992 masterpiece, *Light Sleeper*. I like the transfer very much, and it's great to have the picture in Blu format but I keep having the feeling a little more time, money and technical skill from StudioCanal might have delivered something even more pristine and with even better grain rez to Ed Lachman's superb night time photography. But I really

can't complain about something I never expected to see the light of day in a release as good as this. The Oz disc is a good deal for foreign buyers if StudioCanal does not end up releasing this in other territories, although it is forced Region B, like the BFI release of *The Comfort of Strangers*. All other releases in this review are Region Free.

### THE SEA WOLF (Michael Curtiz, USA, 1941)



John Garfield, Ida Lupino, *The Sea Wolf*

Two couples. George Leach (John Garfield) with the sole female onboard Jack London's scavenger ship, the

"Ghost", Ruth Brewster (Ida Lupino). Below the other major couple, captain "Wolf" Larsen, played with

commanding intelligence by Eddie G Robinson, and his interlocutor Humphrey van Weyden played by Brit

newcomer to Hollywood Alexander Knox.



Alexander Knox, Edward G Robinson, *The Sea Wolf*

The latter sequence comes up around 47 minutes into Michael Curtiz' movie of Jack London's *The Sea Wolf* from 1941, now restored to its original release date length of 100 minutes for the first time since 1947. And it handsomely delivers most of the meat in London's novel with an intelligent if slightly bowdlerized screen adaptation by Robert Rossen.

There is one very clumsy edit at the 46-minute mark in a crucial scene from half profile two shot to fully seated two shot seen in the second screen which flags at least one of apparently several big cuts Warners made pre-release to any overtly political dialogue that might have been inferred to refer directly to fascism and events in Europe at the very peak of Hollywood's still self-imposed silence on the dictatorships, even after Britain declared war, so keen was it to protect its markets.

That all came to an end soon after this picture was released with Pearl Harbor. Rossen's adaptation at first struck me as somewhat vignettish, as though he were parsing Jack London's prose into a sequence of layouts and reveals. Lineally if you will. Curtiz in 1941 was in full mastery of the studio machinery, and he seems to have taken complete visual control of these sequential vignettes for each scene of the act, along with the fantastic score from Korngold (his best I now believe) with its sophisticated use of leitmotifs to cue characters and incident. (my favorite leitmotif, the harmonica arpeggio for "freedom.")

Thus Curtiz tends to begin each of the screenplay's and score's "marks" as it were with wide two, three or group shots and pushes Sol Polito's camera into a dolly to close-in and personalize the dialogue and exchange. Initially this

## **SENSO (Luchino Visconti, Italy, 1954)**

A new brand 4K restoration of *Senso* from StudioCanal has appeared for a Film Forum season in NYC.

The older HD which Criterion released as a Blu-ray

looked to me like not much more than crepuscular stylistic ornamentation but in fact it's a steady use of camera grammar in position, framing, lighting and changing POV that serves the material to a Tee.

The censorship of a lot of the fascist related dialogue at Warners' directions to Rossen is regrettable but the images leave no doubt about Jack London's textual ideas in visual form. The Wolf's library with its impressive ubermensch collection of everything important in early 20th century thought from Darwin to Nietzsche is dovetailed into a superb reading by Alexander Knox of his big scene, standing in for the author with line readings of such grace, subtlety and near selflessness that compel us to listen to him while we watch Eddie, a master class in actor and reactor.

Apart from the sheer pleasure of seeing such a sequence realized so perfectly and with such force it's a complete blast to watch two such totally different actors in style come together like this at the peak of their game.

The new Warner Archive Blu-ray comes to us from a just recently discovered 35mm nitrate original full length fine grain which was thought missing for the last 40 plus years. Warner has held off ever reissuing *The Sea Wolf* because the only sources for missing material from the existing 1947 86 minute recut were 16mm dupes. The image is literally pearlescent with absolutely glowing whites, blacks and contrast, and with a slightly dusky edge to gray that only nitrate could produce.

One of the year's best rediscoveries and discs.

several years ago is hideous, thin with no gamma, pushed, artificial looking color, but worst no depth or filmic quality. This has been a devil of a movie to get the deluxe treatment. I am hoping now, despite a few moments of



Bologna Ritrovato style urine soaked whites in this, the rest of it looks very good. This is one of the old Commie's best movies, his career effectively ending meaningfully for me with *Vaghe Stelle dell'Orsa* (Sandra) in 1965.

It's also the movie with the loveliest real footage of the glorious La Fenice in Venezia, which burnt to the ground not long ago.



### SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS (Stanley Donen, USA 1954)

"A man can't sleep when he sleep with sheep". Johnny Mercer's lyrics, with Matt Mattox, Russ Tamblyn and Tommy Rall (screen below, click on the image to enlarge). The song is "Lonesome Polecat". One of the very greatest numbers in the American Movie Musical done, at Michael Kidd's insistence, in a single four-minute take. They don't

get any better than this, the only thing to come close might be Chuck Walter's Dreyer-esque "Friendly Star" from *Summer Stock* with Judy and Gene Kelly shot in two long takes with a corkscrew crane to an invisible edit in the middle.





The screens above and below come from a great new Warner Archive Blu-ray two disc set of Stanley Donen's *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954.) The title had been a problematic one for decades, even past the point when Warner issued a DVD back in 2005 which added a scrubbed up print of the alternate 1.85:1 widescreen

version. Earlier this year Warner finally found an original inter-positive (first generation) print with virtually no wear or damage and was able to recomposite image quality and stereo sound in what is probably the closest you'll ever get to original Scope 2.55 and true stereo release prints in 1954.



The picture was Metro's first venture into Scope, along with Minnelli's *Brigadoon*, which was filming in an adjacent soundstage. Unfortunately for Donen, Metro very much delegated the production budget for *Seven Brides* to "B" status, despite his pleading to keep the shooting outdoors (at greater expense.) So they enforced studio bound filming with painted backdrops in place of the glorious Montana mountains and landscape.

*Brigadoon* meanwhile was given the full "A" treatment, although Minnelli himself preferred and chose soundstage and painted backdrops over the great outdoors, to say nothing of his fascination with the new and incredibly strange Anscocolor process. I think history relegates Anscocolor to what must have been the most artificial, if not the most outright hideous looking color process in the history of cinema, on the evidence of these two pictures and George Sidney's 3D *Kiss Me Kate*, which does have a fantastic color design that seems to suit Anscocolor's typical color schemes of purples, blues, oranges and kelly green.

This wonderful new Blu-ray edition imports the extras from the 2005 DVD, including a feature length commentary from Stanley Donen which Warner recorded with him back in 2004. I will now counsel all and every film student or undergrad in Film Studies to immediately throw out every text book and lecture note they've ever collected and patiently sit down to play back Donen's commentary track. It's a masterclass in film making, the greatest one could ever hear, and without either effort or self-aggrandisement, Donen's passion for the musical form blows a searchlight through this glorious masterpiece. Donen took to Scope like a duck to water, like Cukor, Preminger, Ray and Fuller at the same time, if only for the simple reason, as he explains it: "I had up to 18 people on the screen at any one time – six brothers, six brides and six town boys, so I needed the widest screen to do it with."

His incomparable, elegant, athletic and graceful mise-en-scène was already well established. It had perhaps

peaked in the musical numbers for *Singin' in the Rain* in 1952, which is co-credited to Donen and Kelly, but for which Donen must take the lion's share of credit. He keeps his takes as long as fluidly possible, all for meaning and grace, and he only cuts on movement to movement, all the better to shine even more of the frame on the beauties of the choreography.

Kidd's choreography for *Seven Brides* is one of the outstanding masterworks of American dance. Donen shoots the Lonesome Polecat (screen above) number in *Seven Brides* in a single take, just a day's work as he calls it, and for the rest his cutting, like Cukor's, remains invisible and seamless. It looks to me he has used a crab dolly for every musical number in the picture. One of his visual signatures is the lithe dolly in, swoop, dolly up, then swoop down and dolly back. It's a gorgeous and incomparable formal structure he gives to Audrey's "How long has this Been Going On" in *Funny Face*, and to Kelly and Charisse in the Broadway Rhythm ballet from *Singin' in the Rain*, to cite just two numbers. His camera movements are even more gorgeous than Minnelli's, which are generally concentrated on the spectacle of static composition, and movement within the decor, like the numbers from *An American in Paris*.

At this point I will stick my neck out and acknowledge Donen as the very greatest director of American Musicals, even greater than Minnelli. Even Donen's stage to film adaptations, like *Pajama Game* for which Warners at least gave him a budget for more extensive location shooting, are perfect movies, because he had a flawless eye for talent, dancers, singers, actors, and for movement. The great French born cinephile Jean-Pierre Coursodon praises Donen to this level, and I salute that recognition. In half a dozen musicals from 1952 to 1960, and a string of other pictures, Donen is unmatched in the cinema for form, grace, the presentation of dance and music in the American Cinema. He turns 95 this year and should also be saluted today as the greatest living film director.

## **SEYMOUR: AN INTRODUCTION (Ethan Hawke, USA, 2014)**

"I never dreamt that, with my own two hands. I could touch the sky."

So says Seymour Bernstein in Ethan Hawke's sublime and profoundly affectionate tribute to his guru and music

teacher, the great, modest and humble man, now 86 still living in a one room apartment on the upper west side, so crammed with his piano and music and books it would take centuries to read and rediscover all his secrets after he dies.



*Seymour: An Introduction* was the best film I saw in 2014, and in my limited knowledge of the documentary form, it's the greatest documentary I could ever hope to see in my lifetime. It always comes down to the subject and here, the subject is an untouchably rare human being, the master, the guru, the saint. For Ethan Hawke, and many others who are interspersed through this sublime film is the shocking recognition that although you've never met this man, you know him immediately, and the fact you know him now changes your life.

Ethan's movie ran from Sundance through the Festival circuits in 2014 and since then has had a too sheltered life

on VOD and direct order video. These screens are from a commercial DVD finally available from the States on the IFC Films label. I consider it one of the most treasured discs in my library.

Hawke's empathy and skill as a filmmaker is not only to acquaint us with Seymour Bernstein, but to transport us into the precious and secret realm of the artist whose skill or genius is, as others might put it, to communicate god through his ego. I can't bring myself to use that word meaningfully but it comes close to the rapture he allows me to feel.

## **SIGN OF THE CROSS (Cecil B De Mille, USA, 1932)**

De Mille's very camp *Sign of the Cross* (1932) in which the lions are still winning their fight against the Christians. The picture is far from the most interesting or formally dynamic exercise. Static pictorialism, heroic gestural acting and declamatory line readings were used to convey Victorian

High Historical painting mode. But *Sign of the Cross* takes the prize for De Millian absurdity, with ample help from Mitchell Leisen, in the presentation of censor baiting "depravity".



The three screens (above) here are Laughton as Nero, playing the role as a psychopathic infant, Colbert in the bath of Asses Milk, with peekaboo titties, and the "Lesbian Kiss" in which the demure "Mercia" (Alissa Landi) is unsuccessfully tempted by the wicked "Ancaria" (Joyzelle Joyner, an exotic dancer of the period who gives a far more enthusiastic performance than Landi) in a Lesbian hoochy cooch routine to titillate the orgying dinner guests during the sequence.

The movie-going public have presumably never personally put together at home such perversions as wine-guzzling

and eating grapes while rolling on the floor, and generally fiddling with long haired hookers' tumbling locks while watching a live lesbian dance number in their living room. Thank the metaphorical god for De Mille who makes such things possible in the movies to simple folks like you and I. This is, surely, one of the roles of cinema art.

The movie is one of three De Milles recently released in France on the redoubtable Elephant Blu-ray label. The others are the 1934 *Cleopatra* (already out on Masters of Cinema) and a nice Technicolor transfer of *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942).

## **SINCE YOU WENT AWAY (John Cromwell, USA, 1944)**

These images are from *Since You Went Away* (produced by David O Selznick in 1944). Lovely transfer of one of the most amazingly beautifully photographed movies in American film. Two DPs no less, Lee Garmes and Stanley Cortez. One is tempted to just watch the film again to try and spot who photographed what. The long shadows recur over and over like Damocles' sword throughout this masterpiece which is presented as a wartime "waiting women" propaganda picture.

John Cromwell is named as director but Selznick hired several more to "perfect" the comedy and action sequences including Eddie Cline and Tay Garnett. I think the picture is Selznick's best. Chuck Walters is uncredited as dance director for the amazing air hangar dance sequence (first frame) and almost certainly for the out of left field shots of the two servicemen dancing the jitterbug. Just slipped it in, and never mind the Breen office.









SOME LIKE IT HOT (Billy Wilder, USA, 1959)



Criterion's new BD release of Wilder's great *Some like it Hot*, two screens above) is from a new 4K and the only thing I have to say is, along with the new 4K of *The Apartment*, you will not see anywhere a better and more flawless transfer of late 50s black and white American film-

making. The only disappointment from these two new 4K sourced Blu discs is that they are not released in 4K UHD discs or 4K streaming format. *Some Like it Hot* is eye watering and its audacity and classical comedy balance never abates for me.

### THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE (Robert Siodmak, USA, 1946)



Screens from the latest Kino Lorber Blu-ray of Siodmak's terrific Gothic melodrama-noir, *The Spiral Staircase*, from a new 4K scan taken from a very nice 35mm Fine Grain.

Carlton the Bulldog (above) is probably the most placid character in the show.



The Murderer's eye (above) snatched from a superb slow lap dissolve/montage from the eye to the mind of Helen,

the heroine



More interesting is the ever-pneumatic Rhonda Fleming

(above), an RKO stalwart if ever there was one



Then there is George Brent with Gordon Oliver (above), the latter playing Steve, the warring brother to Kent Smith. If I haven't included any images of the leads, it's because the two players are both virtual ciphers in a puzzle. Kent Smith, surely the most lugubrious leading man in American cinema, and Dorothy Maguire as the "fragile" Helen, here a mere target device for the innumerable plot machinations.

The movie really sings with the secondary, and bit players. Among them Ethel Barrymore, the perpetually mad Elsa Lanchester, James Bell (the doctor from *I Walked with a Zombie*.) And all this lyricism photographed to a chiaroscuro tee by Nick Musuraca, the king of DPs at RKO, along with production design by the great Albert d'Agostino.

The picture was born from a weird coupling of Producer Selznick (and, off the record, Dore Schary) and RKO. With two Chopin and Beethoven piano pieces gracing the opening of the film's score to create mood for the silent movie era setting, the rest of the picture is entirely scored by the unsung hero of RKO and film music everywhere, Roy Webb.

82 minutes of perfectly rendered pleasure with a surface as polished in smooth cinematic strokes as its heart is brittle and sharp. I hate saying this about every Siodmak picture I ever see but it's one of his best. The whole period from 1944 and *Phantom Lady* (and *Cobra Woman*!!) to the end of the 40s and *Criss Cross* is one of the great periods of one of the greatest American directors. The disc is a doozy and a must have.

## **SUMMER STOCK (Charles Walters, USA, 1950)**

Chuck Walters' very best musical is *Summer Stock* (1950). After the intro he shoots the number, "Friendly Star" written by Harry Warren and Mack Gordon, in just two fluid takes and a crane, with only an "invisible" reverse cut from high on the second chorus.

Walters' *mise-en-scène* literally elevates the meanings of the song and the sequence to something out of Carl Dreyer. All this takes place in a Metro musical, not from Arthur Freed's unit, but from Joe Pasternak. There are sublime orchestrations (uncredited) by Conrad Salinger.

Walters and Bob Alton staged and set up the "Get Happy" number in eight shots. Shots four and five are the longest. All but three of the cuts are made to accommodate the full chorus in spots where the marks can't be otherwise

reached without cutting. As for La Gumm, legend has it she put down the vocal track in two takes. Nevertheless she never worked for Metro again. It was only Pasternak and especially Gene who got her this picture and fought to keep her on it. It's a terrific last musical for her great Metro period.

The movie also restores the American musical form through theme and delivery back to a model of almost total joy and purity. It's my number three or four of all time (after *The Band Wagon*, *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*, and *Funny Face*.)

Warner Archive's gorgeous new Blu-ray of *Summer Stock* is taken from a pristine inter-positive, from the three strip Tech negs and is essential for intelligent life.

## SUMMERTIME (David Lean, UK, 1955)



Kate Hepburn with Isa Miranda (above), and in the second screen (below) the archetypal 50s lounge lizard in the form of super-vaselino Rossano Brazzi in David Lean's 1955 *Summertime*, shot entirely in Venice. (Click on the images to enlarge.)

The screens are from a new no frills German Blu-ray from Concorde (Region B only) which uses an unrestored but

quite strong 35mm print, possibly an IB to deliver a nice clean image with good and occasionally brilliant Technicolor hues. The movie is presented in open matte Academy Ratio (1.37:1) which I think is wrong for the mid-fifties period, and the compositions down to the opening credits leave plenty of foot-room as well as headroom which was surely designed to allow for masking to widescreen, be it 1.66 to 1.85.



I am absolutely no great fan of Lean nor any of his pompous, often torturously long-winded male only sagas and the kind of faux "Academicism" to Lean's films that ultimately makes them feel completely middlebrow. He never drops the ball so far that anything goes terribly wrong, just dull. But he also surrounded himself with extremely capable writers and other artists. In this case he's filming from a screenplay by the great Arthur Laurents, who for at least the first hour or so of the picture holds in check Lean's tendency to a very unpleasant kind of misogyny, a trait that totally underlines the pseudo-homosocial bollocks of the interminable Florence of Arabia.

Here it's held back, perhaps ironically, by a gay writer, a man with a much broader stroke than Lean, like Laurents.

But the last thirty minutes feels like a ski ride out of control down a bumpy hill with Kate seeming to debauch her dignity for the sake of the ludicrous Rossano in yet another of Lean's unpleasantly humiliating sequences designed to bring his heroines "back to earth".

For all of this the picture still has a lot to recommend it, not least the gorgeous Technicolor views of mid-fifties Venice, just before it turned into the tourist nightmare hell it is today. And in a few major but far too brief scenes, Isa Miranda plays the hostess of the *pensione* where Kate stays, a performance of such warmth and vigor and experience she warms up Kate's scenes in a way not seen since Kate gave the frame over completely, in a long single take, to Judy Holliday's breakdown scene for Cukor's superb *The Marrying Kind* (1952).



# T

## TAIPEI STORY (Edward Yang, Taiwan, 1985)

Screens are from the superb, 2016 4K restoration of Edward Yang's *Taipei Story* from 1985. The restoration was performed by the Film Foundation in association with Cineteca Bologna and I understand had its premiere at last year's Cinema Ritrovato. At least two other Yang pictures also have undergone substantial restorations for

Criterion Blu-ray in the last couple of years, *Yi Yi* (2000) and *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991.) The 2016 restoration of *Taipei Story* has been a long time coming for Yang's fans but the wait was well worth it after decades of poor quality dupes and inferior TV broadcasts..



Hou Hsiao-hsien, *Taipei Story*

While the first two aforementioned Yangs have been released in Criterion's main Blu-ray line, *Taipei* is part of the label's ongoing World Cinema multi-disc boxset series curated and with intros by Scorsese, from Film Foundation. *Taipei Story* Blu-ray was released this year in Volume 2 of the series and includes the 1965 Turkish film Lutfi Akad's *Law of the Border* with Yilmaz Guney, a seminal Turkish picture long thought missing and finally rescued from a dupe 35mm print and 16mm backups. Other titles in the set: Mario Peixoto's *Limite* (1931), Lino Brocka's *Insiang* (1976), Weerasathakul's *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000) and Erkek Shimabaev's *Revenge* (1989). All I can say is rush out there and buy this. Everything on it is essential.

But most essential to me was Yang's second feature, and the first (to my knowledge) appearance of his friend Hou

Hsiao-hsien, later to become perhaps the most eminent current Taiwanese director, as the male lead. Hou was also a co-writer of the screenplay. I wish he'd done more movies as an actor, he reminds me in many ways, physically especially of Fassbinder in his own performances. (I keep imagining him doing his own nude scenes.)

Yang's film is the most astute and the first recognizable salute to Antonioni by a major new director in what would later become post Antonioni cinema (MA left us in 2007.). In the year the master died Nuri Bilge Ceylan also adopted the Antonioni mantle in his second film *Climates* (2007) delivering a comparable influence and a seamless assimilation of tone. These two directors seem to be the only artists who have done so in a way that amplifies their individual concerns and styles.



Tsai Chin, *Taipei Story*

Thus *Taipei Story* opens with a girl, Chin wandering into an empty apartment to inspect for rent, then a boy, Hou ('Lung' in the movie). The figures part and barely look at each other, chat idly and meaninglessly, and for the first of many times in the movie Chin "arrives" at the centre of the frame and looks out directly to the camera to close the opening sequence. Yang has taken the end of Antonioni's masterpiece *L'Eclisse* as the starting point for his "new cinema" of the same empty spaces and environments that MA montages in that film, but he now returns characters to these empty spaces as the new world of Taipei is undergoing its by now god knows how many umpteenth metamorphoses into a constantly "renewing" city that keeps leaving its inhabitants behind, lost, adrift.

The genius of Yang's film in particular is both the specificity of its protagonists' estrangement from their

earlier world, which is concomitantly even more profoundly universal, and at heart the disease of our age, existential and physical. For years, like most everyone, I would try to wrestle with the movie in a rough, blurry ex VHS from Brit TV but the sheer fogginess and weak detail of the lousy image was a real barrier to its meanings, to say nothing of its considerable formal beauty. I feel ashamed to admit but I had not been looking closely at these Criterion Film Foundation Boxsets until the Yang this year impelled me to break out of my lazy comfort zone. At the moment these boxsets are selling at under \$US80 and I cannot recommend them highly enough.

Hopefully a few cognoscenti picked them up in the last Barnes and Noble Half-Pricer. It's a bit like having Bologna at home, literally, although nothing can quite match those great audiences and the fondly remembered, if gruelling, steam bath syndrome.

## **TELL ME THAT YOU LOVE ME, JUNIE MOON (Otto Preminger, USA, 1970)**



The second last shot, two minutes of it, of *Tell me that you Love me Junie Moon*, a superbly judged, emotionally overwhelming and crystal clear climax unsullied by overacting or sentimentality. One of the greatest howls of pain in all of movies, and from one of Preminger's late unrecognized masterpieces. *Junie Moon* is now released on a marvellous Olive Blu-ray which finally completes Olive's ten year long trawl of the Paramount catalogue for Preminger's seven film deal with that company in the late sixties to early seventies, up to and including the amazing and almost as fine *Such Good Friends* in 1971.

The last two of these pictures were shot for 1.85 or even 1.78 masking, a format Preminger consciously chose for intimacy over his masterful use of Scope and Panavision widescreen for "bigger" projects. And although *Junie Moon* captivated me decades ago on first release, it seemingly disappeared from circulation, be it revival houses or even television although I recorded a disastrously murky pan and scan from TV sometime in the 90s which was unwatchable.

So the film remained unwatched by me, until now. The material from Marjorie Kellogg's counterculture/commune era novel is probably the peak of his work with youth culture and outsider films, starting with *Hurry Sundown* in 1966 and in the process *Junie Moon* seems almost shockingly tender and sweet natured, considering how tight a line Prem walked, along with Penn and Ashby and others on the hippy trail back then, between indulgence (like the abominable *Easy Rider*) and engagement. It was a stroke of the greatest fortune to have a director whose career was so embedded in "objectivity" and "gaze" and whose thematic obsession was primarily trust and the possibility/impossibility of love as Preminger.

We are very lucky indeed to have this string of films from Prem starting with the outright Jackie Gleason Acid Trip picture *Skidoo* in 1968 and ending with the wonderful closing credits song, Suddenly It's all tomorrow to *Such Good Friends* in 1971 with which Dyan Cannon literally appears to be peaking on an acid trip as she takes the kids and herself into Central park to figuratively and literally shed her old life.

Pete Seeger provides the opening and closing music for *Junie Moon* in single take tilt pans of him singing a chorus while wandering through the woods, like a Premingerian

minstrel. At this point some of the film's amazing pedigree also begs to be announced, not least the great DP Boris Kaufmann from the very beginnings of sound cinema, and later in the film the substitution of American master Stanley Cortez, after Kaufmann became ill late in shooting. Among the cast Liza Minnelli whom Preminger so admired from *Charlie Bubbles* in 1967 (directed by Albert Finney, her movie debut), and relatively unknown performers Ken Howard as the fit prone Arthur (seen above in the cap with Liza) and Robert Moore as a wheelchair bound gay man of stoic indomitability and the glue that will hold the three of them together for the film. His is one of the most charming and essential performances by and of a gay man in the cinema. The three are the ultimate outsiders jointly determined to rent a shambling cottage from a ghostly landlady out of a Murnauian past, played by Kay Thompson (!!!!) with ankle length bejewelled gowns, a turban and a foot long cigarette holder.

The picture has been out of circulation for so long now almost nobody remembers seeing it let alone having a view on it. I am putting my neck out and claiming it as totally major Preminger. Notwithstanding the continuously uneven wild audio dialogue track which often loses coherence whenever a player turns his or her back to the camera and the occasional boom mike shadows on medium two shots with solid backgrounds, I don't care frankly because Kaufman could photograph the yellow pages and I'd still watch, and a couple of very attractive bits from what are clearly town locals playing themselves whose own innate kindness to the newcomers underlines the movie's and the text's essential decency. This "coarseness" in the texture gives the film the tone of a Warhol/Morrissey picture of the same period and it all works. The single biggest shock from *Junie Moon* is that it, like his underrated *Fallen Angel* from 1945 is essentially concerned with love and trust, an even more core thematic element for Preminger than culpability or so called innocence.

That the movie begins and ends with such an embedded tone of tenderness and compassion from Seeger and all that passes in between is almost unique in Preminger's work, and it tells me we need to be looking again, very hard at every last one of his late pictures.

Essential.

### THE THIRD SEX (Veit Harlan, West Germany, 1957)



"Marcel André" (above) as "Lolita" playing her peekaboo male/female witcheroo drag act at a then Hamburg 50s gay bar, the Three Fans, in Veit Harlan's wonderful 1957 cautionary tale of the perils of adolescent boy crushes, and the concomitant evils of avant-garde art and music, *The Third Sex*. AKA *Bewildered Youth*, or in its original German title homage to the great Richard Oswald's 1919 pioneering gay blackmail silent, *Anders als du und ich*.

According to the proprietor of the underground gay bar in this little miracle of a picture, Lolita has just "finished in Paris". Perhaps Paris has just finished with her (him). She looks more like a truck driver than a dragster, even for the

Ru Paul stable.

While the movie doesn't display much of Harlan's originality or the *mise-en-scène* more apparent in his wartime domestic Agfacolor melodramas like *Opfergang*, he does end this sequence with a long lap dissolve from Lolita's chiaroscuro-ed face to a pretty wild expressionist arts soirée at seducer-of-youth, Dr Boris Winkler's (below) salon where we're treated to the cinema's first demo of musique concrète, verse libre poetry readings, some very bad abstract art, and a couple of Hamburg rentboys in saten underpants doing Greco-Roman wrestling.

Essential cinephilia.



### TOO LATE FOR TEARS (Byron Haskin, USA, 1949)

*Too Late for Tears* (1949) was the second Noir directed by Byron Haskin with the iconic blonde Noir *Femme Fatale d'Occasion*, Lizbeth Scott, and effectively her last true noir. Scott would go on to do several more movies, some of them distinguished including Dwan's *Silver Lode* (1954),

Wyler's *The Detective* (1950) and a weakly written Brit Noir from Terence Fisher *Stolen Face* (1952) which was one of the first in a series of quota quickie Brit ripoffs from the genre with at least one "over the hill" (older) American star in the lead to secure US distribution.



Lizbeth Scott, *Too Late for Tears*

But *Too Late* is a fitting climax for Lizbeth's career. Playing one of the most ruthless femmes fatales of the forties, in a role that springs from a domestic past of life in

the "Middle class Poor", Scott's character seizes the extraordinary opportunity from literally falling into a large wad of cash, to realize her dreams of wealth, while



disposing of man after man on the way to a life of Riley. Scott was never a "big" actor with a wide range, but she did a great deal with what range she had, and her vocal delivery teamed with a poignant smile to frown face and peekaboo hairstyle delivered her a legion of loyal fans which perseveres to this day. I am one of them, and I would have to say her lesbianism, which was ruthlessly exploited by the early 50s smut rag *Confidential* possibly did her as many inadvertent favors as it did other similarly slandered actors like George Nader, Rock Hudson, Rory Calhoun and so many more with a kind of notoriety that actually enhanced their status, especially to fans of Noir.

The movie itself while not one of the strongest in the noir canon, comes late in the cycle, and in a year in which it had to compete with masterpieces like *Criss Cross*, *The Reckless Moment*, *Caught*, *He Walked by Night* and others. What makes it stand out is Lizabeth Scott herself, in her last major Noir performance, and the way in which an occasionally ropey screenplay is morphed into full scale tragedy from the all too rare but extremely interesting "domestic noir" of suburban family conflicts, and the relatively flatly lit, shallow depth photography of movies like this and *Pitfall* (Andre De Toth, 1948).



Don DeFore, Lizabeth Scott, *Too Late for Tears*

Scott's initial "redemption" by the discovery of the bag full of cash is hard for an audience not to share. In fact, the snare is so strong by the time Don DeFore's character turns up as the brother of her first husband, the sketchy

and frankly underwritten part is barely enough to bring us on side. Yet. This is also the movie in which the sublime Dan Duryea, perhaps the most complex and enjoyable villain in all of Noir is brought spectacularly undone.



Dan Duryea, Lizabeth Scott, *Too Late for Tears*

The resurrection of this title from a total Public Domain hell black hole is almost as interesting a story as the scenario

itself. Up to 2016, all copies of the picture circulated in atrociously weak rips from 16mm and even rarer TV

screenings. Indeed, most prints had either no opening credits or bodgied up ones, with virtually no shadow detail or clean audio track. Eddie Muller's Noir Foundation located two original dupe nitrate positive prints in France (where the movie is titled "*la Tigresse*") and a fine grain acetate 35 print of the 1955 reissue, titled *Killer Bait*.

From these elements the Noir Foundation and UCLA performed a 2K restoration of the title right down to

recreating the credits and rotoscoping them in original typeface over the reissue print's otherwise intact opening night-time car sequence. The result is a remarkable revival, displaying a picture that is almost entirely bathed in dark and shadow with very few short sequences shot in daylight. The viewing experience of the new 2K on Kino Lorber Blu-ray from early 2017 is revelatory and commanding

## **TOUCHEZ-PAS AU GRISBI (Jacques Becker, 1954)**

Screens below are from Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au Grisbi* released in 1954 and now reissued by Studio Canal on a spanking new super glossy Blu-ray. The movie comes around half way through Becker's too brief career. His first feature, *Dernier âtout* came out in 1943 during the Occupation and his last film, *Le Trou (The Hole)* was released in 1960. Becker remains one of the unsung

heroes of French cinema, an artist who began his career as Assistant Director with Renoir in the thirties until *La Marseillaise* in 1938 when Becker appears to have had some kind of rupture with Renoir. He went on to start his own career as a writer and director during wartime after a year spent in a German Occupation Prisoner of war camp.



Becker's 13 or so feature films, beginning in 1943 run through the post war, pre-Nouvelle Vague era to his death in 1960, shortly after that movement began. Becker was one of a handful of "old school" directors, like Ophuls, Melville, Cocteau, Bresson and Renoir himself who remained in favor with the New Wave, unlike their

detested "Tradition de Qualité" colleagues. Indeed Becker's 1949 romantic comedy, *Rendezvous à Juillet* contains a virtual compendium of Left Bank iconics which would set the tone for future Vague-ists - rebellious middle class youth, sixth Arrondissement jazz dives, existentialism and a subdued but audible critique of the Gaullist establishment.



My personal pick of Becker's movies is *Touchez-pas au Grisbi* (*Don't Touch the Loot*, 1954) a gangster picture in the style and mould of other post Noir French gangster movies from the period like Dassin's *Du Rififi Chez les Hommes* (1956), and Henri Decoin's hugely entertaining *Razzia sur la Chnouf* (1955) which also stars Gabin and Lino Ventura in similar parts to *Grisbi*. The screens above show, alternately Max (Gabin) and his trophy butch "protege" Marco (Michel Jourdan) at the bar of their niteclub home away from home, bathed in the gorgeous super luxe white lighting style of DP Pierre Montazel who photographs all the studio interiors with comparable flooding of whites, creams and erased shadow in classic "Tradition de Qualité" luxury style. In the second screen Gabin, now cast into blackness and in the same frame of moral implication as Marco and the drug syndicate kingpin Pierrot (Paul Frankeur) torturing "Fifi" the gay snitch (Daniel Cauchy) in one of the movies shock jolts into high contrast deep shadow Noir lighting and layering.

Thus the film itself parlays its thematic movement back and forth from old to new in light and shade as the screenplay shows the old gang unravelling, and with it potentially the deep pact of honor between Max and Riton (Rene Dary) over the totemic "Grisbi". The movie is as much a meditation on the passing of batons from old to new, and also the passing of honor and morality, like some other genre pictures in a sense farewelling their own generic style, and stars, like Miinnelli's masterpiece, *The Band Wagon* with Astaire, and the Ranown westerns of

Boetticher and Randolph Scott.

Becker's movie to me ranks as the premier mid-fifties part for Gabin, along with his producer role in Renoir's sublime *French Can Can*, and perhaps even the more complex role. *Grisbi*'s denouement involves a brilliant night time heist sequence with Max's ultimate loyalty to Riton put to the test. It would not be too much of a spoiler to reveal that Max behaves with honor. The movie is breathtakingly paced and structured and displays a remarkable manipulation of dual visual stylization.

Indeed, if only for the studio production design and photography *Grisbi* represents one of the high points of 50s Tradition de Qualité "look" with low contrast, highly lit glossy surfaces and textures, blended depth and minimal layering. Ophuls and his DP Christian Matras would employ a similar look in two of his black and white films before the Eastmancolor and Scope *Lola Montès*. But like Ophuls, Becker takes his material way, way past the superficial glamour of the Tradition of Quality ambience.

The movie has been restored and released on Blu-ray by Studio Canal, along with new releases of *Le Trou* which by word of mouth is a superior new encode to the two-year old Japanese JVC Blu-ray, and a second new Blu of *Casque d'Or* (1952) which may or may not be the same encode as the original Canal Blu disc from circa 2010. All titles are Region B fixed.

**TRANSIT (Christian Petzold, Germany, 2018)**



*Transit* is both mesmerizing and terrifying. The sheer power of the outdoor Scope photography and the glorious depth of color and air is constantly in play with ideas of confinement, refuge, escape, identity and loss.

I was very wary of Petzold's previous *Phoenix* but I will now watch it again very closely. I think *Transit*, as last year's film, is my contender for best in 2018 along with

Schrader's *First Reformed*. Both films throb with the ache of impending disaster and both directors seem to me to be incredibly alive to the defining issues of our lifetime and perhaps even the time left for mankind.



Filming the 1942 source novel with all its Val D'Hiver holocaust round-up narratives in present or near future time was an act of genius, and it amplifies the horror. You don't have to do anything these days other than turn on the camera to film Paris and capture a state of imminent

danger and terror. The constant presence of armed military police and armed guards everywhere never lets you forget you are in a state of ongoing emergency.

Stunning film. Absolutely stunning.

## THE TREE OF LIFE (Terrence Malick, USA 2011)



All these screens come from the second half of the new 188 minute extended cut of Malick's *The Tree of Life* which has just come out through Criterion on a double Blu-

ray disc edition with the Theatrical cut. That version was released in what was then (and still is) a reference quality Blu disc by Fox a few years back.



Having only ever seen this cut, like everyone else, I decided my disappointment with the film which bordered on intense dislike, needed to be fed with a re-viewing of the new work.

So far so good. The new color grading done by Malick and

his DP, Emmanuel Lubezki is slightly warmer and gives the image, which was already completely mind blowing, greater depth while maintaining the lightness and gorgeous felicity of the original color palette. If ever Criterion could have committed to doing a title in the new UHD 4K format this should have been it.





So I achieved one viewing of it earlier today, broken up by three interruptions, and I will give it one more without any interruptions later. I feel far more at ease these days with

what Stratton used to call his loathed "wobble cam". I have never had major problems anyway with hand held photography, definitely not in the hands of skilled artists like these.



I think in fact Lubezki and Malick have literally unchained the camera from the formal tyranny of the tripod, and in the process the film ceases to indulge or even permit more or less straight lines. Conceptually and visually every shot tilts, travels, shifts its angle and never leads anywhere except to allow itself to exist. The formal purposefulness of

this cubism is most profound I think in the first half of the movie in which autobiographical narrative is less prominent than the second half, and unlike my original viewing back in 2013 or so, I was engaged far more by the movie.



The second half turns into a different key, which is why I've taken screens from it. And it's in this last 90 minutes that the extra material - all of it I believe extensions of existing characters and locations - takes the picture deeper into personal conflicts. But it also gets much more churchy. I could smell this coming a mile off, but ignored it until, in the end that became impossible. Just a minute before the final credits, in the last multi-time, multi-generational sequence in which everyone is brought

together in some supernatural framework in a transcendental beach scene, Jessica Chastain's "wife/mother" character picks up one of her children and whispers to the sky "I offer up my child to you".

And so it all comes crashing down. I will defer to David Denby, of all people, a critic I don't usually read or seek out. In reviewing the original movie back in 2011 he says, in effect: "I have never met any woman in my life who has or would ever say they offer their child to any god." I think his meaning is clear and I concur absolutely.



Thus the entire edifice, so powerfully wrought and felt, for me is ultimately abandoned to something as meretricious and as offensive as this hideous biblical level of subjugation to some fucking theocratic drivle.

The movie has its admirers, and sadly or not I remain not one of them. I will watch it one more time, for the record, and put it away, probably forever

## TROIS PLACES POUR LE 26 (Jacques Demy, France, 1988)

**Note: David's thoughts often provoked spirited discussions on Facebook. After this note was published one such exchange which took place is reproduced below.**

Yves Montand and a flotilla of chorus boys in a shot looking more like something from Fassbinder's *Querelle* than a clip from a musical with Yves, playing himself, within a movie about Yves, with Yves also playing himself for the movie. Demy's film is probably the giddiest work of self-referentiality in his whole oeuvre and it serves as both the inspiration for the film's best moments, and the picture's near downfall from its less successful stretches of fancy.



The palimpsest of invocations in this last film is undermined I fear by the assignment of entirely new personae to the three leads. Far more successful both narratively and formally is *Une Chambre en Ville* in 1982 with Darrieux maintaining the physical and spiritual link to *Les Demoiselles* and beyond it, back to the sublime beginnings of Demy's cinema with *Lola*.

This 2K restoration from 2012 is in all respects bar one very fine, but the transfer has a milky bias to the otherwise brilliant color design, always a giveaway for yet another slightly misguided color transfer from Lab Eclair. In motion the image is very attractive but in more competent hands it would have been brilliant. The Blu-ray disc was released by Pathé earlier this year and includes English subs. It's also region free. As far as I am aware this is the first appearance of the movie on disc anywhere.

The movie is for me and at this time a work for further research. Much as I found great slabs of it unconvincing or even unengaging the execution of the numbers and the drama itself is beautifully handled. I was in tears by the end. The director would have been one of the greats in French cinema had he lived longer. Except that he already was for his first half-a-dozen movies.

**Michael Campi responded:** Good to see such a thoughtful mention of this rather neglected film. The father-daughter incest theme appears in Demy's *PEAU D'ANE* some years earlier as well. Some years ago there was a French set of the complete works of Demy with English

The movie is - for those who might not already have

guessed - Demy's farewell to cinema in 1988, *Trois Places pour le 26*, two years before he died from complications arising from AIDS in 1990. The typically contorted narrative here involves incestuous sex of all things with his own daughter Marion (Mathilda May), from a long-ago relationship with old flame Marie-Helene (Francoise Fabian.) This is as far as Demy will permit transgression, although the near all-male chorus lends the film an unmistakable background referencing Tom of Finland out of Michel Legrand's uneven but occasionally charming score.

subtitles. *TROIS PLACES* was in there in a good transfer. The box is a treasure trove as well for including a nice copy of *LOLA* before its most recent controversial restoration and *LES PARAPLUIES ...* in its original 1.66

ratio before the restorers decided to slice the top and bottom of the images to render their current 1.85 version which now appears inescapably on every disc release. A year or so later there followed a Varda set but because her output has been so vast over sixty years, it's not as comprehensive.

**David Hare replied:** The older French set you mention still has a good DVD transfer of *Lola* made prior to the Mathieu Demy supervised 2K of *Lola* from 2012 which is an unmitigated disaster. The same horrible, dull, flat, ungraded encode of that is included in the big Criterion Blu-ray "complete" (but not) boxset of a couple of years ago which also didn't include this final picture. (*Trois Places pour le 26*)

**Michael Campi:** Our memories of *LOLA* in 35mm and reminders courtesy of the older discs are to be cherished. It was tragic to see *LOLA* in that 2012 restoration projected in the piazza in Bologna. Younger people unfamiliar with the film were thrilled by its human qualities. Demy, Anouk, Legrand survived it all but many demerit points for others involved.

**David Hare:** Mathieu was thrown into a den of Lions in Los Angeles when Agnes sent him over to "produce" the new 2K with the LA Post House back then. He handed over control of the grading and remastering to Technicolor in Los Angeles who are responsible for the fuckup that is

now *Lola*. It has to be redone one day but Agnes is very stubborn about these things, as you know. The new *Lola* 2K is so soft and devoid of contrast (a total betrayal of Coutard's photographic style and lighting) you can barely make out any detail in the image now.

## **TROUBLE IN PARADISE (Ernst Lubitsch, USA, 1932)**

From Bologna. If it's heat you're seeking nothing could be clammy than an also jam packed house with people literally lining the walls for the once only screening of a 35mm print of Lubitsch's masterpiece, *Trouble in Paradise* at the devastatingly fiery Arlecchino cinema, which does redeem itself every time with the best projection for both DCP and 35 I've seen in years.

The new print was introduced with the usual UCLA resto credit with extensions to George Lucas and the Film Foundation. While this is the first time I have seen the title in 35mm and in such good shape this print struck me as very much a first pass on an eventually finer end product.

The current print retains a lot of surface tramline scratches and nicks through the first few minutes of reel one as well as a quite few dupey opticals, (no AB rollings) as well as cigarette burns for the reel changes. While these things are of no great concern to me, I would figure they will be dealt with along with stabilisation and further grading and sharpness issues before the movie goes into a deeply hoped for reissue in 4k. The overwhelming applause at the end for the picture from a crowd who in large part had probably just seen it for the first time was one of the most moving experiences I've ever had in the cinema.



# U

## UNDER CAPRICORN (Alfred Hitchcock, UK, 1949)

Rohmer and Chabrol in their wonderful book on Hitchcock, which ends at *The Wrong Man* in 1957, are in the text below contradicting Andre Bazin's analysis of Hitch's continuous long take experiment with the filming of *Rope* in 1948 as simply an alternative to traditional montage, in the way Bazin suggests it simply re-arrives at the conventional setups and "champs-contrechamps" POVs of the travelling shots. I think they very astutely pick out both the correct nature of Hitchcock and Cardiff's completely liberating travellings in *Under Capricorn* as well as providing the key to this critically underrated movie, thus:

*"The majestic beauty of Under Capricorn foreshadows that of I Confess in 1953. These films are related not only by theme but by rhythm, both having been conceived as a slow but sure march punctuated by abrupt halts. Though neither scorns to jangle our nerves, the very baldness of these effects purifies them, makes them more fascinating than really terrifying. At the highest point of the emotion in which they grip us they nevertheless permit us the distance necessary for the contemplation of great works of art. This distance needed only be taken once. The profundity of this work having been brought out, it will reflect light on the other films."*

I will only add to this typically poetic homage from les gars that even after Hitch himself complained so long and loudly of his disappointment with the "failure" of *Under Capricorn*, commercially, artistically and critically, there is no ignoring the astonishing steps he takes with this new

adventure in long takes and travellings in which the camera and the movie itself is liberated not only from the conventions of the narrative, and conventional dramatic tics, to express a pure physical lyricism which extends the imagination of the film to another plane, beyond even the fourth wall of the camera, the audience and the screen itself. In *Rope* Hitch's long takes (and the trick invisible cuts with the camera travelling behind furniture, etc) were all executed in the service of presenting a drama in real time, an exercise itself which denies to a large extent very much more meaning to the camera as visual signifier. In *Capricorn* Cardiff's first travellings, after several very long takes, all static, of four minutes or more are used for the copious (and tiresome) exposition. With Sam's/Wilding's first visit to see his cousin the governor Cedric Gibbons having his bath, a narrative turning point, Cardiff's camera glides behind and with Sam through not one but two doorways and apparently solid walls which appear to dissolve into the depths of Government House.

The shock of this, after so much prosaic and fundamentally routine setup literally breaks the movie's mood and only just prepares the viewer for the next of several outstandingly beautiful series of travelling and counter travelling tracks, dollies and cranes – all of them great lyrical flights with the power of the privileged moment, which enable us to glide as well over under and into the Flusky house and the characters imprisoned within it.



SCREEN 1



Not only does Cardiff's camera visually correlate Henrietta's addiction and confinement, it creates another completely open frame of reference for viewing and interpretation which is clearly promising the possibility of liberation and freedom. That outcome will only be delivered in fact by Henrietta's Confession which itself is played in the last staggering eight minute take of the (Screen 2) Bergman drugged but conscious seeing the steps Margaret Leighton as Milly has been taking to drive her crazy. And (Screen 3) Cotton in a shock of natural

picture.

Screens above (1) are Bergman as Henrietta Flusky and Michael Wilding as Charles Adare, in the first mirror shot after he's freeing her from the house.

radically different tone and color of the first NTSC DVD disc released by Image back around 2000, and a French Universal PAL DVD released in 2005. Both look like they

have used a weak and fairly



SCREEN 2

auburn hair as the "emancipist" Flusky. The new Kino Lorber Blu-ray is derived from a new 4K scan, although the disc is not clear about provenance. I have included a couple of screens at the end of the review to show the

damaged Eastman element, with color and black levels that have been obviously manipulated for too much contrast and indeed the limitations of the old DVD medium.



SCREEN 3

The new Kino Lorber displays a strong, coherent and ultimately very satisfying image, with ideal, maximum white levels (Like the sort coming from projection of a Tech IB print thrown with a carbon arc lamp.) And a neutral color tone which is consistent and correct for skin

tones. There is hardly any trace of three strip Technicolor fringing and shrinkage based frame instability which plagued both DVD renditions. The new 4K image is not what I was expecting but it has to be said I've simply never seen a 35mm, or even a decent copy of *Under Capricorn*



IMAGE DISC, NTSC, 2000

until now. The bonus items on the disc are not yet explored by me but if Kino had more faith in sales the title might have benefited from a fuller supplemented package of critical opinion.

But, thanks to the new disc, one of Hitch's most maligned pictures is rescued for a new generation of enthusiasts. This might be one of the most important "rediscovery" titles of the year for movie lovers in fact.

# V

## Jean Vigo (1)



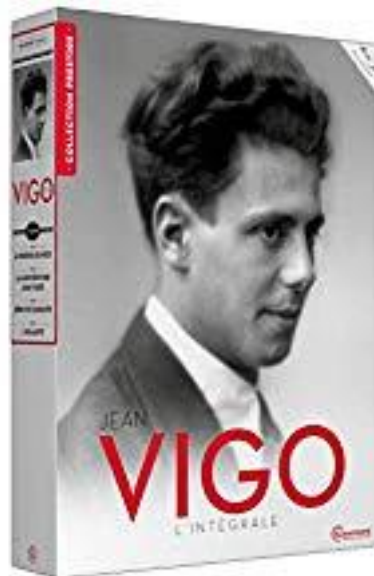
The screen above was the first format in which I bought the complete Vigo in DVD, a French "integrale coffret"

back in the early 2000s. Subsequently Gaumont and then Artificial Eye and Criterion re-issued the films in Blu-ray.



When I bought the Criterion single Blu disc (above) a few years ago and also downloaded a custom re-edit of the older version of *L'Atalante* which differs slightly from the authorised version, I made the difficult decision to discard

the older French DVD boxset. I did this with literally hundreds, if not thousands, of DVDs which were being steadily replaced. I have regretted it ever since because the box was so beautiful, and it also contained a small booklet.



But the new Blu-ray box from Gaumont (above) looks like a worthy successor. Some of us seem to be at the point

where we're tracking our life through these things.

## Jean Vigo (2)



Jean Vigo

From Bologna. I wonder if Vigo himself might be smiling from the Pantheon today at the sublime opportunity I had to watch Bernard Eisenschitz's completely breathtaking new 4k restoration of *Zero de Conduite* on the very morning the Oz papers announced the imminent police pinch of His Eminence George ("the Cockroach") Pell for kiddy fiddling? Even if Jean is not technically with us he got me smiling from the first minute and it hasn't left my face yet.

This resto has a couple of previously unseen shots including a silhouette of the Principal sticking a hypodermic into his bum, and what seems like a previously unseen and staggering dialogue between the queer kid and his schoolmate lover talking in bed about the coming revolt. *Zero* may not quite have the totally full bodied feature length formal power of *L'Atalante* which is in itself one of the titans of pantheon cinema, but it, like the wonderful short *Natation de Jean Taris* also restored and screening with *Zero* this morning crowned such a perfect day as today.

The relentless heat was given a short reprieve with a couple of welcome showers during the day that saw couples with

toddlers and folks with dogs in equal numbers out in the shade of lovely local parks like the September 4, which sits felicitously behind the Cineteca complex just down from our apartment and the other main cinemas. It was here yesterday that we saw the 90 odd minute mega reel of outtakes for Vigo's sublime *L'Atalante* curated and narrated in French by Bernard Eisenschitz.

The material is compelling and life affirming to those of us who regard the movie as something so unique in the history of cinema. Most of the outtake footage is without sound, but dame fortune left the audio intact for four single complete takes, each shot from a different angle and POV without any cutting of the young street peddler with his enchanting junk wares who sings Maurice Jaubert's crazy Little "Peddler's Complaint".

It's seeing material like this with a near packed house that makes the whole Bologna enterprise worthwhile, notwithstanding the cruel late June heat, which one is tempted to call *Le chaleur qui ne Passe jamais*, with deference to Nounes, *L'Atalante's* producer.



## VIKTOR UND VIKTORIA (Reinhold Schünzel, Germany, 1933)



Renate Muller as "Viktor" with the sublime Anton Walbrook in Reinhold Schünzel's dazzling pre-Weimar 1933 comedy of gender flexing, and the template for Blake Edwards' great film of the same name (in English). No point in a detailed review as the title is one of six movies in a terrific Blu-ray but un-subtitled boxset released by Studio Hamburg Enterprises under the moniker "50 Years of Murnau Stiftung celebrations".

Other films include only one other Weimar era title released last year in an English friendly Blu disc by MOC, Joe May's *Asphalt* (1929). I confess to finding the picture actually rather insipid, but for the enjoyable spectacle of uniformed and booted Gustav Frohlich (momma's boy

Junior from *Metropolis*) being humiliated in high Weimar BDSM style by dominatrix of the gutters, Else Heller.

I hope somebody thinks about picking this up for English friendly viewers. They might profitably pair it with another comedy from Schünzel who made several more including the amazing costume fantasy *Amphitryon* in 1934, just before he fled Goebbels and Germany to Hollywood.

Attentive viewers may recognize him as an actor, in the part of friendly and charming "Dr Anderson" amongst the Nazi gang hiding out in Rio in *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1946).

## Josef von Sternberg – Three Thoughts on the Criterion Box set

(1) Bad news regarding the Dietrich/Sternberg Criterion boxset coming out today, Tuesday. The dialogue which was cut from a shot in *Shanghai Express* at approx 40 minutes is still cut in the new 1080p transfer for BD.

This problem first cropped up back in the early 90s when the first Laserdisc of the title appeared ca. 94, then on all subsequent VHS and DVD incarnations in both PAL and NTSC formats the missing dialogue is here and is in the middle of the 40 second odd single take:

*CHANG. Then why does he wear that uniform?*

*LILY. Why do you wear that uniform then?*

*LENARD. I'm going to see my sister and I don't want her to know I've been discharged. It would cause too much shame and sorrow.*

*LILY. HE is going to visit his sister and he doesn't want*

*her to know about his disgrace.*

This includes an additional two lines in which Chang and Lenard speak French before she translates for Chang. Here is [a link](#) to the shot as it has existed since 94 with the snip as it appeared then and - alas - now.

Surely someone at Universal, if not Criterion as well, could have foreseen this issue which has now been public knowledge (I made it so in 1994) for 24 fucking years.

Or is this a reflection of the relatively low esteem which Criterion now holds for deep catalogue titles for provenance and element harvest, not to mention respect?

Really, really pissed off with this

(2) Now in my grubby little hands the boxset of the year, no, the decade. No, the history of Home Video.





(3) The Criterion Sternberg/Dietrich box has been a long time coming and it was worth the wait. The movies have all had relatively recent high quality 4K scans and mastering from elements that in all but one case were well preserved and close to original nitrate sources. The exception is not unexpectedly *Morocco* (1930) for which

the closest Universal and Criterion could get to O-neg was a dupe safety (acetate 35mm) from UCLA. This is softer and less detailed than the others for fine grain but it was still worth doing it at this 2K level, simply because we will never see it again in its original 1930 35mm nitrate, first gen glory.



Von Sternberg &amp; Dietrich

The box is lifeblood for old timers, going back to the 60s when we first saw these masterpieces, and Sternberg's career was kick-started in serious ways around the world, beginning with the Venice FF in 1961 which included the revelation of Dietrich's personal 35mm nitrate print of *Devil is a Woman*, a title that had not been seen at all since it was unofficially "banned" after complaints from the pre-Franco government of Spain in 1935.

As noted above, another small missing piece of history, still missing is four lines of dialogue in English (and two in French) from a fifteen second splice made to *Shanghai*

*Express*, another victim possibly of complaints from yet another government in its death throes - the Daladier shambles in France before an even greater shambles would take over in 1936 with the Parti Communiste Front Populaire which quickly killed itself off by 1938.

The restoration of these titles, first to 4K, and *Morocco* to 2K and thus to Blu-ray is an act of preservation and commercial risk taking that is immensely satisfying and now typical of the synergy between Archival/Curatorial restoration and commercial availability to collectors, cinephiles and festivals.

## Josef von Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich

Dietrich's engagement with Sternberg becomes so intertwined that by the last two films they made together, she gives the effortless impression (whether it's "actual" or not) of completely controlling the *mise en scene* herself,

with things like minute eye movements, turns of the head or movements of one part of the body in counterpoint to the axis, and she often slightly anticipates the cameraman and/or the edit, pan and even the lighting cue.



Dietrich as Helen Faraday

In the case of *Blonde Venus* (1932) her Helen Faraday character is orchestrated through the several classic soap opera "fallen woman" genre roles so typical of pre-code Hollywood to allow for her to assume and then discard several personae: The nymph, the housewife, Helen Faraday, the Blonde Venus, the fallen woman, the newly

pansexual artist, Helen Jones in Paris wearing men's white tie and tails with a bevy of SM chorus girls in black lingerie for backup, and finally mother in the superbly dovetailed "happy ending" by scriptwriter Jules Furthmann which is presented to look like it's all been manipulated by Dickie Moore!



...a bevy of SM chorus girls in black lingerie for backup...





...and finally mother

The whole film and indeed the six films are a single exercise not only in the relationship of the two and the nature of image, fetish and desire (which they are) but a

statement of "what is cinema" in terms of the actor as a supreme auteur, not the least in creating the "image" of "reality".

### **VOYAGE À TRAVERS LE CINEMA FRANÇAIS (Bertrand Tavernier, France, 2016)**



*Dernier Atout (Jacques Becker)*

Bertrand Tavernier begins his majestic survey of French Cinema, *Voyage à travers le Cinema Français* with a childhood memory of seeing his very first movie during the German Occupation at age 6. The movie was a crime thriller with night time car chases and excitable men and gorgeous dames and was the very first film indeed by Jacques Becker, *Dernier Atout*. As it turns out Bertrand's lifelong love affair with the movies thus began with a director who would become one of the very greatest in French cinematic patrimony. Becker becomes the first of

Bertrand's superbly crafted and lovingly detailed "réparations", as one might call them, to restore so many missing faces to this immensely moving and gratifying work of love, passion and vast scholarship.

Beginning with Becker, a director who died too young at 53 in 1960, but whose dozen plus movies can now be recognized and enjoyed as the work of a pantheon director, after decades of neglect



*Edouard et Caroline*, (Jacques Becker)

Bertrand devotes the first 30 minutes of this 3 hour 13 minute documentary to Becker, working his way through Becker's work in all their diversity of genre and subject matter. Indeed, there are no clips only from the period Technicolor farce *Arsène Lupin*, presumably due to copyright. As luck and more than a little fortune would have it, this particular directorial resurrection coincides with a substantial reissue on restored Blu-rays with English subtitling of two large swathes of Becker's 1950s films, most of them in fact.

They include the sublime Ealing-esque domestic comedy, *Edouard et Caroline*, a movie about a dress, a moderately unhappy quarrelling couple and a silly society party, made with indescribable grace, beauty and pacing worthy of Hawks; a reissue of the earlier 4K restoration of the already famous *Casque d'Or*, a film that out-Renoirs what everyone thought Renoir was going to become: and the knockout Gabin/Lino Ventura Noir, photographed by go to ultra-Luxe DP Pierre Montazel, *Touchez-pas au Grisbi* from 1954. It ends with Becker's last film in 1960, *Le Trou*.



*Casque d'Or* (Jacques Becker)

Every one of these is a masterpiece in my opinion, and the titles from Studio Canal are complemented by several more technically first rate Blu-ray releases from Gaumont of *Antoine et Antoinette*, the 1949 *Anxious Youth*/Left Bank Jazz Rebellion picture *Rendez-vous de Juillet*, Becker's amazing second feature a massively diverse yet

intimate ensemble piece, *Goupi Mains Rouge*, the contemporary melodrama, *Falbalas (Paris Frills)* with Micheline Presle, a Fernandel comedy *Ali Baba* and a rebound project from an ailing Max Ophuls, *Montparnasse 19*. This is a hell of a body of work.



Romy Schneider *Max et les Ferrailleurs* (Claude Sautet)

After celebrating Becker's work, Bertrand moves the show into a series of long meditations and discussions, each 30 minutes or so, on Gabin, Renoir, Edmond T. Gréville, Truffaut and the new Wave and Melville, during which he makes a compelling argument for *Léon Morin, Prêtre* as one of the director's best pictures. And to end this *Voyage*

for the time being, Claude Sautet, a director he clearly loves, a response I share. It amazes me that Sautet's *Max et les Ferrailleurs* still does not have any English subtitled Home video release, some sort of indication of the extremely spotty availability of so much French material.



Erich Von Stroheim, Mireille Balin, *Macao, L'Enfer du jeu*

In the course of this Homeric journey Bertrand pauses to segue and riff on subjects like actors, songs, writers, musicians and all the other bits and pieces of movies which actually comprise so much of our experiences in the cinema, outside of a lifetime of unashamed auteurist worship. He illustrates for example the frequent presence of von Stroheim before the occupation in a number of late 30s movies, including one as vastly entertaining as Delannoy's dawn-of-war thriller-comedy-romance, *Macao L'Enfer du Jeu* from 1939.

The picture stars the sublime Mireille Balin and opens with

a travelling shot across a bombing zone somewhere in China during the Sino-Japanese conflict of the late 30s, past a tattered poster whimsically inviting passers-by to visit "scenic Japan", until the camera comes to land on one of the cinema's great leg art shots in the form of Balin sewing a major tear in her stocking while sitting on a cattle crate, wearing her trademark polka dot cravat while bombs fly and people run all around her.

The picture adds to this pure ultimate 1939 cast Roland Toutain as male love interest, and Erich von Stroheim who was taken out of the movie by the Vichy censors to be

recut using Pierre Renoir for the part during the Occupation era screenings. Sessue Hayakawa, fresh from Ophuls' 1938 *Yoshiwara*, also made in Paris, is here too, playing the shady arms trader who does "business" with Erich, a double agent who spends the rest of his spare time curating a fetishist's wardrobe of women's novelty clothes, shoes and boots, with which he seduces his willing or unwilling targets, including the now imperiled Mireille into BDSM submission with alternate rough stuff and soft millinery.

The film is literally as good as it sounds and Delannoy directed several other remarkable works, despite his relegation to the pits of the "Tradition de Qualité" as dictated by the New Wave *Politique des Auteurs*. *L'Eternel Retour* from Cocteau's source material is another such Delannoy picture and aside from its considerable beauty as a fine Cocteau adaptation it's a movie that pioneered the angora sweater for a generation of fashionable French teenagers.

This diversion leads Bertrand to the one unavoidably grave subject of the Occupation, Renoir's apparent complicity with it. At this point he produces two typed letters from Renoir to the head of Vichy operations dated March 1940. In the letters, Renoir openly and - sad to say - gleefully cozies up with the Vichy regime using some of the most disgusting anti-semitic language to come out of the era. After supporting the new regime's intentions to "clean up" the industry he offers to assist in any way to help rid the business of these "vermin" and "undesirables" who still riddle the landscape.

The joy totally leaves Tavernier's face while he talks about

this, and he ends the section on a sobering note leaving us, each and every one, to arrive at whatever feelings we may now have about Renoir himself, and the whole dirty business in France for the duration. Clearly there's no joy here, but it had to be done.

Bertrand's movie then picks up steam to encompass and link, discuss and analyze, reflect and illuminate in a breadth of scale with such intimate and razor sharp perception as one could ever hope to see, read or view. Bertrand's whole life has been defined temporally and personally by French cinema, and his own contributions to it are also no small matter.

This titanic, 3 hours plus, documentary has already had screenings around the festival and revival house circuits and makes a debut on an English subtitled Blu-ray from Cohen and Sony in the USA on November 21. My own viewings have been from the French Gaumont BD. At the end of the show is an "advance" title card suggesting the contents of a second series, and that very series is now re-screening as we speak on French Ciné Classic in Europe in the form of eight 54 minute episodes.

I was able to obtain a Standard Def TV capture of these eight programs, with literally dozens of themes like Gremillon, Duvivier and the first pre-war expat influences in French movies, to the 30s wave including Pabst, Siodmak and Ophuls. Among what I've seen so far the Gremillon/Ophuls/Decoin episode is almost unbearably sublime.



Lila Kedrova, *Razzia sur le schnouf* (Henri Decoin)

Bertrand's resurrection of Henri Decoin, from the graveyard of the *Politique's* "Trad de Qualité", is also a major and overdue exercise in cinema history reclamation.

It starts with Decoin's completely astonishing companion piece to Becker's 1954 *Grisbi*, the absolutely amazing *Razzia sur la Chnouf* (1955) which shares Becker's

casting of Gabin, Lino Ventura and even the former trophy hunk, Michel Jourdan who was passed between the two rival gangsters in the Becker. All are recast here as different characters in another, blacker, and far more violent essay in the mechanics of drugs and gang warfare.

Suffice to say that *Razzia* completely defies expectations of even French crime pictures of the era like Dassin's good if overrated *Riffifi*, with depictions of bluntly effective killing, torture and drug addiction. The title loosely translates to "Raid on the Smack", which gives you some idea, and the whole totally seedy milieu is again photographed in the highest possible Luxe high contrast long lens depth by master DP Pierre Montazel, fresh from

shooting *Grisbi*, right down to a jaw breaking sequence in a black dope fiend cafe where an all-male, all-black clientele descend on full gone heroin junkie "Lea" - a stunningly good Lila Kedrova - who succumbs to a circle gang rape on the nite-club floor after getting her fix from the bar manager.

Gabin looks on all of this impassively from the bar. The movie has to be seen to be believed. So does much more of Decoin.

As does all of Tavernier's great work.



Jean Gabin "looks on impassively",  
*Razzia sur le schnouf* (Henri Decoin)

I hope the first disc, with tranche one of the *Journey*, reaches the widest audience through disc and broadcast and even, theatrical screenings. The second tranche of which I have watched less than three hours so far has left

me shell-shocked, to say nothing of testing the extremely weak limits of my French language "skills".

Release of the year?





# W

## WHO'LL STOP THE RAIN (Karel Reisz, USA, 1978)



Tuesday Weld, Nick Nolte, *Who'll Stop the Rain*

*Who'll Stop the Rain* was issued on a very fine Twilight Time BD much earlier this year and is still in print (the label does runs of 3000 which sometimes sell out quickly.)

I acquired an earlier Blu of this on the French Sldonis label a year or more ago. That transfer unfortunately suggested a less than ideal 35mm source which appeared to be digitally scrubbed to erase both grain and surface emulsion damage, which was then given the usual high frequency "sharpening" process, one which simply creates artefacts, haloes and other awful digital noise that make viewing on a large screen basically unbearable.

The new Twilight Time disc is from another much better source, mastered very nicely with a warmer color temperature, relatively little emulsion damage and a very balanced digital encode. This is typical of the care this label always gives to the materials they use. The movie has a *Blade Runner* link via Jordan Cronenweth as DP, who shot this the year before Scott's movie. The picture gets an added period bump, to share with Wenders and others, in the form of a Jack Nitzsche score.

The expat Brit Karel Reisz made the rousing and off the wall post-Nam picture in 1978, a film whose subject matter

must have scared the literal shit out of then distributor United Artists. Not only were Vietnam War pictures BO poison, unless they were cheer fests like the misguided *The Green Berets* (John Wayne, Ray Kellogg & Mervyn Leroy, USA, 1968) but they were even more untouchable if they fingered one of the major cores (if hidden) of the "secret" war, the massive heroin trade the CIA introduced into the Vietnam scenario from the mid-sixties, a neat little trick which addicted a generation of young poor white and black conscriptees into smack and sent them home doubly or triply crippled, if not in a body bag.

The picture remains probably too tough for most modern audiences, even allowing for the calming manifestations of cinema goddess, Tuesday Weld an actress of supernatural powers to heal the soul, and Nick Nolte in peak pre-convulsive hysteria who wears the bulk of the picture's motivation. The Twilight Time Blu-ray uses a near pristine 35mm source and grading and rez are, as always with this fine label, beyond criticism.

# Y

## YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE (Fritz Lang, USA, 1937) and THE BIG HEAT (Fritz Lang, USA, 1953)



Sylvia Sidney, Henry Fonda, *You Only Live Once*

Two unforgettable death scene climaxes from two of Lang's greatest movies.

Joe (Henry Fonda) kisses his dead wife (Sylvia Sidney) just before he's shot in the back in Lang's second American film, and an outright first tier Lang masterpiece, *You Only Live Once* (1937), now reissued in a fine quality Blu-ray from a restored 35mm element by new kid on the

block label, Classic Flix in the USA.

The next two screens of Dave Bannion (Glenn Ford) and a dying Debby (Gloria Grahame) are from a brilliant, high contrast, sharp as a tack Brit label BD from a superb 4k scan of Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953) out of Sony pictures home vid team under the redoubtable Grover Crisp.



Glenn Ford, *The Big Heat*

Both movies were previously issued in Blu-ray but both show major improvements. *The Big Heat* had a fine release from Twilight Time in the USA barely a couple of years ago, taken from the same 4K remaster. *You Only Live Once* was also given a BD less than two years ago by an Italian label, Eagle Pictures which was completely botched in the disc authoring process by some idiot in the control room who rejigged the picture geometry from the

film's original 1.37:1 aspect ratio to 1.24: pinching the image into a squeezed skinny travesty of the film that is unwatchable. The new Classic Flix has no such problem and the restoration appears similar if not the same to the earlier BD, minus the pinched image. It looks very nice indeed if not at the very top range 4K scans from original nitrate elements of more expensive restorations.



Gloria Grahame, *The Big Heat*

The 35mm source used appears to be a British BFI Archive print down to the opening BBFC censor card. It goes without saying the Blu-ray is yet another essential collector's title from this nifty little label.

Indicator's new disc of *The Big Heat* is from the same 4K as the older Twilight Time but it goes an extra mile or so in attention to fine shadow detail, grain management and overall visual quality. The acid test for these newer discs encoded from 4K masters is how well they uprez on a 4K/HDR screen and system like my own. The answer is brilliantly for *The Big Heat*. Visual improvements in this

over the Twilight Time disc may be incremental to most viewers but they are discernible at 55 inches or over. Indicator at the moment is doing probably the very best transfer work for BD anywhere, in some cases even better than Criterion or Warner MTI, and I think they have taken the 1080p realm to the limits of its technical game. I only wish at least one cinephic label, perhaps Criterion, would make the first dive into 4K/HDR disc releasing.

For any collector who hasn't yet picked up the Twilight Time *The Big Heat* this disc is a no brainer. It's also, like all Indicator titles region free.

# Z

## ZAZA (George Cukor, USA, 1939)



Claudette Colbert (above) plays Zaza (1939) in Cukor's first foray at Paramount since the pre-code days of *One Hour with You* (1931) which he finished for Lubitsch during his own directorial apprenticeship.

If ever a movie could display the chasm between a fledgling director and a master of the medium it's this eight-year gap from Cukor's beginnings to his artistic maturity. Cukor himself complained long and loud to Gavin

Lambert about the censorship of the movie by the Breen Office which removed most of Herbert Marshall's part, but along with Lambert, who commiserates from a well-judged distance in his major interview book, I agree Marshall is the one great weakness of the show. So the reduction of his part frankly makes near zero impact on the dramatic arc in the sense that Zaza's meeting with Marshall's child, prior to the last act, played by a superb 8 year-old actress, Ann E. Todd (not the Ann Todd of Hitchcock's *The Paradine Case*) basically finally tails the "illicit" romance to perfection.

The whole experience of going to Paramount should demonstrate irrevocably to anyone still in doubt the dead hand of the appalling old shiteap, Louis B Mayer at Metro, a studio that slid from interesting up to the Code year of 1934, to deadily dull, and underwritten by a totally hypocritical, nauseating "Family Values" studio style. Metro was, through the 40s, a place where formerly great directors like Borzage and Sternberg with magisterial early careers, came to die.

Meanwhile Cukor got away with several near perfect accommodations, like the movies he made there with Joanie up to 1941. I would suggest a different take on his Hepburn/Tracy pictures there as emblematic of the worst excesses of overly refeeded, turgid middlebrow.

To my mind the wartime Metro period is also Cukor's rock bottom, with the all-time worst Joanies (*Susan and God*) and the absolute worst Hepburn/Tracy (*Keeper of the Flame*, a saccharine boiled down remake of *Kane*

atrociously written by the once great Donald Ogden Stewart).

The one great exception to this torpor is Borzage's totally outrageous *Strange Cargo* from 1940 with Joanie and Gable and the open throated full bore depravity of miscegenation, homosexuality, adultery, murder, and then some, directed with the great hand of compassion by the great Borzo, in one of his last masterpieces.

Which leads us back to *Zaza*. The greatest shock, among several, of this barely seen masterwork, is Colbert's performance and the completely unexpected extension of her range. At one point, Cukor brought in Fanny Brice to help Claudette with her musical numbers, and the influence is palpable.

If the movie resembles or signals forward to anything else in cinema it's Renoir and his 1954 *French Cancan*. In fact

*Zaza*, along with Cukor's 1960 Sophia Loren stunner *Heller in Pink Tights* constitute Cukor's own version of *The Golden Coach*, his two most Renoirian tributes to the imaginative life of the theater. and the centrality to all his movies as auteur of the primacy of "character", of roles, impersonations and identities.

*Zaza* has a pace and energy, very much like Renoir's 1954 picture that could never have taken off on the Metro soundstages. The Paramount production arsenal gave him more than he could ever use for Parisian and theatrical authenticity, down to a Sternbergian level of layered sets, and medium shots which the great Charles Lang shoots with the highest degree of Paramount glam-realism.



Among the peaks of visual style, Edith Head's wardrobe, leaning heavily on the titanic Paramount master costumer, Travis Banton, visible in screen one with one of two incredible feathered gowns, this one white, which Colbert alternates with a similar black gown for the last fifteen minutes of the picture.

In the world of *Zaza* 83 minutes becomes in Cukor's hands and despite the Breen Office, the seemingly perfect duration for one of the great movies about performance, identity, transition, love and regret, all pulled together with music and staging which sits comfortably with Renoir's great *French Cancan* and *The Golden Coach* as one of the primal movies about the life of the theatre.

The screen here was of necessity snatched from Google as this recent Universal Archive DVD VOD disc is challenging my PC and software apps to refuse to un-stretch a forced 16:9 screengrab configuration to the

correct 1.37 Academy Ratio. The source material looks near pristine to me, and I can only recommend viewers and collectors go foraging through US e-tailers for the absolutely breathtaking range of material that has made its way without announcement onto the Universal Vault catalogue.

As a footnote to the Renoir connection, the second last music cue we hear in *Zaza* is the band playing out "Quand l'amour se Meurt" as Colbert walks transversely across backstage, now in her black feathered outfit to peek out at Marshall through the curtains. The moment resonates with the great backstage moment in *French Cancan* when Françoise Arnoul peers at Gabin who is himself peering through the red curtains. The song was of course a Renoir favorite and he gives it to Jeanne Moreau to sing in his middle "episode" of *Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir*. The first time we hear the song in a movie is Dietrich singing it, in mandrag, in the sublime *Morocco*.

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**2011**

The Tree of Life

**2014**

Seymour: An Introduction

**2016**Arrival  
Certain Women  
Kedi  
Ma Vie de Courgette  
Voyage à travers le  
Cinema Français**2017**Babylon Berlin  
Un Beau Soleil Intérieur  
Four Seasons in Havana  
God's Own Country  
Lean on Pete  
Man in an Orange Shirt  
Phantom Thread**2018**First Reformed  
Ladies in Black  
Roma  
Transit

# FEATURING

Budd Boetticher  
John Brahm  
Gil Brealey  
Henri-Georges Clouzot  
George Cukor  
Samuel Fuller and Douglas Sirk

Derek Jarman  
Julien Duvivier  
Ernst Lubitsch  
Anthony Mann  
Jeanne Moreau  
Paul Schrader  
Jean Vigo  
Josef von Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich