

September-October 2019

Video Librarian

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Invisible Hands

★★★1/2

(2018) 75 min. DVD:

\$24.95. First Run

Features (avail. from most distributors).



The horrifying documentary *Invisible Hands* reveals the extent to which child labor—specifically slave labor of kids as young as four years old—is rampant worldwide. Filmmaker Shraysi Tandon bravely confronts multiple situations on several continents where children are forced to work without breaks or sick days, from farm labor in the U.S. to cocoa plantations in Ghana; from underground cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo (for our cell phones), to tobacco fields in Indonesia. Viewers will learn that few protections exist for these helpless young bodies from particularly toxic pesticides (Donald Trump reversed a ban imposed by the Obama administration on several such poisons), and that there are dangerous levels of nicotine in the blood of children who handle tobacco leaves all day. Tandon wants Americans to think long and hard as consumers about who's out there paying a heavy price for our gadgets, candy, and cigarettes. The importance of that consideration multiplies as the film makes clear how corporations such as Nestlé and Unilever put distancing layers of supply chains between

themselves and the international labor market, shielding their reputations from the punishing, exploitative child slavery their profits depend on. A powerful, deeply disturbing documentary, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani's harrowing documentary *The Devil's Miner* (VL-9/06) brilliantly personalizes the story of child labor told in *Invisible Hands*, focusing on two Bolivian brothers, 14-year-old Basilio and 12-year-old Bernardino Vargas, who work in a small silver mine. As reviewer Frank Swietek noted, "the film is largely narrated by the boys, with Basilio taking the lead in describing their impoverished circumstances, fear of mining disasters and lung disease, and hopes for a better future, symbolized by the family's efforts to scrape together funds to finance Basilio's schooling—a goal partially realized by his taking a job in a larger, even more dangerous mine. Exceptionally well-made and deeply affecting, [this is] highly recommended."



Cover Photo: Courtesy of First Run Features

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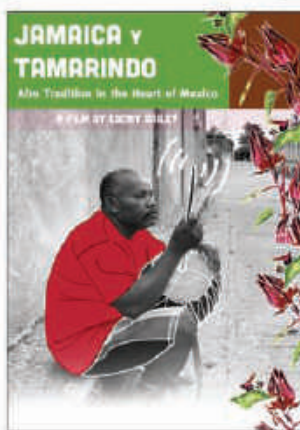
A musical journey that tells the story of Afro-Colombian women singers and their music of resistance, hardship and survival.

70 mins, DVD \$29.95, PPR \$250 UPC: 6-82086-16021-4



A small community in Mexico searches for a sustainable way of life in one of the world's most threatened ecosystems.

95 mins, DVD \$29.95, PPR \$250 UPC: 6-82086-16022-1



This documentary explores African identity in Mexico City. It is an identity that goes beyond the color of one's skin.

23 mins, DVD \$29.95, PPR \$250 UPC: 6-82086-16023-8

Video Newsbriefs

John Waters's "Polyester," Chaplin's "The Circus," Ernst Lubitsch, and More on Criterion Collection's September Slate

The Criterion Collection's September slate kicks off September 3 with a 4K Blu-ray restoration of Marco Bellocchio's provocative 1965 Italian-language debut *Fists in the Pocket* (Blu-ray: \$39.95), which follows a young man who takes drastic measures to rid his grotesquely dysfunctional family of its various afflictions. Coming on September 10 is Ritwik Ghatak's 1960 family tragedy *The Cloud-Capped Star* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), a masterpiece of Bengali cinema that tells the story of a family uprooted by the Partition of India who have come to depend on the eldest daughter, the self-sacrificing Neeta (Supriya Choudhury). Arriving September 17 is Ernst Lubitsch's 1946 final film *Cluny Brown* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), a zany comedy of manners set in England on the cusp of World War II, starring Jennifer Jones as an irrepressible heroine sent to work as a parlor maid at a stuffy country manor. Also slated for September 17 is filth maestro John Waters's 1981 film *Polyester* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), featuring Divine as Baltimore housewife Francine Fishpaw, a heroine blessed with a keen sense of smell, cursed with a troubled family, and relieved by a handsome hunk (Tab Hunter). Scheduled for September 24 is Charlie Chaplin's 1928 final silent era film *The Circus* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), featuring Chaplin's Little Tramp as he flees into a traveling circus and soon becomes the star of the show. Also coming September 24 is a 2K digital restoration of Bill Forsyth's offbeat 1983 small-town fable *Local Hero* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), in which a Texas oil guy (Peter Riegert) is dispatched by his crackpot boss (Burt Lancaster) to a remote seaside village in Scotland with orders to buy out the town for a planned oil refinery.

Ken Burns's Landmark "Country Music" Documentary Series Coming September 17 from PBS

Coinciding with the national broadcast premiere, PBS Distribution will release director and producer Ken Burns's *Country Music* (DVD: 8 discs, \$99.99; Blu-ray: 8 discs, \$129.99) on September 17. In

this new landmark documentary series, Burns chronicles the history of the uniquely American art form of country music, starting from its early days in the 1920s and following up through the mid-1990s while focusing on the personal stories of the fascinating characters who created and shaped the genre. Stars including the Carter Family, Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Johnny Cash, Charley Pride, Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, Garth Brooks, and many more are showcased, and the series also looks at the origins of the genre, including ballads, minstrel music hymns, and the blues, back to the days when it was first recorded and called "hillbilly music." Illustrating the fact that country music was never just one style but a broad American mixture that became a major cultural force, the series also include bonus features such as a behind-the-scenes featurette with additional material gleaned from hours of interviews.



"Be Natural" Documentary on Filmmaker Alice Guy-Blaché Available Now from Kino Lorber

Kino Lorber has newly released *Be Natural: The Untold Story of Alice Guy-Blaché* (DVD: \$29.99). Directed by Pamela B. Green and narrated by Jodie Foster, *Be Natural* is a comprehensive documentary portrait of cinema's first female director, screenwriter, producer, and studio owner, Alice Guy-Blaché, whose innovative and groundbreaking films are only now beginning to be fully appreciated. In a career spanning two decades and two countries, Guy-Blaché wrote, produced, and/or directed 1,000 films, including comedies, Westerns, and dramas, as well as films with still-controversial subject matter related to child and spouse abuse, immigration, anti-Semitism, and female empowerment. Bringing the "Belle Époque" to life using a cutting-edge blend of animation and archival footage, the film also features interviews with filmmakers and actors including the late Agnès Varda, Ava DuVernay, Geena Davis, Julie Taymor, Gillian Armstrong, Ben Kingsley, and Kathleen Turner, as well as historians and archivists including Serge Bromberg and Kevin Brownlow.

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LIL' MONSTERS



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It's time for the Halloween Dance-Off and monster friends Lil' Fangs and Lil' Stitches can't wait to strut their stuff. Together with their zombie and Frankenstein friends they plan a new routine to wow the judges and make Count Dracula proud, it's Lil' Monsters!

"The Halloween Family has a colorful aesthetic that seems right at home in the season of spooky spectacle!"

- Dove.org

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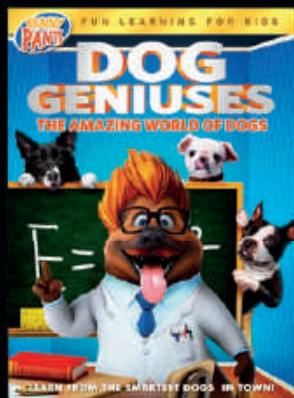
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THE DEAD
COMES TO LIFE



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"Cool for any canine-wannabes
wanting to develop their minds."

-Dove.org



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Books Into Movies

The following films based on books are slated to open during September and October. Movie release dates are subject to change.

Coming in September

It: Chapter Two (Sept. 6) is a sequel to 2017's *It*, both based on horror master Stephen King's 1986 epic coming-of-age phobia drama. Directed by Andy Muschietti, the film stars James McAvoy, Jessica Chastain, and Bill Skarsgård as murderous clown Pennywise.



The Goldfinch (Sept. 13) is based on Donna Tartt's 2013 Pulitzer Prize-winning coming-of-age novel. Directed by John Crowley, the drama stars Ansel Elgort, Oakes Fegley, Nicole Kidman, and Jeffrey Wright.



Coming in October

Jojo Rabbit (Oct. 18) is based on Christine Leunens's 2008 novel *Caging Skies*. Directed by Taika Waititi, the WWII-era black dramedy stars Roman Griffin Davis, Scarlett Johansson, Thomasin McKenzie, and Sam Rockwell.

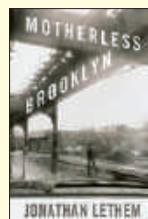


Looking Ahead

Slated for November is **Doctor Sleep**, an adaptation of Stephen King's 2013 follow-up to his 1977 classic *The Shining*. Directed by Mike Flanagan, the film stars Ewan McGregor, Rebecca Ferguson, and Carl Lumbly.



Also coming in November is **Motherless Brooklyn**, based on Jonathan Lethem's 1999 novel about an NYC detective with Tourette's. Directed by and starring Edward Norton, the cast includes Willem Dafoe and Bruce Willis.



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Tens of thousands of titles published **ONLY** on VHS are no longer commercially available. As a library with a significant investment in VHS and a need to make sure that content remains viable, what are your options? Digitizing under US Copyright Section 108 is viable, but expensive and time-consuming.

We started the Academic Libraries Video Trust so libraries can share the time, cost and research about the copyright-related issues associated with this process. The ALVT is a cloud-based content repository, run as a cooperative, that **ANY** library can join.

Unlike a streaming service or a distributor, ALVT provides library-staff access to ready-to-use files for content you already own on VHS, and the ability to share files you've digitized with other libraries that also own the content on VHS.

Visit our site now, at videotrust.org, so you can see our growing database, the group of flagship libraries that helped us get started, and our generous terms of membership.

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Academic Libraries Video Trust

A project of the National Media Market
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Mixed Media features new release information on upcoming video games and TV series on DVD/Blu-ray, as well as notable older titles that are re-priced or new to DVD/Blu-ray.

Video Games

Note: Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) ratings for video games are: E (Everyone), E10+ (Everyone 10+), T (Teen), M (Mature), and RP (Rating Pending). Some titles are not rated until just prior to release date.

Available Now

Astral Chain (Nintendo, Switch: \$59.99, Rated: T). In this third-person action game, players can choose between a male and female character in a police special task force that is up against mysterious, alien-like invaders.

September 1—September 7

NBA 2K20 (2K, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E). The latest entry in this popular basketball simulation series features exceptional graphics and gameplay along with unparalleled player control and customization.

September 8—September 14

Borderlands 3 (2K, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). The beloved first-person shooter-looter franchise returns with an all-new mayhem-fueled adventure in which players step into the shoes of one of four brand new Vault Hunters, each with deep skill trees, abilities, and customization.



Daemon X Machina (Nintendo, Switch: \$59.99, Rated: RP). In this third-person shooter, players suit up in the Arsenal (customizable mechanized flying battle armor) to defend Earth and defeat corrupted A.I.-controlled robots.

Gears 5 (Microsoft, XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). With all-out war descending, Kait Diaz breaks away to uncover her connection to the enemy and discovers the true danger to Sera—herself—in this new third-person action entry in the long-running franchise.



NASCAR Heat 4 (704Games, PS4/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: E). In this racing simulation game, players test their driving skills across three NASCAR national series and an Xtreme Dirt Tour, with an enhanced career mode.



NHL 20 (EA Sports, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E10+). This latest iteration of the hockey simulation game features over 45 new shot types that make every attack on the ice a threat.

September 15—September 21

The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening (Nintendo, Switch: \$59.99, Rated: E). Players explore a reimagined Koholint Island as Link in this third-person action-RPG, a reboot of the classic 1993 Gameboy game.

September 22—September 28

FIFA 20 (EA Sports, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: RP). This latest entry in the hit soccer simulation series includes both professional play and an all-new authentic street football mode.

The Surge 2 (Focus Home Interactive, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this third-person sci-fi action-RPG sequel, players explore the sprawling, devastated city of Jericho, where they face imposing foes.



September 29—October 5

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Breakpoint (Ubisoft, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this third-person shooter, players become a Ghost—an Elite US Special Operations soldier—fighting your brothers who have turned against you.

October 6—October 12

GRID (THQ Nordic, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E). Capturing intense moment-to-moment racing action, this addition to the touring series returns with an all-new experience as players define their legacies in the motorsport world.

Indivisible (505 Games, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: E10+). In this 2D action-platforming RPG featuring hand drawn-art, Ajna sets out on a globe-spanning journey to discover the truth behind

her mysterious powers, gaining new abilities along the way.

Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince (Modus, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$29.99, Rated: RP). This beloved 2.5D action-puzzle adventure series returns as the three heroes—Amadeus the Wizard, Pontius the Knight, and Zoya the Thief—are sent on a quest to retrieve the troubled young Prince Selius.



October 20—October 26

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (Activision, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this latest entry in the famed first-person action-shooter series, players engage in breathtaking covert operations throughout iconic European cities and volatile expanses of the Middle East.

MediEvil (Sony, PS4: \$29.99, Rated: T). Players step into the bones of Sir Daniel Fortesque, a slightly-inept (and long dead) knight accidentally resurrected by his greatest enemy in this reboot of the classic third-person action-adventure game.

The Outer Worlds (Private Division, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this first-person RPG set in Halcyon—a colony at the edge of the galaxy owned and operated by a corporate board—players must fight the alien monsters left behind when the terraforming didn't exactly go according to plan.



WWE 2K20 (2K, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: T). The popular wrestling game returns with a massive roster of WWE's and NXT's most popular superstars and legends.

October 27—November 2

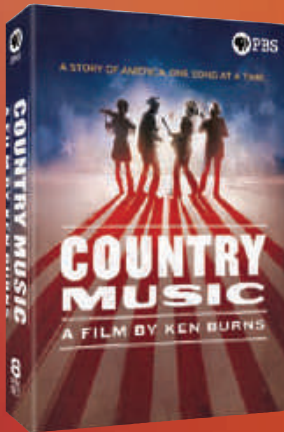
Luigi's Mansion 3 (Nintendo, Switch: \$59.99, Rated: E). In this third-person action-adventure game, Luigi embarks on a dream vacation with Mario and friends after receiving an invitation to a luxurious hotel—but his dream quickly becomes a nightmare.

TV on DVD/Blu-ray

Available Now

American Gods: Season Two (Lionsgate,

New Releases from PBS



COUNTRY MUSIC, an eight-part, 16-hour documentary series from Ken Burns, chronicles the history of a uniquely American art form, focusing on the biographies of the fascinating characters who created it. The film follows the evolution of country music from its diverse and humble origins as it emerged, by the end of the twentieth century, into a worldwide phenomenon.



PRESS is a sharp, fast-paced series from acclaimed writer Mike Bartlett (*Doctor Foster*) that rips aside the front pages of rival newspapers to reveal the lives, loves, and lies of a dynamic group of journalists. Under relentless pressure from the 24-hour news cycle, these passionate professionals go to extraordinary lengths to uncover stories and get them into print. They hold the powerful to account and turn ordinary people's lives into headlines, but can they face up to the truth about themselves?



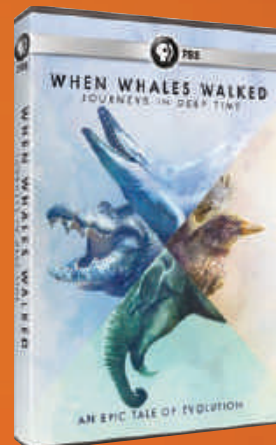
NOVA explores the awesome beauty of the planets in this breathtaking five-part series. Special effects and extraordinary footage captured by space probes provide an up-close look at Saturn's 45,000-mile-wide rings, Mars' towering ancient waterfalls, and Neptune's supersonic winds. Along the way, NOVA reveals how each of these spectacular worlds has shaped our own planet: Earth.



With breathtaking CGI, beautiful landscape footage, and some of the world's most important astronomical artifacts, **Ancient Skies** looks at the universe through the eyes of our ancestors, charting our changing view of the cosmos throughout history. Cutting-edge animation showcases our ever-evolving understanding of how the universe works and our place in an ever-expanding cosmos.



THE MAGICAL LAND OF OZ travels the Australian continent, from the land's highest snow peaks to the depths of the frigid and wild southern seas, entertaining and deepening our understanding of how the natural world is made up of not just unique species, but distinct individuals, whose lives are far from predictable.



Discover the evolutionary secrets of some of the world's most majestic creatures. From voracious crocodiles and acrobatic birds to stupendous whales and majestic elephants, **When Whales Walked** follows scientists on a global adventure as they follow clues from fossil records and change what we thought we knew about the evolution of iconic beasts.



PBS | Educational Media

Find these and other DVDs at Education.Shop.PBS.org!

The PBS logo is a registered trademark of the Public Broadcasting Service and is used with permission.

DVD or Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$34.98 each). This 2019 second season of the Starz-aired series based on the novel by Neil Gaiman focuses on the battle between ancient deities and contemporary concepts and stars Ricky Whittle, Emily Browning, Crispin Glover, and Orlando Jones.

The Blacklist: The Complete Sixth Season (Sony, DVD: 5 discs, \$45.99; Blu-ray: 5 discs, \$55.99). The 2019 sixth season of the crime drama starring James Spader in a Golden Globe-nominated role reveals that FBI fugitive turned fixer “Red Reddington” (Spader) is actually an impostor.

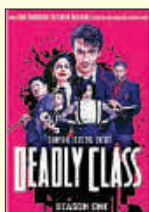


Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season Six (Universal, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98). Marking the shift from Fox to NBC, this 2019 sixth season of the Golden Globe-winning NYC-set police comedy series stars Andy Samberg, Stephanie Beatriz, Terry Crews, and Andre Braugher.

Chicago Fire: Season Seven (Universal, DVD: 6 discs, \$44.98). This 2018-19 seventh season of the Dick Wolf series centering on the workers of Firehouse 51 features guest appearances by Monica Raymund and Rahm Emanuel.

Chicago Med: Season Four (Universal, DVD: 6 discs, \$44.98). Nick Gehlfuss, Torrey DeVitto, S. Epatha Merkerson, and Oliver Platt star in this 2018-19 fourth season of the drama series set at Gaffney Chicago Medical Center.

Deadly Class: Season One (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Aired on Syfy, this 2018-19 debut season of the 1980s-set coming-of-age series centered on the adventures of a teen who attends an academy for assassins features Benedict Wong, Taylor Hickson, Henry Rollins, and Ice-T.



The Flash: The Complete Fifth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$44.99). An adult daughter from the future is the least of worries for superhuman crime scene investigator The Flash (Grant Gustin) in this 2018-19 fifth season of the DC Comics action series.

Homeland: The Complete Seventh Season (Fox, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98). Claire

Danes and Mandy Patinkin star in this 2018 seventh season of the gripping Showtime-aired political drama series.

The Hot Zone: The Complete First Season (Fox, DVD: 2 discs, \$37.99). Inspired by real-life events, this 2019 miniseries based on Richard Preston's 1994 nonfiction book about the origins of Ebola stars Julianna Margulies, Noah Emmerich, Topher Grace, Liam Cunningham, and James D'Arcy.



Into the Badlands: The Complete Third Season (Lionsgate, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$44.99). This 2018-19 third season marks the final episodes of the *wuxia* action-adventure series starring Daniel Wu, Emily Beecham, Nick Frost, and Lorraine Toussaint.

Mayans M.C.: The Complete First Season (Fox, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.98). This 2018 debut season of the motorcycle club drama series—a sequel of sorts to *Sons of Anarchy*—stars JD Pardo, Sarah Bolger, and Edward James Olmos.



A Million Little Things: The Complete First Season (Buena Vista, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.99). Boston friends rally around each other when one of them dies by suicide in this 2018-19 debut season starring David Giuntoli, Romany Malco, and Allison Miller.

Mr. Mercedes: Season 2 (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$26.99). This 2018 sophomore season of the crime drama based on the serial killer novel trilogy by Stephen King stars Brendan Gleeson, Harry Treadaway, and Holland Taylor.

NCIS Los Angeles: Season 10 (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$53.90). Chris O'Donnell, LL Cool J, Nia Long, Linda Hunt, and Eric Christian Olsen are back in this 2018-19 10th season of the military police procedural drama series.

New Amsterdam: Season One (Universal, DVD: 6 discs, \$39.95). Ryan Eggold, Janet Montgomery, and Tyler Labine star in this 2018-19 debut season of the medical drama based on the book *Twelve Patients: Life and Death at Bellevue Hospital* by Eric Manheimer.

Riverdale: The Complete Third Season (Warner, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 5 discs, \$47.99). KJ Apa stars as Archie Andrews in this 2018-19 third season of the dark comic drama series.

The Rookie: The Complete First Season (Buena Vista, DVD: 4 discs, \$32.99). A 45-year-old (Nathan Fillion) starts off at the bottom of the Los Angeles police force in this 2018-19 debut season.

The Spanish Princess (Lionsgate, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Based on novels by Philippa Gregory, this 2019 Starz-aired historical-drama limited series on the life of Catherine of Aragon stars Charlotte Hope, Alicia Borrachero, Georgie Henley, and Harriet Walter.



S.W.A.T.: Season Two (Sony, DVD: 5 discs, \$45.99). Erstwhile Marine Hondo Harrelson (Shemar Moore) takes his job as a S.W.A.T. sergeant to heart in this 2018-19 sophomore season of the action crime-drama series that also features Stephanie Sigman and Alex Russell.

September 3

Bull: Season Three (Paramount, DVD: 5 discs, \$53.99). Psychologist Dr. Jason Bull (Michael Weatherly) is back at the jury consulting firm following his heart attack in this 2018-19 third season of the drama series that features guest appearances by Ben Vereen and rapper Astro.

The Goldbergs: The Complete Sixth Season (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$26.99). This 2018-19 sixth season of the 1980s-set family sitcom stars Sean Giambrone, Jeff Garlin, and Wendi McLendon-Covey.

NCIS: The Complete Sixteenth Season (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$53.99). The Naval Criminal Investigative Service trudges on in this 2018-19 16th season of the police procedural series that features guest stars Fred Dryer, Dee Wallace, and Dabney Coleman.



True Detective: The Complete Third Season (HBO, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$59.99). Mahershala Ali and Stephen Dorff star in this 2019 third season of the acclaimed anthology crime series, this time set in the Ozarks.



Montessori: Let The Child Be The Guide

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ON DVD SEPTEMBER 10

Inherited from Maria Montessori in 1907, the Montessori Method is a child-centered educational philosophy that celebrates and nurtures each child's desire to learn – an approach valuing the human spirit and full development: physical, social, emotional and cognitive. The Montessori Method is increasing in popularity both in the U.S. and abroad.

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-David Khan, Executive Director of North American Montessori Teachers' Association



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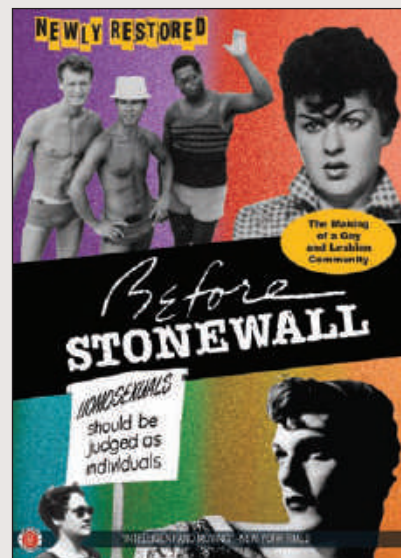
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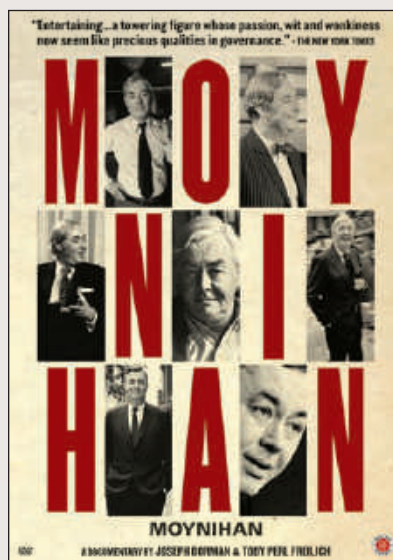
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"Intelligently crafted and enlightening. Joyously brings to life one of the most colorful, brainy characters in 20th-century American politics." -Film Journal

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Young Sheldon: The Complete Second Season (Warner, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). The childhood of future Nobel Prize-winner Sheldon Cooper (Iain Armitage) is recounted in this 2018-19 sophomore season of *The Big Bang Theory* spin-off that features narration by star Jim Parsons.

September 10

The Alienist (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). Based on the 1994 historical crime novel by Caleb Carr, this psychological drama limited series stars Daniel Brühl, Luke Evans, and Dakota Fanning.

Chicago P.D.: Season Six (Universal, DVD: 6 discs, \$44.98). Marking another notch in executive producer Dick Wolf's extensive belt of police procedural dramas, this 2018-19 sixth season of the Windy City series stars Jason Beghe, Jon Seda, and Tracy Spiridakos.



Hawaii Five-0: The Ninth Season (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$53.99). This 2018-19 ninth season of the reboot of the Aloha State police action series features guest stars including Louis Gossett Jr., Joan Collins, Taryn Manning, and Gladys Knight.

SEAL Team: Season Two (Paramount, DVD: 5 discs, \$53.99). David Boreanaz, Max Thieriot, and Jessica Paré star in this 2018-19 sophomore season of the military drama series following a submarine unit of the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Development Group.

Supernatural: The Complete Fourteenth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$44.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99). Coming off the heels of last season's parallel universe drama, this penultimate 2018-19 14th season of the dark urban fantasy series stars Jared Padalecki, Jensen Ackles, and Misha Collins.

This Is Us: The Complete Third Season (Fox, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.99). Starring Milo Ventimiglia, Mandy Moore, and Sterling K. Brown, this 2018-19 third season of the family drama series takes place within various time frames.



September 17

Elementary: The Final Season (Par-

amount, DVD: 3 discs, \$53.99). Contemporary Sherlock Holmes (Jonny Lee Miller) and Watson (Lucy Liu) bring their mystery-solving NYC adventures to a close in this 2019 seventh and final season based on the iconic detective character created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.



The Good Fight: Season Three (Paramount, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98). This 2019 third season of the web TV series sequel to *The Good Wife* stars Christine Baranski, Rose Leslie, Delroy Lindo, and Cush Jumbo.

Modern Family: The Complete Tenth Season (Fox, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98). A death in the family is a major storyline for this 2018-19 penultimate 10th season of the acclaimed sitcom, featuring guest appearances by Mira Sorvino, Ed Begley Jr., and Nathan Lane.

Supergirl: The Complete Fourth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$44.98). Reporter and superhero alien Kara (Melissa Benoist) deals with a Russian doppelganger in this 2018-19 fourth season of the DC Comics live-action series.

September 24

American Horror Story: Apocalypse (Fox, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98). Set in the aftermath of a nuclear apocalypse, this 2018 eighth season of showrunner Ryan Murphy's chilling anthology series stars Joan Collins, Sarah Paulson, Jessica Lange, Gabourey Sidibe, and Emma Roberts.



Billions: Season Four (Showtime, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.99). This 2019 fourth season of the Showtime financial drama series stars Paul Giamatti, Damian Lewis, Maggie Siff, and Malin Åkerman.

Legends of Tomorrow: The Complete Fourth Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$24.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$29.98). Time travel and magic come into play for the members of the Legends superhero team in this 2018-19 fourth season that stars Caity Lotz, Brandon Routh, and Maisie Richardson-Sellers.

Madam Secretary: Season 5 (Paramount, DVD: 5 discs, \$49.99). The penul-

timate 2018-19 fifth season of the political drama series centering on Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord (Téa Leoni) features guest appearances by Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, and Colin Powell.

October 1

Charmed: Season One (Paramount, DVD: 5 discs, \$46.99). Three sister witches (Madeleine Mantock, Melonie Diaz, and Sarah Jefferey) protect their college town from evil forces in this 2018-19 debut season of the reboot of the earlier Aaron Spelling series.



Gunsmoke: The Fifteenth Season, Volume 1 (Paramount, DVD: 4 discs, \$46.99). This first volume from the 1969-70 15th season of the iconic Western series features James Arness, Ken Curtis, and Amanda Blake. Also newly available at the same price is **Gunsmoke: The Fifteenth Season, Volume 2**.

Tell Me a Story: Season One (Paramount, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98). Based on a Spanish TV series, this 2018-19 first season of the psychological thriller web anthology series that adds contemporary creepy twists to fairy tales stars James Wolk, Billy Magnussen, and Kim Cattrall.

October 8

Life with Lucy: The Complete Series (Paramount, DVD: 3 discs, \$46.99). Lucille Ball stars in this short-lived 1986 sitcom that also features Gale Gordon, Jenny Lewis, and Kellie Martin.

October 15

The Returned: The Complete Second Season (Music Box, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$34.95). Anne Consigny, Frédéric Pierrot, and Clotilde Hesme star in this 2015 second and final season of the French supernatural drama about dead people who reappear.

October 22

Shetland: Season Five (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Produced by BBC Scotland, this 2019 fifth season based on the novels by British crime author Ann Cleeves stars Douglas Henshall and Rakie Ayola.



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The great drama of Martin Luther's life comes alive in this vivid portrayal of the penniless monk's quest for truth—a quest that would re-shape the church, and the world. Perhaps the most faithful movie about Luther's life ever made, the film does not shy away from the deep questions—and answers—that mark Luther as one of the most influential people of the last thousand years. Drama, 105 minutes.

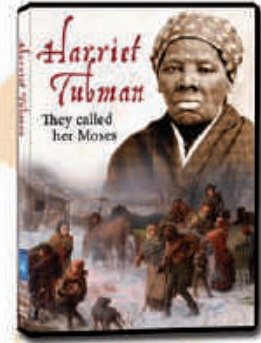
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Flying High for the Glory of God

Pilot and world champion runner Orville Rogers trained bomber pilots in World War II, flew the B-36 on secret missions during the Korean Conflict, ferried airplanes to remote missions, and managed to squeeze in a 31-year career as a pilot. As if that wasn't enough, Orville took up running at age 51 and ran his first marathon six years later. At age 90 he broke two world records. He holds 15 world records to date and continues to compete annually. Invariably, he wins. Documentary, 44 minutes.

#501804D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01804 1



Harriet Tubman: They Called Her Moses

Harriet Tubman is a familiar and revered name in American history. But many are unfamiliar with the details of her remarkable story and the inner motivations that drove her. Discover the real Harriet Tubman in this compelling documentary narrated by actress Alfre Lynn Roberts. It features expert interviews with leading scholars and includes early 20th century audio recordings of African-American spirituals sung by former slaves. Documentary, 45 minutes.

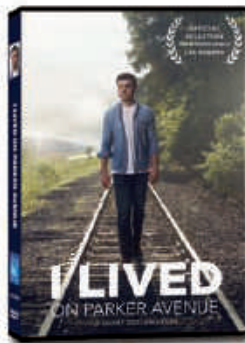
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Alaska Missionaries

Alaska Missionaries is a six-episode reality series about a team of intrepid missionaries who run the Suicide Prevention Summer Camp at Camp Nahshii on the upper Yukon River in central Alaska. Follow these dedicated people as they give their all to make a difference in the lives of hurting young people, even as the missionaries face their own challenges in America's last frontier. Documentary, 168 minutes total.

#501838D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01838 6



I Lived on Parker Avenue

Adopted at birth and raised in Louisiana, David Scotton is on a journey to Indiana to meet the birth parents he's never known. His tattooed birth mother, Melissa, and reserved birth father, Brian, anxiously wait for him, concerned David will reject them for decisions they made before he was born. This documentary is about a mother's agony in choosing what's best, the joy of a couple starting a family, and a young man's search for where his life began. 30 minutes.

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Newton's Grace: The True Story of "Amazing Grace"

John Newton was a troubled young man with a violent temper and a penchant for vulgarity. Following a powerful conversion experience at sea, Newton eventually became a pastor in the Church of England and the writer of several of the church's most beloved hymns, including "Amazing Grace." He also came to hate the slave trade, becoming a spiritual leader in the fight to end slavery. *Newton's Grace* tells his true story. Drama, 80 minutes.

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This section features reviews of current and classic studio, independent, and foreign feature films. Each review includes pricing information, as well as running time, rating, subtitling information, and street dates for yet-to-be-released titles. Most titles reviewed here are widely available through most distributors.

★★★★★ = Excellent
 ★★★★ = Good
 ★★★ = Fair
 ★ = Poor

Current Films

3 Faces ★★★

Kino Lorber, 100 min., in Persian & Azerbaijani w/ English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99



In 2010, Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi was forbidden to leave Iran or make any films for 20 years. *3 Faces* is his fourth feature since the sentence was passed and Panahi once again plays himself on screen, this time in a supporting role. The film opens with Panahi driving a popular TV actress (Behnaz Jafari, also playing herself) into the mountain region near the Turkish border to look for a teenage girl (Marziyeh Rezaei) who was accepted into a prestigious acting institute and recorded a video plea to make her case to her parents—but may have killed herself before Jafari received the message. Jafari is determined to find out what happened and the pair meander through rural villages looking for the girl, meeting local citizens and learning a little about their culture: values, concerns, and identity as Iranian-Turkish villagers far from the cities. Yet while Panahi presents their lives with dignity, he also looks at the opportunities denied to women and the cultural prejudices that linger in remote towns, where girls are married off rather than being allowed to attend college or pursue careers. Like the films of Panahi's fellow Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, *3 Faces* is a road movie, one that explores the relationship between life and movies and uses humor as a way to highlight cultural conflict and serious issues. A winner for best screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival, this is a gentle and generous film that celebrates art and artists with affection and irony. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

All Is True ★★½

Sony, 101 min., PG-13, DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Although Kenneth Branagh's film is os-

tensibly about Shakespeare's final years when he had retired from theatrical work in London to be with his family, the emphasis in *All Is True* is actually on make-up and landscapes—the fake nose and hairpieces required to make Branagh the spitting image of the Bard as portrayed in contemporary paintings, coupled with pervasive shots of the idyllic countryside. The title is deliberately ironic: virtually nothing is known of Shakespeare's years back home, so the narrative is almost entirely made up. The premise finds Shakespeare gloomily ruminating on the death of his beloved son Hamnet, who died years earlier in his father's absence. The cause of death is listed as plague, but Shakespeare has doubts. He also has other problems on his plate: his wife (Judi Dench) is used to getting along without him, his spinster younger daughter (Kathryn Wilder) is angry that he has ignored her, and his married older daughter (Lydia Wilson) will be falsely accused of infidelity. As the Earl of Southampton (a haughty proponent of Shakespeare's genius), Ian McKellen briefly livens up the action, and ultimately all is well that ends well, but much time in this overly reverential and sluggish film is devoted to Shakespeare's determination to plant a garden in Hamnet's honor—a decidedly non-dramatic plot strand. Optional. (F. Swietek)



All You Ever Wanted For ★

Film Movement, 87 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



Barry Morrow, the Oscar-winning co-writer of *Rain Man*, makes his directorial debut with this fairy tale so cute that it misses genuine enchantment by a mile. Darren Criss stars as charm-free Tyler, the son of a successful fashion executive (James Remar). Bored and rudderless as he's reluctantly groomed to take over dad's business, Tyler flies to Milan for meetings, only to be kidnapped and held for ransom. But the inept hostage-takers get lost driving through mountains and take refuge in a cottage that is under a gypsy spell. When all wake up the next day, the curse kicks in: each man will fall in love with the first soul he sees. For his part, Tyler's initial glimpse is of the sharp-tongued, Sophia Loren-like Rosalia (Madalina Ghenea), who he subsequently woos as a servile, jack-of-all-trades. Meanwhile, the three kidnappers chase after a spooked spinster, a gay hunk, and...a cow. Morrow proves absolutely ill-equipped to direct with any meaningful feeling for atmosphere, texture, story rhythm, or actor charisma, while Criss is unappealing—alternately whiny and starry-eyed—and Ghenea, for all of her sun-kissed beauty, is constantly lost in shadows.

Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

Ash Is Purest White ★★★

Cohen, 136 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Like his earlier films, Jia Zhangke's latest is tied to changes occurring in modern Chinese society, in this case using a gangster scenario within a ruminative, moody film that features a tripartite structure. The story begins in 2001 with Qiao (Zhao Tao) involved with provincial gang boss Guo Bin (Liao Fan). A hardboiled dame from a dying mining town, Qiao saves Bin with his illegal gun when they are attacked by a band of motorcycle thugs. She then further protects him by claiming that the gun is hers, earning herself a five-year prison term. The second act, set in 2006, follows the just-released Qiao as she travels northward through the altered landscape in search of Bin, enduring episodic experiences—some humorous, others poignant—along the way. Although old acquaintances tell her that Bin has moved on and does not want to see her, she finally locates him, only to find that he is a changed and desolate man. The final section of the film leaps ahead to 2018, as Qiao and Bin have effected a reconciliation of sorts, but she is now the boss, while he sits dejectedly in a corner, a shadow of his former self, treated without respect by his colleagues. The white volcanic ash alluded to in the title symbolizes the absolute fidelity with which Qiao still adheres to the old values, especially loyalty. A long and demanding film that is also an important addition to the canon of one of today's most notable directors, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Avengers: Endgame ★★★½

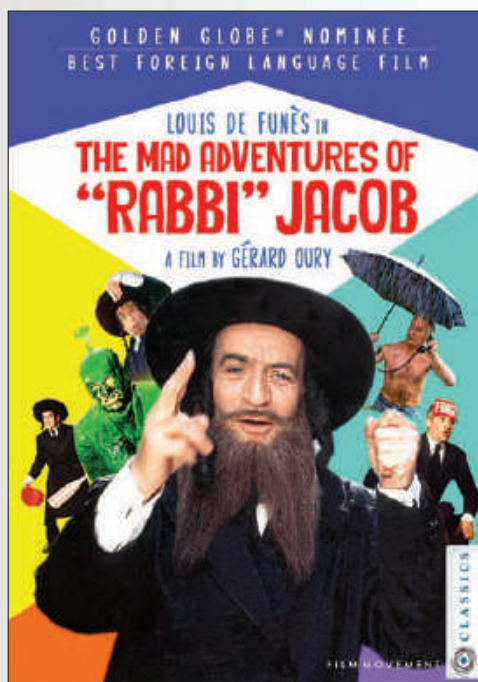
Disney, 181 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



This epic-length super-hero team-up concludes more than a decade of 22 intertwined Marvel movies featuring Iron Man, Captain America, The Hulk, and Thor, among others. *Endgame* begins right after the conclusion of *Infinity War*, in which evil Thanos (Josh Brolin), who possesses the Infinity Stones, snaps his fingers and vaporizes half the world's population, including Spider-Man, Black Panther, Doctor Strange, and Star-Lord. The remaining Avengers include Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner), Hulk (Mark Ruffalo), Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson), Thor (Chris Hemsworth), Captain America (Chris Evans), War Machine (Don Cheadle), Rocket Raccoon (Bradley Cooper), and Tony Stark/Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.), who are all suffering from survivor's guilt. After soul-searching grief and the blame-

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game—along with a time-shifting narrative involving Thanos's daughter Nebula (Karen Gillan)—Captain Marvel (Brie Larson) and Ant-Man (Paul Rudd) surface, and the cathartic action begins in earnest. Directors Joe and Anthony Russo deftly juggle the complex storylines and surprise cameos in this long, nostalgic goodbye that has no sly post-credit teasers. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)

Ayiti Mon Amour

★★★1/2

IndiePix, 88 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Notable as the first (and only) Haitian production submitted in the Academy Award competition for Best Foreign Language Film, Guetty Felin's drama combines neorealism with mysticism in a tale that touches on the Caribbean nation's challenges and resilience. Set in a fishing village in 2015, five years after the devastating earthquake that destroyed much of the island, the film is divided into three stories. The first involves young Orphee (Felin's son Joakim Cohen), who mourns the death of his father and is treated as an outcast by many in his community. One day, he discovers he has a hitherto unknown superpower—but using that power also means recognizing a new sense of mature responsibility. The second story involves the efforts of the elderly fisherman Jaures (Jaures Andris), who believes that the only cure for his ailing wife Odessa (Judith Jeudy) can be harvested from offshore waters. The third focuses on a would-be writer (James Noel) who creates a beautiful central character (Anisia Uzeyman) who comes to life and decides that she wants to pursue her own existence independent of his writing. Despite working on an obvious low budget, Felin has helmed a fine film that channels Haiti's indefatigable spirit. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)



The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales

★★★1/2

Shout! Factory, 83 min., in French w/English subtitles & English-dubbed, G, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$24.99

Compiled here are a trio of charmingly quirky animated shorts from the makers of the Oscar-nominated *Ernest & Celestine*, all of which feature barnyard animals—an officious pig, his two dimwitted pals (a rabbit and a duck), and a lazy guard dog, along with the chickens he is supposed to protect—plus a fox and wolf that live in the nearby forest. In the first short, pig, rabbit, and duck must take a baby to its parents after receiving a delivery from a duplicitous stork; in the second, fox steals some eggs from the henhouse, only to have them hatch and the chicks adopt him as their mother; and the third is a Christmas story



in which rabbit and duck believe they have killed Santa Claus and decide to replace him, while pig tries to keep them from destroying the holiday entirely. The three tales are presented as sketches being performed onstage that are linked by humorous introductions from the fox—with occasional interruptions spoiling his spiel. The creamy pastel animation is lovely, the jokes and pratfalls evoke a stream of chuckles and some genuine belly laughs, and the voice work—in both the original French version and the English dubbed one—is excellent. In our CGI age, this throwback to the days of classic hand-drawn animation is a delicious treat. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Blaze

★★★

Shout! Factory, 129 min., R, DVD: \$16.99, Blu-ray: \$22.99

The name of Blaze Foley is not well known to most, but the singer-songwriter (born Michael David Fuller) was an unsung hero of the Outlaw Country movement of the 1970s and '80s. Ethan Hawke's *Blaze*, based on the 2008 memoir *Living in the Woods in a Tree* by Foley's widow Sybil Rosen, offers an impressionistic look at the life and career of Foley, who is here played by musician Ben Dickey as a gentle bear of a man who can quickly become violent. The film interweaves the events of the last day of his life in 1989 with commentary on his legacy from his friend and sometime collaborator Townes Van Zandt (played by musician Charlie Sexton), as well as the story of his love affair with Sybil (Alia Shawkat)—who he met at an artist's commune in Georgia—and the arc of his career, which falters as he becomes alcoholic and violent. Hawke has compassion for the man but is unblinking in his portrait of Foley's self-destructive behavior, and while the interviews with Van Zandt (Hawke himself plays the interviewer) spin Foley into a veritable legend, the naturalistic scenes of his life defy the myth to reveal a talented man who becomes his own worst enemy. Hawke takes an unconventional approach to the artist bio-pic genre, but while the film's rambling rhythm may frustrate some viewers, the complicated portrait that emerges is rewarding. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Brightburn

★★

Sony, 90 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99

Since superhero origin stories and subversive horror movies currently dominate the box-office, it's not surprising that someone came up with a premise that combines both genres. About a dozen years ago in the rural town of Brightburn, KS, a meteor crashes on the farm of childless couple Tori (Elizabeth Banks)



and Kyle (David Denman) Breyer. Aboard is a healthy baby boy—a heaven-sent answer to their prayers. Naming him Brandon, they tell others that he's adopted. As he approaches puberty, strange things start happening to Brandon (Jackson A. Dunn). While helping his dad with chores, for instance, he accidentally throws a lawnmower 100 yards across a field, noting, "I'm special." So he stalks a pretty classmate (Emmie Hunter), who once sympathized with him when he was teased for being so smart, but she is not pleased, calling him a pervert, and then dropping him during a "trust fall" exercise in gym. In response, Brandon crushes the bones in her hand after she's forced to help him up. Brandon then becomes defiant, manipulative and, eventually, homicidal, wearing a cape fashioned out of his baby blanket. Is all of this somehow inexplicably connected to that malevolent space pod, vibrating and glowing in a locked cellar in the barn? Director David Yarovesky turns Superman into the Bad Seed in this formulaic tale that focuses on grisly gore rather than delving into the creepy concept of an evil superhero who is eminently capable of mass destruction. Optional. (S. Granger)

Dark Sense

★★

Breaking Glass, 94 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

This Scottish potboiler thriller centering on a long-in-the-making rendezvous between a psychic named Simon (Shane O'Meara) and a crazed serial killer (James Robinson) has some fun moments, but its cloaked villain with a bloodthirsty religious bent awkwardly recalls Dan Brown's silly, self-flagellating albino-monster-monk in *The Da Vinci Code*. After Britain's MI5 intelligence agency determines that Simon and his powerful clairvoyant abilities pose a national security threat, officials take Simon and the war veteran (Jim Sturgeon) who he's hired as a bodyguard into custody, where flabbergasted authorities try to reconcile how young nobody Simon knows state secrets absent of any apparent surveillance. Director Magnus Wake (is that a fine name for a horror director, or what?) does a solid job of building momentum throughout *Dark Secrets*, and the scenes in which Simon suffers phantom agonies in advance of the killer's arrival are effective. But that boogeyman—who is preoccupied with the most gruesome of Christian imagery and has his face encrusted in some thick mud mask or whatever—is a disappointment. Optional. (T. Keogh)



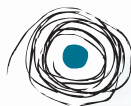
Domino

★

Lionsgate, 89 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$21.99

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violent counterterrorism thriller revolves around a Copenhagen cop tracking a killer who is tied to ISIS. When Christian (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) reports to work, he accidentally leaves his service pistol behind in his apartment. And because he's unarmed, Christian's partner/pal Lars (Søren Malling) winds up getting killed, and Christian is suspended from the police force. Nevertheless, he is determined to capture Ezra Tarzi (Eriq Ebouaney), a Libyan immigrant who fled a crime scene, leaving behind the corpse of a collaborator—a grocer who connected jihadists and weapons dealers. What Christian and fellow detective Alex (Carice van Houten), who was having an affair with Lars, don't realize is that Tarzi's children are being held hostage by the ISIS leader—and Tarzi is being protected by duplicitous American CIA agent Joe Martin (Guy Pearce), who is really after a sheikh released from Guantanamo. Sketchily scripted by Petter Skavlan, this stilted, nonsensical cat-and-mouse tale bears little resemblance to De Palma's previous works (the filmmaker essentially disowns this film, which he says was “underfunded”). Dull and disappointing, this is not recommended. (S. Granger)



Ecstasy ★

Strand, 86 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

Originally titled “A Thought of Ecstasy,” this is a near impenetrable blur of quasi-apocalyptic sci-fi, cringe-worthy eroticism, torture porn, and wafer-thin mystery. German actor Rolf Peter Kahl (who also co-wrote and directed, under the name RP Kahl) stars as Frank, who is seen on the phone in an early scene, talking about a contract for a desalination plant in climate-imperiled Southern California. But the rest of the time he drives interminably on desert highways in a white T-shirt in relentlessly unforgiving heat (but never sweats) while constantly recalling an old lover named Marie he hasn't seen in two decades. Typical of Kahl's ill-advised efforts to crank up fever-dream kinkiness, we see Frank and Marie, in flashback, frontally nude and coupling on what looks like a rocky, Venusian hellscape. Frank is convinced that a newly-published memoir written under a pseudonym is, in fact, authored by the missing Marie, and he wants to find her. Deborah Kara Unger plays a purring ice queen who knows something about Marie and she directs Frank to a desert bunker, where *Ecstasy* enters a rabbit hole of forbidden fantasy. There are a few earnest strands in the scenes ahead in which an ordinary, attractive young woman named Nina (Ava Verne) is paid to be whatever a sex client wants her to be: punching



bag, partner, or porn queen—but Kahl seems unable to make anything out of the opportunities here, flailing around in a genre-bending story that features some graphic sexual content. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

El Chicano ★

Universal, 109 min., R, DVD: \$22.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99

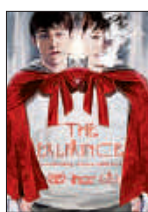
If this is the first Latino superhero movie, the Hispanic community deserves better. When Los Angeles Police Detective Diego Hernandez (Raul Castillo) embarks on a career-making investigation of execution-style gang murders, his boss, Captain Gomez (George Lopez), assigns him a new partner, Martinez (Jose Pablo Cantillo). Diego's twin brother Pedro reportedly committed suicide after being released from prison for crimes he committed when he was involved with the gang. Complaints that Martinez is a “Midwestern Mexican” who is not familiar with the local cartel fall on deaf ears, and the investigation leads the detectives to Shotgun (David Castañeda)—Diego's former childhood friend-turned-criminal—and El Gallo (Sal Lopez), a drug kingpin who believes that California was stolen from Mexico and wants to reclaim it. Reading Pedro's journals leads Diego to believe that his brother may have adopted the guise of El Chicano, a 1940s motorcycle-riding urban legend and bloodthirsty vigilante who wears a ceremonial mask and uses an Aztec knife to stalk evildoers in the barrio. And before long, Diego himself becomes El Chicano. Stuntman-turned-director Ben Hernandez Bray's *El Chicano* has far too many scenes that are murky and woefully under-lit, frustrating any attempt to follow the action, resulting in an incoherent and confusing film. Part police procedural/part avenger drama, this frenzied, clichéd tale full of graphic violence is not recommended. (S. Granger)



The Erlprince ★

Altered Innocence, 101 min., in Polish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$22.99

Somewhat confusing in its superficial razzle-dazzle and self-congratulatory allusions to a poem by Goethe (“The Erl-King”), random speculations about parallel universes, and an annoying motif concerning the impending end of the world, *The Erlprince* buries what should have been a more accessible tale of family tragedy. At the center is an unnamed teen (Staszek Cywka, referred to as “Boy” in the credits), a brainy prodigy whose controlling, steely Mother (Agnieszka Podsiadlik) is desperate for him to win a science competition that has a cash prize. Hounded by creditors, Mother needs



the money, and the Boy sees her pressure as one more example of how she does not love him for himself. About halfway through the film, the Father (Sebastian Lach), who the Boy has never met, turns up to help fill the emotional void in his son's life. The driving question ultimately becomes how far will the Boy go to numb his anger and loneliness? The film's three principal actors are outstanding, and the complications in the mother-son relationship are well explored (often behaviorally rather than verbally). But director Kuba Czekaj's *The Erlprince* suffers from fast-cutting, electronic voices, and other distractions that dampen the emotional impact of the story. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

Everything is Free ★★

Breaking Glass, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Love and sex and conflict... What else would you expect when a bunch of randy young men gather near the alluring surf in a Central American paradise? Written and directed by Brian Jordan Alvarez, the drama begins when Ivan (Alvarez), a gay, expatriate American painter living in Colombia, is visited by his straight best friend, Christian (Peter Vack), and the latter's younger brother, Cole (Morgan Krantz), whose sexuality is a bit dubious. Clubbing and coupling with different people, the characters are locked into somewhat monotonous action broken up only by scenes of Ivan visiting the gallery where his paintings are displayed, and shots of everybody romping in the waves of a pristine beach. When Ivan falls hard for Cole, who is open to his host's advances, Christian turns from cheerful buddy to harsh guardian of his sibling, a radical change that doesn't feel particularly authentic. A handful of supporting characters add a little seasoning to the narrative, but this is ultimately a rather thin effort—sprinkled with graphic sex—to depict a rootless generation trying to find itself. Optional. (T. Keogh)



Fast Color ★★1/2

Lionsgate, 100 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Filmmaker Julia Hart's small-scale post-apocalypse superhero fable centers on twentysomething Ruth (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), who is on the run in an America that has been forced to go back to basics due to a prolonged worldwide drought. Her desperate effort at concealment stems from the fact that she has a unique power, setting off earthquakes whenever she suffers seizures, so government agents and scientists naturally want to find her for experimentation. After nearly being caught, Ruth seeks shelter with her estranged mother Bo (Lorraine Toussaint), who has been



raising Ruth's daughter Lila (Saniyya Sidney) on her remote ranch. When the sheriff (David Strathairn) arrives to warn them that agents are bearing down on the place, this leads to a series of revelations about special powers within the family—most notably the ability to separate matter into individual molecules and then rejoin them into their original forms—that have been passed down from generation to generation, but only in the female line. This peculiar inheritance is only fully explained during a final confrontation with the authorities, after Ruth has seen the aurora-like colors in the sky that apparently represent the full realization of her talents, which brings about an event that presages a new era of hope for humanity. *Fast Color* is more a fable of female empowerment than a sci-fi thriller, and while the visual effects are effective in a low-key way, the film does wind up feeling a bit tedious and pretentious. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Feliz Año Tijuana (Happy New Year Tijuana)

★★★

Strand, 74 min., in English & Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Oct. 8



Alejandro (Luis Devezé) is a Chicano studies professor in the U.S. While headed to his hometown of Guanajuato, Mexico, for New Year's Eve, he misses a connecting flight in Tijuana, and is stuck in the city overnight. Too restless to sleep in his seedy hotel room, Alejandro decides to hit the streets and see what the holiday looks like. But he soon proves to be a rather quirky figure who's a little removed from the life around him, angering a hooker by asking why she's a prostitute, and being lured into some sketchy backroom—like a curious anthropologist—to get his cards read. What becomes clear over the course of the night is that Alejandro's deep-rooted convictions as an educator on the subjects of Latinx identity, pride, and history have become more about long-distance principle than immediate experience. And that disconnect is even more apparent when he bumps into an attractive American—a former student of his named Ana (Kristine Veta)—who invites him to a party. Once there, alcohol and flirtation combine to release repressed passions and a hunger for life in Alejandro, which in turn are met with some pushback by tiny minds. Devezé, who co-wrote the film with director Andrew van Baal, shoulders the movie, his Alejandro a work of guileless humanity, surprising naivete, and a Don Quixote-like romanticism. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

The Great Buddha+ ★★1/2

Cheng Cheng Films, 104 min., in Mandarin, Taiwanese & English w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Taiwanese filmmaker Huang Hsin-yao's

film is an expansion of his 2014 short of the same name, which explains the plus sign cheekily added to the title. A dark comedy about class and corruption on the island, *The Great Buddha+* centers on Pickle (Cres Chuang), a watchman at a factory that makes huge iron statues of Buddha, and his pal Belly Button (Bamboo Chen), a scrap collector. The two while away the nights watching TV in Pickle's run-down office, where he opens and closes the gate to let vehicles in and out. When Pickle's set breaks down, they decide to check out the dash-cam footage from his boss Kevin's Mercedes. Most of what they see—which is shot in bright colors, in stark contrast to the gritty black-and-white of the rest of the film—consists of tedious conversations between the womanizing Kevin and his many dates, but eventually they come upon a horrifying scene in which the boss kills a woman who threatened to reveal his shady connivance with government officials and religious leaders. The pair dither over what to do—at one point even trying to consult an oracle at a makeshift shrine dedicated to General Chiang Kai-shek—until a tragedy proves that, in the end, power is all that matters. *The Great Buddha+* is a slow and meandering film that requires a viewer's patience but also ultimately rewards it. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Guy ★★★

Icarus, 101 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99



A gentle, funny French mockumentary about a 1960s pop star now playing to fellow septuagenarians while on a tour circuit, *Guy* stars the film's director, comedian Alex Lutz, as crooner Guy Jamet. The film opens with a shaky shot of Jamet as he is approached at an outdoor café, where offscreen (fictional) director Gauthier (Tom Dingler) pitches the idea of filming Jamet in his life and work. What Jamet doesn't know is that Gauthier has a personal reason for this project. But will Jamet learn what it is before *Guy* ends? The film serves up Jamet's history as a vintage star (Lutz plays Jamet both in his prime and old age, the latter under impressive makeup), while capturing him with his former wife, current girlfriend, and with fans taking selfies. All of this is good fun, although there are moments where the film runs a little deeper, touching on Jamet's accrued life wisdom and absence of delusions about his legacy. Some in-jokes about French pop culture are likely to go over the heads of non-Francophiles, but most will find this to be an engaging film. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Hail Satan? ★★1/2

Magnolia, 94 min., R, DVD: \$26.99



Question: The Satanic Temple—a non-theistic religious activist group headed up by Lucien Greaves (not his real name)—has a) performed ritual murder/sacrifices, b) drank the blood of babies, or c) argued that America as a pluralistic nation should honor the separation of church and state envisioned by the Founding Fathers? Filmmaker Penny Lane (her real name) presents a funny and thought-provoking look at the Satanic Temple, naturally headquartered in Salem, MA, which was founded by three members in 2013 and grew to over 50,000 strong within three years. Noting that Satan challenged authority (check out John Milton's *Paradise Lost*), the group is less concerned with doing the Devil's work than in fighting against the definition of America as a monotheistic Christian nation (yes, the answer was “c”). Lane points out that “God” appeared in the Pledge of Allegiance and on U.S. currency only in the 1950s, both in direct response to Cold War godless Communism. While the Satanic Temple started out as more of a satirical performance art group (Detroit's Jex Blackmore was a little too heavily into vaguely S&M gatherings—graphic nudity alert—and has since been, uh, excommunicated), the group quickly evolved to target instances of Christian iconography/rituals in public and politically-connected spaces. One of the central legal battles humorously recounted here is between the Satanic Temple and Arkansas State Senator Jason Rapert, with the latter championing a Ten Commandments monument on Capitol grounds (interesting side-note: Ten Commandments monuments proliferated in America in 1956—donated by Paramount Pictures in conjunction with Cecil B. DeMille's sword-and-sandals epic *The Ten Commandments*). In the interests of equal play, the Satanic Temple wants to put up their statue of Baphomet (a Sabbatic goat figure) as well. Other mini-battles/actions include an after-school Satan club, a Satanist sock drive to help the homeless, and the Satanic Temple's highway-adoption stretch of road (where trash is picked up with—wait for it—pitchforks). *Hail Satan?* will make you laugh but also think hard about American ideals and where real evil lies (the Catholic Church comes in for a few well-deserved knocks). Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Hal ★★★

Oscilloscope, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Amy Scott's biographical portrait of director Hal Ashby (1929-1988) centers on the string of remarkable films he made in the so-

called "New Hollywood" of the 1970s—*The Landlord*, *Harold and Maude*, *The Last Detail*, *Shampoo*, *Bound for Glory*, *Coming Home* and *Being There*—before he lost his way in the following decade, producing a string of flops. Without overlooking the reasons for his sharp decline—especially a destructive cocaine habit—*Hal* is primarily a celebration of Ashby's humane and generous spirit, emphasizing his hippie inclinations in the "peace and love" era, compassion in depicting unusual and troubled characters, and genuinely collaborative attitude toward actors and crew (although that did not extend to the studio executives he blasted for interfering with his creative independence). Scott touches briefly on Ashby's difficult childhood (his father committed suicide) before proceeding to his work first as an editor and then as a director, essentially offering a film-by-film overview, with clips and behind-the-scenes footage from each accompanied by admiring comments from actors (Jon Voight, Jane Fonda, Beau and Jeff Bridges), writers (Robert Towne), cinematographers (Haskell Wexler), and fellow directors (Norman Jewison, Judd Apatow, Lisa Cholodenko). An autobiographical element is added through audio recordings made by Ashby himself, as well as excerpts from his letters that are read in voiceover, and comments from Ashby's daughter. Although it could have dug deeper, *Hal* is an affectionate tribute to one of the most notable American filmmakers of the '70s. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

High Life ★★

Lionsgate, 113 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Some might describe cult director Claire Denis's newest film as mind-bending, but mind-bruising would be a more accurate appellation. The story is set in a claustrophobic spaceship carrying a crew composed of convicts who have volunteered for a dangerous mission—investigating whether energy can be extracted from a black hole—in return for receiving sentence reductions. Two stand out: Dibs (Juliette Binoche), a creepy scientist conducting experiments on procreation in space who uses crew members as guinea pigs, and Monte (Robert Pattinson), who insists on remaining celibate, and winds up seeing to the needs of an infant he cares for obsessively while going about the business of keeping the ship operating. *High Life* tells its story in a fragmentary fashion, shifting the chronology randomly and keeping the narrative opaque while inviting viewers to piece together the meaning as best they can. Much of it is simply tedious, but some elements are unsettling, such as scenes dealing with what the crew undergoes in connection with the scientist's experiments, or disturbing, as in a long and ugly sequence in which one of the



women is attacked before other crew members intervene. Many deaths occur, and the sight of bodies piled up waiting to be tossed out of the airlock to drift in the void carries a kind of hallucinatory power. While some may consider *High Life* profound, others will find it merely obscure and dull. Optional. (F. Swietek)

The Hustle ★★

Universal, 94 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, Aug. 20

The third time around is not the charm for this tale of dissimilar con artists who clash over territory, which began as *Bedtime Story* in 1964 and returned as *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* in 1988. In this gender-reversed version, supremely suave Josephine (Anne Hathaway), who lives in the South of France in a modern seaside mansion, fleeces scummy rich guys. Meanwhile in America, Penny (Rebel Wilson) engages in small-time scams until one of her marks turns to the cops and she decides to decamp to France, where she meets Josephine and blackmails her into a partnership. Before long they have a falling out, and agree to a bet: whoever succeeds in conning a geeky American tech whiz (Alex Sharp) can stay on the Riviera, while the other must leave for good. Naturally, both go to great slapstick lengths to outdo the other; unfortunately, the farcical goings-on are not uproarious, but poorly thought-out and limply performed. Hathaway comes across as stilted and uncomfortable, while Wilson simply does her customary raucous, abrasive shtick. About all that filmmaker Chris Addison's *The Hustle* has to offer is lovely locations. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



Jean-Luc Godard: The Image Book ★★

Kino Lorber, 87 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99

A cinematic essay by way of a moving picture collage, this cryptic film by iconoclastic filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard ostensibly explores the way we understand images. Using only film clips (many iconic), news footage, paintings, and texts chopped into fragments, Godard removes his images from their familiar contexts, juxtaposing them with others, while also adding a fragmentary soundtrack of music, narration, unexpected sounds, and stretches of silence. Godard also manipulates the images—stretching, distorting the color and contrast, recording and playing scenes in old low-fidelity video—to create distinctive visual textures. Opening with images of filmmaking and writing, the film moves through five sections featuring images of war, technology, justice, and rev-



olutionary action, ending on an extended segment called "Joyful Arabia," which both celebrates the beauty of the Arab world and criticizes the images and ideas that the West has used to define it. In typical Godardian fashion, a contradiction lies inherent in the way he decries war but sympathizes with the terrorist response from radical Arab movements. *The Image Book* plays like a free-association exercise that is constantly making unexpected connections, coming across as both lively and obtuse. For those unfamiliar with Godard's mix of intellectual rigor and visual playfulness (or avant-garde filmmaking) it will likely seem arbitrary and opaque. But even those who appreciate Godard's approach to filmmaking will have a hard time pinning down exactly what it is about. Still, for those who appreciate challenging cinema, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Kanarie ★★½

Breaking Glass, 123 min., in Afrikaans w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Christiaan Olwagen's *Kanarie* is set during the 1980s in South Africa, when apartheid laws were still firmly entrenched and white nationalism not only oppressed the black majority, but also targeted individual displays of iconoclastic behavior that did not sync with the government's vision of model behavior. Schalk Bezuidenhout stars as Johan, a rural young man with musical abilities who is drafted into the military. To his delight, he is selected to become part of the Defense Force Church Choir, also known as the Kanaries. Johan, whose musical tastes include Culture Club and Depeche Mode, becomes friends with opera-loving Ludolf (Germandt Geldenhuys) and Queen- and Kate Bush-worshipping Wolfgang (Hannes Otto). While the military seeks to use the choir to promote the government's vision of church and state, Johan uses the choir to discover his own sexual identity. *Kanarie* is a story of personal discovery set against a backdrop of a repressive militaristic regime, with performances by Bezuidenhout, Geldenhuys, and Otto that are remarkable for their warmth, humor, and musical versatility. An LGBT coming-of-age story, a distinctive musical-comedy, and a very unusual commentary on the cruelties of the apartheid era, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)



Let the Sunshine In

★★★

Criterion, 95 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Juliette Binoche stars as a mature single woman and successful artist who is looking for love and companionship in Claire Denis's decidedly unconventional romantic



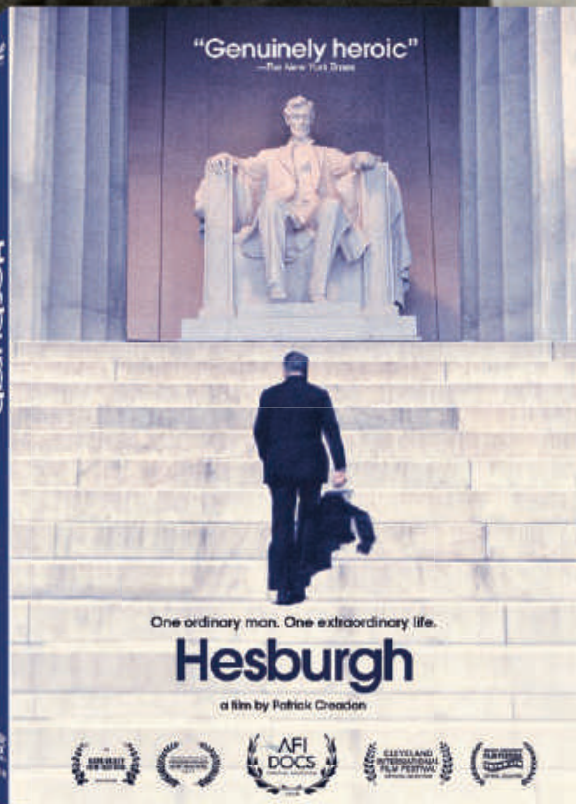


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comedy-drama. Isabelle (Binoche) easily attracts lovers, but for all of her individuality and self-sufficiency, she is still lonely and unsatisfied in her personal life. She's in a frustrating affair with an arrogant banker who refuses to leave his wife and seems to enjoy sabotaging her self-confidence, she tries dating a self-involved actor who can't stop talking about his inner conflicts, and she even sleeps with her ex-husband. *Let the Sunshine In* is a meandering, free-wheeling journey through Isabelle's frustrated relationships and unsatisfied longings that follows the rhythms of her day-to-day life, allowing viewers to see her in moments both guarded and unguarded. Binoche is luminous and utterly believable, an attractive woman who meets men who are uninterested in knowing the person under the physical beauty. And she displays her hopes, fears, yearnings, and disappointments in complicated emotions that play across her face. Gérard Depardieu has a small role as a fortune teller who looks into the future of Isabelle's love life. For fans of French cinema who appreciate depth and nuance, this is recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Ma ★1/2

Universal, 100 min., R, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99, Sept. 3



When teenager Maggie (Diana Silvers) moves with her single mom (Juliette Lewis) to the small Ohio town where the latter grew up, she eagerly seeks new friends but finds herself besieged by peer pressure. Maggie goes off for an evening with three classmates in a van that belongs to Andy (Corey Fogelmanis), hoping that strangers will buy them beer, but the only empathetic adult is Sue Ann Ellington (Octavia Spencer), assistant to the local veterinarian (Allison Janney), and even she refuses—until she realizes that Andy's father is Ben (Lucas Evans), a security contractor. After buying their booze, Sue Ann informs Ben that his son is breaking the law. When Sue Ann offers to buy beer again, she insists the kids come to her secluded suburban house to party in the basement so that they won't get arrested. And they are grateful and game, nicknaming her "Ma." But they are not allowed to venture upstairs, where Ma has hidden her wheelchair-confined daughter (Tanyell Waivers). Flashbacks illustrate Sue Ann's excruciatingly sadistic high school experiences, which left her miserable, traumatized, and obviously deranged—a middle-aged psycho-killer determined to wreak revenge on those who humiliated her many years earlier. Likely only green-lit due to the presence of Oscar-winner Spencer, director Tate Taylor's unmemorable horror flick is not recommended. (S. Granger)

Meeting Gorbachev ★★★

Passion River, 91 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Idiosyncratic director Werner Herzog's doc-

umentary is built around an extensive interview with Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR (1985-91), offering a decent if somewhat one-dimensional biographical sketch of a man who firmly believed in Communism, yet inadvertently helped bring about the downfall of the Soviet Union. Herzog and the 87-year-old Gorbachev met three times over the course of six months, and the filmmaker splices bits and pieces of those conversations into what is basically a conventional portrait of the ex-Soviet leader's life, from his childhood up through his education, swift rise in Communist Party circles, and ultimate ascension to the position of General Secretary. Herzog narrates against a backdrop of archival footage and stills, with Gorbachev occasionally interjecting recollections in response to questions. Gorbachev's comments become somewhat longer as he discusses his tenure through the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991—an event that he still remembers ruefully, believing that giving greater autonomy to the member republics could have saved the confederation and its Communist foundation. Herzog lauds Gorbachev for his embrace of reform—namely, his policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) at home—as well as his refusal to use force to prop up failing Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and his crusade to eliminate nuclear weapons. Whether one agrees with Herzog's assessment or not, *Meeting Gorbachev* offers an opportunity to witness the leader explaining himself before the bar of history within the context of a portrait of his career and lonely civilian life afterward. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Men in Black: International ★★

Sony, 115 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99, Sept. 3



Without charismatic Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones, this frantic reboot feels like second-rate pop culture sci-fi, revolving around Molly (Tessa Thompson), a young Brooklyn woman whose childhood memories of her parents being "neuralyzed" by MIB after seeing an alien has given her insight into what's invisible to most Earthlings. Molly is so determined to discover the truth about mankind's place in the universe that she tracks down Executive Agent O (Emma Thompson) and becomes the highly secretive agency's first volunteer. As a probationary recruit, known as Agent M, Molly is partnered with glibly cocky Agent H (Chris Hemsworth), who relies all-too-often on his looks and charm. Apparently, many years ago H saved the world with London division

boss High T (Liam Neeson) "with nothing but wits and series-70 atomizers." Among those menacing them are Riza (Rebecca Ferguson), a criminal overlord, and the shape-shifting Alien Twins (Laurent and Larry Bourgeois), who exude an eerie cosmic countenance and can manipulate whatever they touch in their search for a crystalline box...aka intergalactic super-weapon. While the gung-ho rookie/seasoned veteran setup is comfortably familiar, the series has just lost its luster, traveling to London, Paris, and Marrakesh, but ultimately going nowhere. Directed by F. Gary Gray, who cannot juggle live action involving fanciful "aliens" with the same satiric skill as *MIB* veteran director Barry Sonnenfeld, this is a disappointing reboot. Optional. (S. Granger)

The Other Story ★★1/2

Strand, 112 min., in Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Oct. 22



The division between secularism and ultra-Orthodoxy that marks Israeli society is treated in rather melodramatic fashion in filmmaker Avi Nesher's *The Other Story*. The catalyst is the upcoming marriage of Anat (Joy Rieger), who has recently abandoned a wildly secularist lifestyle and joined an ultra-Orthodox sect in order to be with her intended, Shahar (Nathan Goshen), a former pop singer now devoted to the yeshiva. In desperation, Anat's mother Tali (Maya Dugan) and grandfather Shlomo (Sasson Gabai), a psychology professor, summon his son Yonatan (Yuval Segal)—Tali's ex—home from the U.S. to dissuade the daughter from the match. Upon arriving, Yonatan—also a psychologist, who is caught up in legal troubles in America—is drawn into one of Shlomo's counseling cases: an observant father (Maayan Bloom) is feuding over the custody of his son with his soon-to-be-divorced wife (Avigail Harari), who has joined a feminist cult with pagan overtones, which has led to the boy's kidnapping. One appreciates Nesher's desire to confront so contentious a social issue by dramatizing it in personal terms, but *The Other Story* employs so many high-pitched narrative threads that despite some fine acting, it still comes across as strident and lacking subtlety. But its concern with a substantive issue—and refusal to take a simplistic stance—is commendable. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Plus One ★★1/2

RLJE, 99 min., not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.99



To many twentysomethings, the forced gaiety of weddings means inevitable agony: the emotion-clogged best man/bridesmaid's toasts, the traditional ceremony, and the booze-drenched reception—including be-

ing seated at the singles table. So long-time college pals Alice (Maya Erskine) and Ben (Jack Quaid), who reunite at the wedding of their friends Matt (Beck Bennett) and Amanda (Jessy Hodges), decide to be each other's "plus one" for Southern California's 10-weekend, marathon wedding season, which also includes a Hawaiian destination. Co-writers/co-directors Jeff Chan and Andrew Rhymer's *Plus One* follows a somewhat familiar rom-com formula about defensively combative friends who become lovers after repeatedly teasing and tormenting one another. Quick-witted, foul-mouthed Alice is still deeply hurt after being dumped by philandering Nate (Tim Chiou), and commitment-phobic Ben's psychological trauma after his parents' divorce has made him steadfastly determined not to settle for anyone but the perfect woman. Also on hand are Ed Begley Jr. as Ben's freewheeling dad, preparing for his third nuptial attempt, and Rosalind Chao as Alice's highly opinionated mother. Snappy and engagingly sweet, but also uneven, this is a strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Pokémon Detective Pikachu ★★1/2

Warner, 104 min., PG, DVD: \$28.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$35.99

Satoshi Tajiri's popular 2016 Nintendo mobile phone video game sent children (and adults) out into the real world to capture Pokémon (i.e., Pocket Monsters), fictional creatures with special skills, such as psychic powers, electric shocks, or sleep-inducing songs. Taking plot points from the game, this story is set in Ryme City, a wondrous experimental world where humans and CGI Pokémon live in relative harmony. Tim Goodman (Justice Smith) is the son of private investigator Harry, who is believed to have died in a fiery car crash, although his body was never found. Arriving in the neon-drenched metropolis, Tim finds his dad's former partner: cuddly, coffee-guzzling, yellow Pikachu (voiced by Ryan Reynolds), who suffers from amnesia and whose snarky, smart-alecky voice only Tim can hear. With the help of cable-news intern Lucy Stevens (Kathryn Newton), billionaire Howard Clifford (Bill Nighy), and his son Roger (Chris Geere), they are determined to find out what really happened to Harry. Is the culprit Mewtwo, a beastie created by gene-splicing and DNA engineering to be the ultimate fighting machine? Or does the mystery go deeper? There are loads of Pokémon characters on hand, including Psyduck, an excitable quacker who induces headaches; Jigglypuff, a diva chanteuse; Cubone, who wears the goth-like skull of his dead mother; and Charizard, who spurts fiery dragon breath. Director Rob Letterman's frantic fantasy-adventure is squarely aimed at millennials who are



familiar with the cast of characters. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Relaxer ★★1/2

Oscilloscope, 91 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Like a lowbrow Samuel Beckett play, Joel Potrykus's minimalist comedy places a character in a surrealistic situation and then observes as he reacts helplessly to a deteriorating situation. Abbie (Joshua Burge) is a couch potato who is egged on by his domineering older brother Cam (David Dastmalchian) to complete idiotic tasks within an allotted time—such as winning a video game while consuming a gallon of milk. Before exiting their grubby apartment, Cam throws down a final gauntlet: Abbie is not to leave the couch until he reaches the highest level in Pac-Man (the year is 1999) and he will have until Cam returns to win. Abbie accepts the challenge, not realizing that his brother will be gone for months, and he refuses to give up. Abbie has visitors, including a goofy friend who brings him food but refuses to give it to Abbie until the latter pays, a woman who advises Abbie to abandon the challenge, and an exterminator who insists on releasing a cloud of insecticide. Abbie smashes a window for air and breaks open a wall to reach a water pipe, and by the time Cam returns, an apocalyptic event—presumably Y2K—has occurred outside and Abbie is a bearded vegetable. Perhaps *Relaxer* is intended as an exhortation to the Abbies of the world to get up and live, but in the end it comes across as just a snarky exercise in nihilism. Still, it did win over a fair number of critics, so consider it a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Return of the Hero

★★★

Icarus, 90 min., in French w/ English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99

Arguably a loopy spin on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* with a farcical touch of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, this story set in the French countryside during the Napoleonic wars finds an army captain named Neuville (Jean Dujardin) called off to battle in Austria moments after proposing marriage to Pauline (Noémie Merlant), an impressionable daughter of equally susceptible aristocratic parents. Although Neuville promises to write Pauline every day, nothing ever arrives in the post. Wasting away from melancholy, Pauline's poor health alarms Elisabeth (Mélanie Laurent), Pauline's quieter, more keen-witted and skeptical sister. Elisabeth resolves to rally Pauline by writing fake letters from Neuville, imaginative correspondence that makes him sound like a fearless warrior who also managed to make a fortune



when not facing thousands of enemy troops by himself. The ruse works, but after three years Pauline marries another, and Neuville returns—and he is nothing at all like the gallant figure who left. But ingratiating himself once again with Pauline's family, Neuville assumes the role of the larger-than-life figure of Elisabeth's invented missives, after which the pair enter a war of wits in an entertaining battle of the sexes. Director Laurent Tirard's handsome period film benefits from masterfully comic performances by Dujardin and Laurent. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Rocketman ★★★

Paramount, 121 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99

This jukebox musical/quasi-biopic offers little insight into the cryptic character of flamboyant singer/pianist Elton John, but as a campy musical that is probably destined for Broadway, *Rocketman* is ambitious, featuring 20 familiar songs that are cleverly interwoven to depict significant sequences in the life of Reginald Kenneth Dwight, a musical protégé from Middlesex, England. Mixing fantasy with reality, the film begins in 1990 in rehab, where Elton (Taron Egerton) struggles to come to grips with his self-absorbed mother, militaristic father, love-deprived childhood, and repressed sexual orientation. "My name is Elton Hercules John. And I'm an alcoholic. And a cocaine addict. And a sex addict. And a bulimic. Also a shopaholic...", he confesses. And the rest of the film serves to illustrate all of that in an unsanitized if also somewhat romanticized fashion. Actor-turned-director Dexter Fletcher stages splashy musical numbers, using John's songwriting partner Bernie Taupin's (Jamie Bell) lyrics to illustrate Elton's emotional journey. Egerton delivers a convincing, powerhouse performance, singing every song, and Bell is intense and poignant as Elton's true brother/collaborator. Completing the ensemble, Bryce Dallas Howard, Gemma Jones, Steven Mackintosh, and Richard Madden are also impressive, and kudos should go to costume designer Julian Day. Extravagant and excessive, *Rocketman* is sparkly fun. Recommended. (S. Granger)



Rondo ★

Artsplotation, 88 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Drew Barnhardt seems to have devoted much of his production budget for this lurid mixture of sex and violence on fake blood squibs, loads of which explode in *Rondo*'s climactic slaughter scene. What leads up to the bloodbath, however, is a tale so amateurishly staged that it carries an Ed Wood vibe. The story begins with alcoholic Paul



(Luke Sorge) seeking help from a strange therapist who sends him to an apartment where, along with two other “patients,” he is instructed by an officious guy named Lurdell (Reggie De Morton) to have rough sex with a young woman as her husband looks on. The encounter turns deadly, however, and Paul’s sister Jill (Brenna Otts) decides to take revenge on Lurdell and his perverted crew, although her attempt results in her being taken captive until she can turn the tables and use up all those blood squibs. *Rondo* is part soft-core porn, more gory mayhem, but all exploitation, delivered with a decided lack of the most rudimentary filmmaking know-how. Awash in poor acting, plodding direction, and banal dialogue—as well as all that fake blood—this is not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Ruben Brandt, Collector

★★★

Sony, 94 min., R, DVD: \$20.99

High art, pop culture, and psychology collide in this feature film debut by Hungarian animator Milorad Krstic. The spirited caper follows a team of international thieves as they steal 13 classic paintings in order to help psychiatrist Ruben Brandt, an art therapist who has nightmares of being attacked by characters from famous artworks. Imagine a 1960s romantic comedy romp as designed by Pablo Picasso (the characters are drawn in a Cubist style, often with multiple eyes and distorted faces) and directed by Salvador Dali. The swiftly-paced adventure sends its criminal super-team to the great art museums worldwide, pursued by a dogged detective whose own tastes run to classic cinema, complete with a collection of movie props. It’s an entertaining jaunt through art history with a psychological twist, a puckish sense of humor, and the overriding belief that great art has a powerful effect. The ravishing canvas incorporates a gallery of masterworks—from Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* and Manet’s *Olympia* to Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* and Warhol’s *Double Elvis*—and there are cinematic nods to Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* and Hitchcock’s elegant romantic thrillers. And while the plot relies less on narrative logic than free-association, the imagery is creative, inventive, and filled with clever details. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Screwball

★★★1/2
MPI, 105 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Not many documentaries on steroid use in sports can claim to be riotously funny, but Billy Corben’s *Screwball* is an exception, taking a sardonic approach to a Miami-based doping scandal that may remind reviewers of the fiction of Carl Hiaasen and Dave Barry. Bio-



genesis was a suspicious “anti-aging clinic” (one of many during the corrupt reign of Florida’s then-governor Rick Scott) run by dodgy “doctor” Anthony Bosch that served as a pipeline for performance-enhancing steroids and other concoctions for both high-school and professional athletes. It’s most famous client: superstar New York slugger and wealthy flake Alex Rodriguez. In 2013, the scandal exploded in the headlines, as a disgruntled Bosch associate stole and tried to peddle the clinic’s incriminating records in an incredibly clueless act of whistleblowing. Corben (*Cocaine Cowboys*) supplements unapologetic interviews with the brazen Bosch and other players (not A-Rod, though) with lengthy re-enactments starring cute *Sandlot*-aged child actors all playing interviewees, lip-syncing (and wearing fake mustaches and tattoos when appropriate). A compelling tale of a loss of innocence in the all-American sport as big money, ego, excess, the MLB corporate mafia, and Sunshine State dysfunction fatefully converged, this is highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Searching for Ingmar Bergman

★★★1/2
Oscilloscope, 99 min., in English, German, French & Swedish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Critically acclaimed German director Margarethe von Trotta works both behind and in front of the camera for this richly impressionistic documentary portrait of one of the true giants of world cinema, the late Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007). Blending archival footage of Bergman directing actors in such masterworks as *Fanny and Alexander* (1982) and *Persona* (1966) with more recent interviews with longtime collaborators (including Liv Ullmann, who is also the mother of one of Bergman’s nine children), various contemporary filmmakers (Carlos Saura, Olivier Assayas), and two of Bergman’s sons, a compelling view emerges of the great man’s complexity as an artist and patriarch. Generous clips from such Bergman classics as *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *Wild Strawberries* (1957) are mixed with comments about his virtues and flaws as a father and partner. Bergman’s self-exile from Sweden for a period (and the dark films he made during that time), as well as his side career as a director of theater, are also covered extensively. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)



The Secret Life of Pets 2

★★★1/2
Universal, 86 min., PG, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99

Set in New York City, this computer-animated sequel to the 2016 original revolves around Jack Russell Terrier Max (Patton Oswalt) and his adopted Newfoundland mix

brother Duke (Eric Stonestreet). Stressed-out Max has become overly protective of his owners’ young son Liam (Henry Lynch), who is getting ready for preschool. But before school starts, the parents (Ellie Kemper, Pete Holmes) are preparing for a weekend in the country. And that means Max must leave his favorite Busy Bee squeaky toy in the care of Gidget (Jenny Slate), a flirtatious Pomeranian, who promptly loses it and turns to the cat Chloe (Lake Bell) for help. Meanwhile, Max, Duke, and Liam are coping with their first visit to a real farm, the undisputed domain of a stately Welsh sheepdog named Rooster (Harrison Ford), who teaches Max about facing his fears and finding courage. In an unrelated segment back in the city, superhero bunny Snowball (Kevin Hart) joins sassy Shih Tzu Daisy (Tiffany Haddish) in an attempt to rescue a timid white Siberian tiger cub from a cruel circus trainer (Nick Kroll). Juggling various sprawling storylines, director Chris Renaud has once again assembled an excellent voice cast. As the protagonist, Oswald seamlessly replaces disgraced comic Louis C.K., while Ford steals the show as gruff Rooster. A sweetly silly slapstick tale—albeit scattershot and not terribly original—this will find favor with the intended young audience. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)



Sex Madness Revealed

★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 66 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Tim Kirk’s spoof of movie-themed podcasts features Patton Oswalt, who is heard but not seen as Jimmy Morris, aka The Film Dick, who here offers his online viewers a special treat: a screening of the actual 1938 cult classic *Sex Madness*—a cousin to *Reefer Madness*, about the dangers of syphilis rather than weed—complete with a running commentary by himself and his guest Chester Holloway (Rob Zabrecky), grandson of the film’s writer-director. As the screening proceeds, Morris’s observations about the picture’s manifest ineptitude are gradually overwhelmed by Holloway’s revelations about his grandfather’s real motive: to blackmail the powerful members of a secret sex cult into doing his bidding. According to Holloway, this cult was involved not only in unseemly sexual activities, but also in gruesome scientific experiments, the effects of which persist to the present day. *Sex Madness Revealed* is a one-joke concept that depends on the joke building inexorably to an explosive conclusion, but while there are scattered laughs here and there, the effort fails overall, not only because Holloway’s observations become absurdly farfetched but also because the culminating revelation—clearly intended



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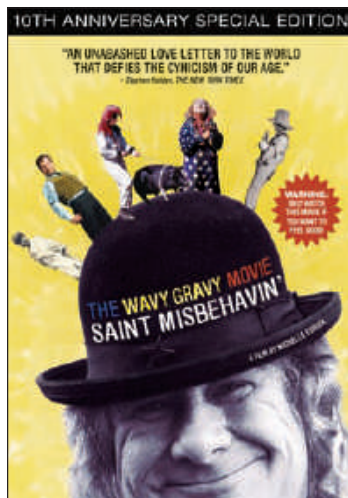
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to be horrifying as well as darkly funny—is fumbled. Optional. (F. Swietek)

Shadow ★★★1/2

Well Go USA, 116 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.98



More than a decade after his twin triumphs *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*, Chinese director Zhang Yimou returns to the *wuxia* genre with this visually stunning tale of court intrigue. Based loosely on the famous Three Kingdoms epic set in the third century A.D., *Shadow* centers on a fortress city that was lost to General Yang (Hu Jun) during one-on-one combat with Commander Yu (Deng Chao) of the Kingdom of Wei. Yu was so terribly wounded that he retreated into seclusion, but enlisted a double named Jing to replace him, and only Yu's wife (Sun Li) is aware of the deception. Jing announces to King Peiliang (Zheng Kai) that he has challenged Yang to a rematch to decide the city's fate, but the cowardly monarch instead decides to seek peace by proposing the marriage of his beautiful sister Quin Ping (Guan Xiaotong) to Yang's son Ping (Leo Wu). When the general responds by suggesting that she become his concubine instead, Quin Ping is furious, leading to a breathtaking hand-to-hand battle between Yang and Jing atop a bamboo tower that serves as a diversion for a backdoor assault on the city. *Shadow* mimics traditional Chinese ink-and-brush painting, shot in shimmering shades of white, black, and gray while also alluding to yin-yang symbolism. Although it can sometimes be overly talky and theatrical, the film is such a ravishing visual experience that its flaws hardly matter. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

SoulMate ★★★1/2

Cheng Cheng Films, 110 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99



This weepie from China concerns a lifelong bond between two girls who nevertheless grow up to become rivals in love, as well as bitter frenemies entangled in one another's ever-shifting destinies. The relationship between the undisciplined, rootless, alcoholic Ansheng (Zhou Dongyu) and the more responsible, play-by-the-rules, dull Qiyue (Sichun Ma) is not overtly sexual, yet they are happiest during sensuous and emotional rituals shared in bed. The twist that raises the stakes even higher for those pained characters is that both are in love (maybe) with the same man. Jiaming (Toby Lee) is a smart, decent guy, but also a kind of emotional meathead who never knows his own heart, and it's hard to understand how two bright women would

carry a torch for him for decades, allowing their individual lives to be shattered. Filmmaker Derek Tsang's *SoulMate* could have been a complex narrative about two women who use their alleged conflict over a man as a medium for a far deeper, unspoken struggle (unanswered desire, or mutual jealousy, or desperately wanting something the other can't give). But the hollow theatricality of this three-way slow-motion trainwreck doesn't reach those heights, although the film does boast lavish production design, arresting cinematography, and lush music. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

The Sower ★★★1/2

Film Movement, 98 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99



Filmmaker Marine Franzen's *The Sower* offers a jolting mix of psychological and romantic drama within a fresh and unpredictable story. Set in France, circa 1851, the story plays out in a rural village where soldiers are under orders from President Louis-Napoléon to kill or capture men suspected of being Republican sympathizers. Consequently, the village finds itself utterly empty of men, which leaves the women to handle all of the farm work. Months pass without men, and the women talk of sharing the first man who should venture into their world. One day, a handsome blacksmith (Alban Lenoir) turns up seeking food and shelter, and young Violette (Pauline Burlet) is assigned to make the male visitor comfortable. But the initial formal nature of their relationship evolves into something deeper and more passionate—which does not sit well with the other local women. While *The Sower* might seem like a Francophonic riff on the Clint Eastwood classic *The Beguiled*, it is actually based on Violette Ailhaud's short story *L'homme semence* (*The Seed Man*), which was written in 1919 but not published until 2006. A powerful film that explores emotional anguish under impossible circumstances, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Strawberry Flavored Plastic ★★★

Breaking Glass, 107 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



This mockumentary centers on a pair of filmmakers whose ill-considered effort to create a cinematic portrait of a serial killer goes off the rails, forcing the two directors to become part of the story. Colin Bemis, the real-life writer-director of *Strawberry Flavored Plastic*, manages to wrangle all of this meta stuff into an interesting if sometimes awkward thriller, anchored by actor Aidan Bristow as Noel, an alleged serial killer who convinces Errol (Nicholas Urda) and Ellis (Andres Montejo) that he was

recently released from prison for a murderous crime of passion. Noel's claim does not hold up, but Errol and Ellis decide to continue filming him anyway when they discover that he's a deeply violent man (perhaps even a killer) in his own right. Noel addresses the filmmakers in interviews and negotiations with a somewhat forced chivalry, and they in turn drip with obsequiousness while trying to keep him interested in remaining a subject. But the foolhardiness of engaging with a psychopath comes to haunt Errol and Ellis, who desperately want to wrap up the shoot but don't know how to end their movie. *Strawberry Flavored Plastic* bogs down when Errol and Ellis deliberate and point fingers at one another, but Bristow is operating on a long leash here that gives him room to go from quiet to monstrous in half-a-moment, and he is the real draw in this tale reminiscent of (the superior) *Man Bites Dog*. Recommended, overall. (T. Keogh)

The Sun Is Also a Star

★★★1/2

Warner, 100 min., PG-13, DVD: \$28.99



Jamaican-born high-school senior Natasha Kingsley (Yara Shahidi) is facing what could be her last day in New York City, as she and her family are scheduled for deportation. Hoping for help from a sympathetic immigration lawyer (John Leguizamo), Natasha is gazing at Grand Central terminal's huge, star-studded ceiling when she catches the eye of Korean-American Daniel Bae (Charles Melton), who is heading for a college interview. She aspires to be an astronomer; he wants to pursue poetry instead of following the medical career path carved out for him by his parents. When idealistic Daniel learns that Natasha doesn't believe in romance, he challenges her to spend the day with him so they can fall in love. Do they? And can their love survive their respective, angst-filled dilemmas? Based on Nicola Yoon's titular 2016 YA bestseller, Ry Russo-Young's film is focused on problems faced by children of immigrants, with the lead characters loosely based on Jamaican author Yoon and her Korean-American husband (although neither faced these immigration issues). Cinematographer Autumn Durald Arkapaw delivers a virtual Big Apple travelogue, capturing Chinatown, the Financial District, the tram connecting Manhattan/Roosevelt Island, the Hayden Planetarium, and Harlem's Apollo Theater. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Tickled ★★★

Magnolia, 91 min., R, DVD: \$19.99

While the title might suggest a film about a harmless fetish, this procedural-style documentary uncovers more emotional pain than physical pleasure. In the prologue, a TV

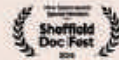
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Street: October 29th

reporter describes narrator and director David Farrier as “New Zealand’s favorite pop culture reporter.” Always on the hunt for unusual stories, Farrier comes across a call for a “competitive endurance tickling” contest that involves flights to Los Angeles, four-night hotel stays, and \$1,500 in cash. On the evidence of the video clips, it all looks rather wholesomely homoerotic (the male participants remain fully clothed during tickling sessions). Farrier proceeds to contact Jane O’Brien Media for an interview, but representative Debbie Kuhn refuses to speak to the openly gay journalist, noting that competitive tickling is “passionately and exclusively heterosexual.” She follows up with a series of homophobic insults, which only inflames Farrier’s curiosity, so he enlists Dylan Reeve as co-director to help figure out what the heck is going on. And that’s when things get really weird. After blogging about their experience, the pair receive a letter from an attorney threatening legal action, and then three Keystone Cop-like Jane O’Brien functionaries fly to Auckland to try to talk them out of their planned film project. Undeterred, Farrier and Reeve travel to California and Michigan where they interview the only participants who are willing to speak about their tickling experiences on the record. Suffice to say that the individual behind the whole bizarre scheme turns out to be one of the biggest loony-tunes to ever hit the documentary circuit, exhibiting a sadism borne of a need to humiliate and control. A disturbing truth-is-stranger-than-fiction tale, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)



Tiger Milk ★★1/2

Altered Innocence, 106 min., in German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$21.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

Based on a novel by Stefanie de Velasco, German filmmaker Ute Wieland’s *Tiger Milk* is largely a girls-gone-wild tale about two 14-year-old best friends carousing through the streets of Berlin with insouciance and a streak of malevolence. Although edgy, the basic story would be merely routine but for an interesting twist concerning the precariousness of immigrant life in Germany, as well as clashes between multiethnic groups who are at one another’s throats. Jameelah (Emily Kusche) is a kid from Iraq who fled with her mother following the killing of her father and brother. Nini (Flora Thiemann) lives with her layabout mother and the latter’s boyfriend (Nini’s father abandoned them years before). The two chase around the city together: shoplifting, stealing from men soliciting prostitutes, and provocatively shouting among pedestrians. At times, their



nonsense strains credulity, particularly when they decide to lose their virginity at the same time in the same room with two older guys (who paid the girls 200 euros)—strangers to Nini and Jameelah. Of greater plausibility are a couple of subplots, one that is focused on the growing possibility that Jameelah will be deported, and another about a lethal clash between Bosnian siblings over a relationship with a Serb. Taken together, these various story threads don’t form something whole and integrated. But *Tiger Milk* (a reference to a horrible-sounding mix of milk, passion fruit juice, and alcohol that the girls enjoy) does feature a few arresting scenes and a heartbreaking conclusion. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

Tolkien ★★

Fox, 112 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99

This literary origin bio-pic centering on J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*) begins in 1916 in the muddy trenches of World War I, where shell-shocked Tolkien (Nicholas Hoult) searches for a friend during the Battle of the Somme, while imagining German flamethrowers as fire-breathing dragons. A flashback reveals that John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973) was orphaned with his younger brother. Peniless, they were entrusted to Father Francis Morgan (Colm Meaney), who enrolled the boys in King Edward’s School in Birmingham, and they boarded in the home of elderly Mrs. Faulkner (Pam Ferris). And that is where shy Tolkien falls in love with pianist Edith Bratt (Lily Collins), who introduces him to Wagner’s operas about “one ring to rule them all.” Tolkien also charms Edith with his own invented language, a precursor of Elvish. On scholarship at Oxford, Tolkien finds three artistic/intellectual friends (played by Tom Glynn-Carney, Patrick Gibson, and Anthony Boyle), and all form a secret society: the T.C.B.S.—Tea Club and Barrovian Society—to “change the world through the power of art.” Floundering in academia, Tolkien joins philologist Joseph Wright (Derek Jacobi) to study linguistics, which will set him on his famous career path. Finnish director Dome Karukoski unfortunately forsakes all fun for an all-too-respectful, flaccid, and flimsy fellowship tale. Optional. (S. Granger)



The Tomorrow Man ★★

Universal, 96 min., PG-13, DVD: \$22.98

Filmmaker Noble Jones’s *The Tomorrow Man* is a quirky romance tale centered on two eccentric senior citizens. Somewhere in rural America, retired Ed Hemsler (John Lithgow) believes every conspiracy theory and/or doomsday prophecy that he hears or reads. Determined to be prepared for the inevitable apocalypse, Ed buys enough food

and emergency supplies to survive a disaster for an indeterminate length of time. One day, while stocking up on canned goods in the supermarket, he spies Ronnie Meisner (Blythe Danner) in the checkout line, paying cash for her groceries instead of using a credit card. Thinking she might be a fellow survivalist, he is eager to make her acquaintance. After starting a conversation in the parking lot, they meet for coffee. He’s “on the wrong side of 60,” divorced for many years, with a grown son (Derek Cecil) who has a family of his own. She’s a lonely widow whose daughter recently died. And they are both partial to Captain & Tennille’s version of the ‘70s pop song “Muskrat Love.” Obviously, they are kindred spirits, so one thing leads to another, although their TV-viewing habits are vastly different. Ed watches a cable TV news program in which the anchorwoman always seems to conclude the broadcast by talking directly to him, while Ronnie is devoted to WWII documentaries. Another difference: he’s a meticulous neatnik, while she’s a compulsive hoarder. Jones’s quirky dramedy builds slowly, moving towards a surprising conclusion. Unfortunately, little time is devoted to backstory and character development, so while veterans Lithgow and Danner make the most of their superficially-scripted roles in this idiosyncratic film, it is still a disappointment. Optional. (S. Granger)

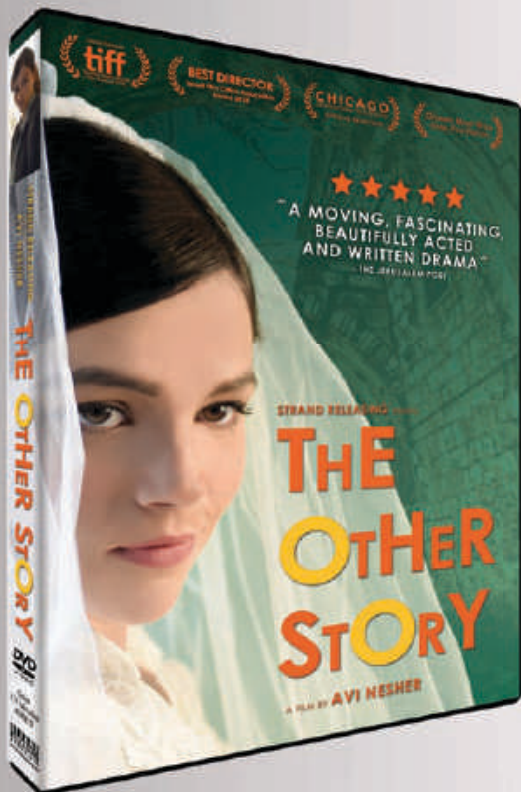


Transit ★★★1/2

Music Box, 102 min., in German & French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99

Anna Seghers’s titular 1944 novel about Jewish refugees trapped in Marseilles while trying to flee the Nazi advance into France forms the basis for Christian Petzold’s film, but *Transit* is no period piece. While the plot is not altered, the story is presented in modern dress, minus the trapings that would distance the events from our own era. And this makes the narrative as relevant as it was 75 years ago, serving up a timeless, existential fable of displacement. The protagonist is Georg (Franz Rogowski), a Jewish radio technician who has escaped from Germany and adopts the identity of a writer who committed suicide, intending to take advantage of the dead man’s guarantee of safe passage to Mexico. But his plan grows complicated after he meets the writer’s estranged wife, Marie (Paula Beer), who is seeking her husband, and he falls in love with her. Georg also interacts with others, including a soccer-loving boy desperate for a surrogate father and his deaf-mute mother; a pathetic orchestral conductor hoping to reach South America; a steely Jewish architect left behind





THE OTHER STORY

"Filled to the brim with intense emotions... holding on to your seat is strongly recommended!" - Los Angeles Times

Renowned filmmaker Avi Nesher's latest film tells a suspenseful, poignant, and humorous story through the eyes of two rebellious young women from two troubled families that tangle in the most unexpected ways in Jerusalem.

Street Date: **October 22, 2019** | SRP: \$27.99

DVD # 3900-2 | UPC 7 12267 39002 1

112 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In Hebrew with English subtitles



OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

YOMEDDINE

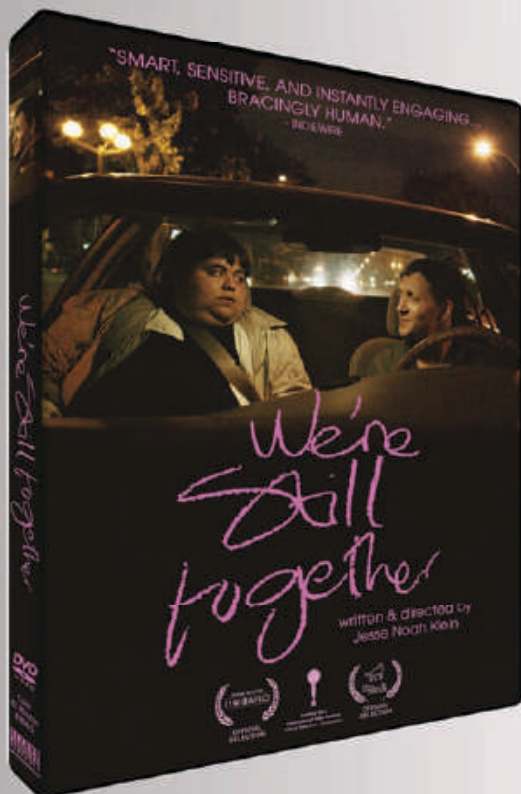
"Life-affirming" - Film Forward

Beshay - a man cured of leprosy - has never left the leper colony in the Egyptian desert where he has lived since childhood. With his meagre possessions strapped to a donkey cart, he sets out, joined by Obama, the nubian orphan he has taken under his wing. Beshay will cross Egypt and confront the world in search for a place to belong..

Street date: **September 24, 2019** | SRP: \$27.99

DVD #: 3815-2 | UPC: 7 12267 38142 5

97 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In Arabic with English Subtitles



WE'RE STILL TOGETHER

"Bracingly human" - IndieWire

Chris can't get along with anyone. When he's attacked in the street, Bobby, a manic single dad, jumps in. The two set out into the Montreal night together crashing parties, meeting girls, and eventually seeing Bobby's estranged daughter. Chris soon discovers that the underside to Bobby's charm is a self-destructive streak.

Street Date: **September 10, 2019** | SRP: \$24.99

DVD # 3806-2 | UPC 7 12267 38062 6

82 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In English with English subtitles

FELIZ AÑO TIJUANA

"A love letter to Tijuana"

- The Los Angeles Times

Adventure, romance, and the resplendent cultural flavor of Tijuana permeate the air in this spirited, high-energy and imaginative film. When Alejandro, a Chicano Studies professor from Los Angeles finds himself stranded in the unpredictable border town on New Year's Eve, a surprise encounter with a former student unleashes a roller coaster of emotions in Alejandro that brings his inner conflicts of love, belief, and identity bubbling to the surface.

Street date: **October 8, 2019** | SRP: \$24.99

DVD #: 3907-2 | UPC: 7 12267 39072 4

74 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In Spanish and English with English Subtitles



by her colleagues; a kindly doctor who also loves Marie and plans on taking her to safety; and the consulate officials who need to approve Georg's papers. Petzold gives Georg's sojourn in Marseilles an off-kilter, vaguely hallucinatory quality that conveys the state of impermanence in which he finds himself (and by extension relating to every refugee, or any human being stuck in a world of sudden, uncontrollable change). The peculiar style of *Transit* may put off some viewers, but for others it will make the *Casablanca*-like narrative even more compelling. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

We Have Always Lived in the Castle ★★★

Passion River, 98 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

Based on Shirley Jackson's titular 1962 final novel, this taut gothic tale of secrecy, a family decimated by unsolved murders, and a mysterious interloper who threatens everyone's precarious hold on sanity, is an atmospheric, highly stylized thriller. Director Stacie Passon channels Jackson's signature tones of paranoia and dread, engaging in a visual audacity that never crosses the line into camp. Eighteen-year-old Mary Katherine Blackwood (Taissa Farmiga), nicknamed "Merricat," is the awkward and socially belittled youngest member of a posh New England family who were all but wiped out in their mansion on a hill when several members, including Merricat's parents, were poisoned by arsenic mixed into a sugar bowl. Local townspeople's suspicion of the survivors has turned to raging hatred, and Merricat has taken to her own brand of witchcraft, casting spells and burying objects on the Blackwood grounds to protect her agoraphobic older sister, Constance (Alexandra Daddario), and feeble Uncle Julian (Crispin Glover). A not-so-delicate balance between all parties is upended when an obnoxious stranger (Sebastian Stan) who claims to be a cousin turns up at the mansion and—sensing the fragility of the sisters' and Julian's situation—throws his weight around in an effort to locate family treasures. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



We're Still Together ★★★

Strand, 82 min., In English & French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Sept. 10

Chris (Jesse Camacho) is a morbidly obese teen experiencing a living hell, regularly assaulted by bullies and locked into a mercurial relationship with his offscreen mother, who apparently bans him from coming home after a quarrel. On one such day of violence and aimless wandering through his hometown of Montreal, Chris is beaten by two thugs who frequently attack him. "Just



do what you're going to do," he tells them, hoping to survive so he can go home when mom cools off. Enter Bobby (Joey Klein), a 30-ish loner who steps out of his car and rescues Chris, punishing the punks with equal amounts of pain and peculiar, life-coach-like rhetoric. Afterward, Bobby—who looks like he jumped from the pages of a Jack Kerouac novel—takes Chris under his wing for a night of misadventure and madness. A dangerously grandiose figure who probably should be on medication, Bobby is the type of guy who takes over every room he enters or every situation involving his estranged family (or Chris) as something that he needs to master, challenge, or soak with self-pity. Yet it's hard not to see the good in Bobby, especially in his paternal (if overwhelming) kinship with miserable Chris. Writer-director Jesse Klein (brother of Joey) has taken a classic trope—an endless car ride—and infused it with a spirit of chaos and darkness that is cracked by the characters' sincere, if sometimes misplaced, efforts at grasping love. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

The White Crow ★★★1/2

Sony, 127 min., R, DVD: \$20.99

The title of director Ralph Fiennes's kaleidoscopic biopic about dancer Rudolf Nureyev (Oleg Ivenko) refers to a Russian expression meaning an "odd bird." Nureyev's story begins in 1961, just after he defected to the West, as his mentor/teacher Alexander Pushkin (Fiennes) is questioned by government agents. In confusing flashbacks, viewers learn that Nureyev was born on a Trans-Siberian train in 1938 and lived an impoverished childhood in Ufa (which Fiennes films as devoid of color). When his mother smuggled Rudy and his sisters into a ballet performance, his future was set. Nureyev spent his formative years at Leningrad's Vaganova Academy, a feeder for the Kirov Ballet (now the Mariinsky). Substituting ferocious passion for technique, he rebelled against classical authority, becoming known for both his perfectionism and arrogance. When the Kirov went on tour to Paris, mercurial Nureyev dismissed "official" outings, preferring to visit museums and galleries by himself or accompanied by French friends, such as Clara Saint (Adele Exarchopoulos), daughter of the notable Chilean artist. Reprimanded by Soviet authorities, Nureyev was told that he couldn't travel with the Kirov to London. But rather than return to Moscow, he sought asylum at Paris's La Bouget Airport. *The White Crow* doesn't deal with Nureyev's subsequent Royal Ballet partnership with British ballerina Margot Fonteyn, later work at the Paris Opera Ballet in the 1980s, or death from AIDS in 1993. Based on Julie Kavanagh's 2007 biography *Rudolf Nureyev: The Life*, the fragmented script by David Hare emphasizes



Nureyev's physical, mental, and emotional dedication. Unfortunately, Ivenko, a talented Ukrainian with the Tatar State Ballet in Kazan, lacks Nureyev's charismatic sensuality. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Woman at War ★★★1/2

Magnolia, 100 min., in Icelandic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99

Icelandic director Benedikt Erlingsson's *Woman at War* stars Halldora Geirharosdottir as Halla, a middle-aged choir director who is secretly an eco-terrorist. With her fancy bow and arrow, plastic explosives, and metal-cutting power saw, Halla takes out and blows up sections of a power grid despoiling a vast green and rocky valley outside Reykjavik—all to sabotage an unwanted aluminum factory. On the run from helicopters and drones looking for the culprit, Halla displays an impressive range of survival skills before returning to her cheerful, musical self, back in ordinary life. Her status quo is shaken when an adoption agency she applied to years before tells her that a Ukrainian girl is available. Suddenly Halla has a decision to make: stick with her radical cause or become a loving mom. The choice places her back in touch with her twin sister (also Geirharosdottir), a spiritual seeker who is heading off to India, and a bearish farmer (Johann Siguroarson) who becomes an ally. Erlingsson (*Of Horses and Men*) is a talent to reckon with, serving up an engagingly original story with vigor and adventurousness. And star Geirharosdottir is fantastic, running across lush wildland to evade capture, camouflaging herself with the skin of a sheep, and hiding in a freezing river. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)



Yomeddine ★★★

Strand, 97 min., in Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Sept. 24

A.B. Shawky's film is an unusual road movie, a technically crude but emotionally powerful dramedy in which a leper and an orphan travel the length of Egypt in search of their families. Rady Gamal is Beshay, whose father dropped him off at a leper colony many years before and never returned. Although his face is terribly scarred and his limbs somewhat deformed, he ekes out a living scrounging for scraps in rubbish dumps and transporting them for resale in his donkey-drawn cart. When his wife dies, however, Beshay decides to leave the colony and search out his father. Obama (Ahmed Abdelhafiz), a 10-year-old orphan, sees Beshay departing and stows away in his cart, hoping to find his own family too. Over the course of their long journey the pair naturally bond, experiencing kindness along



THE GOOD BREAST



"AN UNFLINCHING LOOK."

—Thomas LaVeist, PhD

Veteran breast cancer surgeon Dr. Lauren Schnaper believes that fear and ignorance are fueling an alarming rate of medically unnecessary mastectomies in America. But for the four women in this film who allow intimate access to the ups and downs of their treatment, their search for "the good breast" is a necessity.

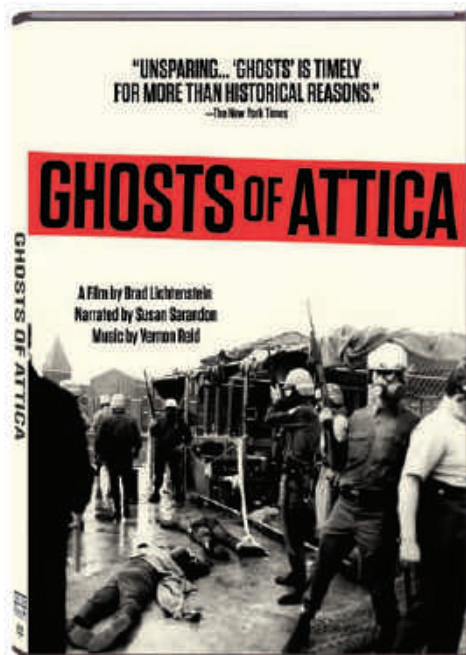
"A poignant documentary about the grueling battle of breast cancer."

—Bentonville Film Festival

THE GOOD BREAST • A film by Bernadette Wegenstein • An Icarus Films Release
 2016 • 94 min • Color • in English • Not Rated • Closed Captioned
 UPC # 8-54565-00281-4 • SRP: \$29.98

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GHOSTS OF ATTICA



"POWERFUL AND DISTURBING."

—Indiewire

Attica. Like Watergate and Vietnam, it is an icon of recent history. Gov. Rockefeller's brutal re-taking of the prison—a nine-minute assault that took the lives of 29 inmates and 10 guards—put an end to the four-day rebellion. But the struggles for justice endured for three decades. The definitive film history of the Attica Prison uprising and its aftermath.

NARRATED BY SUSAN SARANDON

"Top of the line in its every detail."

—Entertainment Weekly

GHOSTS OF ATTICA • A film by Brad Lichtenstein • An Icarus Films Release
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AVAILABLE 9/3

THE OTHER SIDE OF EVERYTHING



"THOROUGHLY ABSORBING."

—The New York Times

A locked door inside a Belgrade home has kept one family separated from their past for generations. An intimate conversation between the director and her mother, the dynamic activist and scholar Srbijanka Turajli, reveals a house and a country haunted by history.

"Accessible, informative, and wryly humorous."

—The Hollywood Reporter

Winner! Best Documentary, 2018 International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA)

THE OTHER SIDE OF EVERYTHING • A film by Mila Turajlić • An Icarus Films Release
 2017 • 104 min • Color • in Serbian w/ English subtitles • Not Rated
 UPC # 8-54565-00239-5 • SRP: \$29.98

AVAILABLE NOW!

THE HEIRESESSES



"EXTRADORDINARY!"

—RogerEbert.com

Chela and Chiquita, both descended from wealthy families in Asunción, Paraguay, have been together for over 30 years. But recently their financial situation has worsened and they begin selling off their inherited possessions. When their debts lead to Chiquita being imprisoned on fraud charges, Chela is forced to face a new reality.

"Finely-crafted, beautifully realized."

—Variety

THE HEIRESESSES • A film by Marcelo Martinessi • An Icarus Films Release • From Distrib Films
 2018 • 97 min • Color • in Spanish w/English subtitles • Not Rated
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the way (as when they fall in with helpful beggars) and prejudice as well (fellow passengers on a train try to eject them out of fear). There are moments of joy as the two get to know one another, but also painful episodes, such as when Obama suddenly falls ill or their donkey collapses. And there is frequent criticism of a governmental bureaucracy that does little to help the country's forgotten poor. A touching portrayal of an unlikely friendship, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Classic Films

The Bedroom Window

★★★1/2

Kino, 112 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Future Oscar-winning filmmaker Curtis Hanson (*L.A. Confidential*) first made his reputation with this 1987 thriller, which draws deep from the Alfred Hitchcock well. Steve Guttenberg plays everyman hero Terry, a "romantic fool" who is having an affair with the boss's wife (Isabelle Huppert). She sees an assault while looking out through Terry's bedroom window but is unwilling to come forward, so when the same man murders another young woman, Terry steps forward to give his mistress's testimony as the witness. After becoming the new prime suspect when his story falls apart at trial, Terry teams up with Denise (Elizabeth McGovern)—survivor of the first attack—to trap the real killer. In addition to the film's debt to *Rear Window*, it features a well-executed set-piece in which Terry rushes to stop a murder at a ballet recital but ends up neatly framed for the killing in a theater that is filled with witnesses (a scene that recalls *North by Northwest*). Guttenberg makes for a likable hero but he has little dimension or depth and the script relies on leaps of logic and contrivances (how does Terry burst into a sold-out ballet hall—twice!—without a ticket?). But Hanson is a skilled director of suspense and he draws the audience into the self-made trap created by the well-meaning hero. And Wallace Shawn has a great scene as the attorney who takes Terry's story apart in court. Extras include audio commentary by film historian and critic Peter Tonguette. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



The Big Clock ★★★

Arrow, 96 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99

Ray Milland stars as the editor of a crime magazine whose latest assignment from his publisher (Charles Laughton) is to track down a mystery man in this clever 1948 film noir thriller. Laughton delivers a suitably hammy performance as Earl Janoth, an imperious, micromanaging



media mogul obsessed with time and punctuality—every clock in his office building is synchronized with the giant clock in the lobby—and Milland is George Stroud, a family man who goes on a drinking binge with Janoth's vindictive mistress (Rita Johnson) when he is fired. After Janoth murders his mistress in a rage, he hires Stroud back to lead the search for the man she was seen with. Director John Farrow avoids the more lurid aspects of the story—Stroud never makes a pass at his beautiful drinking buddy—focusing instead on the ordeal of an innocent man trying to save himself as the investigation closes in. The visual style lacks the evocative heavy shadows and claustrophobic atmosphere of more traditional film noirs—only one scene in the basement clockworks presents the characters slipping in and out of darkness in a visual labyrinth—but the direction of the actors is excellent and the pacing builds the tension beautifully as Stroud races to find the real killer before he himself is identified in this solid thriller. Extras include audio commentary by film scholar Adrian Martin, new featurettes on the film and Laughton, a 1948 radio play version featuring Milland, and a gallery of stills and artwork. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The BRD Trilogy

★★★★1/2

Criterion, 3 discs, 339 min., in German w/English subtitles, R, Blu-ray: \$99.95

Rainer Werner Fassbinder was already an internationally respected filmmaker when he embarked on a trilogy of films that explored the history of post-war Germany and the Federal Republic of Germany (i.e., the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or BRD) as seen through the eyes of three women—movies that became his first big commercial hits in Germany. Hanna Schygulla stars in *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979) as a woman struggling to survive while awaiting the return of her husband, a soldier reported missing in battle. Maria's rise to success parallels Germany's development in the years between 1945 and 1954, but the personal costs to Maria belong to the operatic emotional world of melodrama. The gauzy beauty of the look in *Maria* becomes brighter, harder, and more decadently garish in *Lola* (1981), a spin on Heinrich Mann's 1905 novel *Professor Unrat* and Josef von Sternberg's 1930 film *The Blue Angel*. Fassbinder's reworking casts Barbara Sukowa as the star attraction in a Bavarian brothel, with Armin Muller-Stahl as a self-righteous city bureaucrat whose fight against corruption is sidetracked when he falls for the calculating Lola. Shot in stark and striking black-and-white, *Veronika Voss* (1982) is kind of a *Sunset Boulevard* story set in the shadowy twilight of Munich some 10 years after the war. Rosel Zech stars an aging former movie star who is



now a lonely, forgotten, drug-addicted victim of a predatory doctor who feeds her habit while systematically robbing her estate. *The BRD Trilogy* films rank among Fassbinder's greatest and most accessible. Newly remastered from 4K restorations, extras include audio commentary on each film, cast and crew interviews, archival featurettes, and the feature-length 1992 documentary on Fassbinder *I Don't Just Want You to Love Me*. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Extraordinary World of Charley Bowers

★★★★1/2

Flicker Alley, 2 discs, 288 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$49.99

Charley Bowers was one of the most ingenious talents of the silent film and early sound film eras, but is one of the least remembered by modern audiences. This collection of 17 restored short films spanning 1917-40 provides a long-overdue appreciation of this creative artist's distinctive approach to filmmaking. Originally a cartoonist and animator, Bowers moved into live-action productions that mixed stop-motion animation with complex mechanically-inspired humor. In shorts including *Egged On* (1926) and *Many a Slip* (1927), Bowers tries to improve on the food chain by creating an unbreakable egg and a no-slip banana peel, respectively. As a performer, Bowers's diminutive stature and mostly deadpan approach to outlandish physical situations recalls Buster Keaton's screen persona, but also predated Ernie Kovacs in creating surreal sight gags that boggled the imagination: a basket of eggs in *Egged On* hatch to reveal a swarm of miniature automobiles, while a pussy willow in *Now You Tell One* (1926) grows full-sized cats. Bowers's sound work—including *It's a Bird* (1930), featuring a metal-eating avian—shows his ability to incorporate clever audio elements into his cinematic trickery. Extras include the documentary short *Looking for Charley Bowers* (which details how French film archivist Raymond Borde rediscovered Bowers's long-lost films in the 1960s and championed his cause), an image gallery, and a booklet with an essay by *Video Librarian* contributor Sean Axmaker. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)



Fantomas: Three Film Collection ★★

Kino, 2 discs, 304 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$49.99

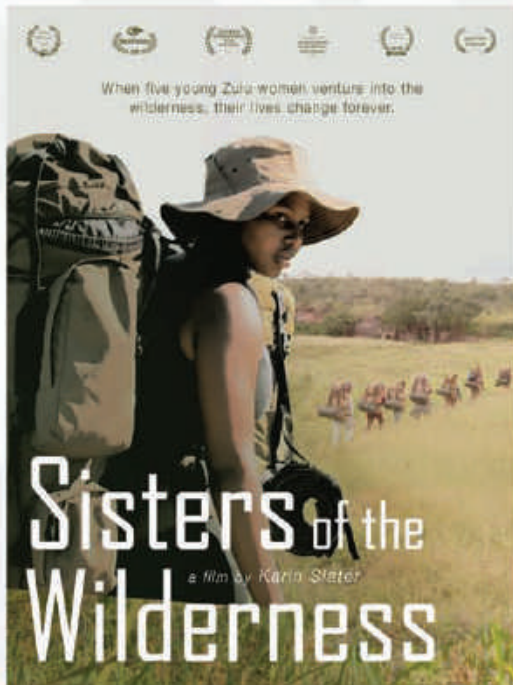
Jean Marais, who was most famous for his leading roles in Jean Cocteau's films *Beauty and the Beast* and *Orpheus*, plays dual roles in this trilogy of supervillain crime films based on the pulp serials written by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain in the 1910s. In *Fantomas*



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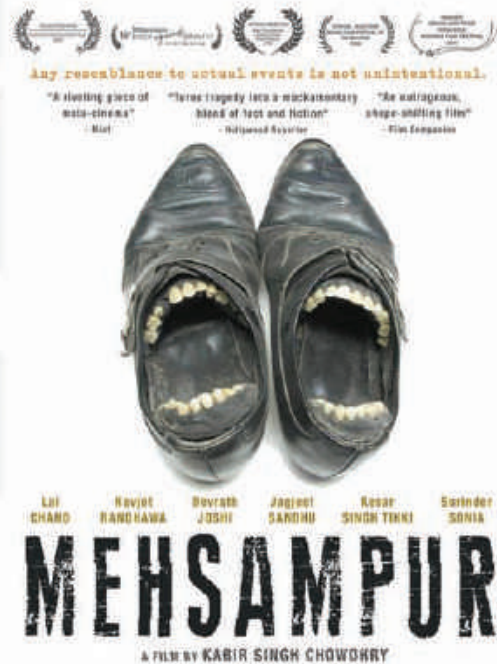
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"A riveting piece of meta-cinema" – *Mint*



FAMILY

UPC: 845637000333 SRP: \$24.95

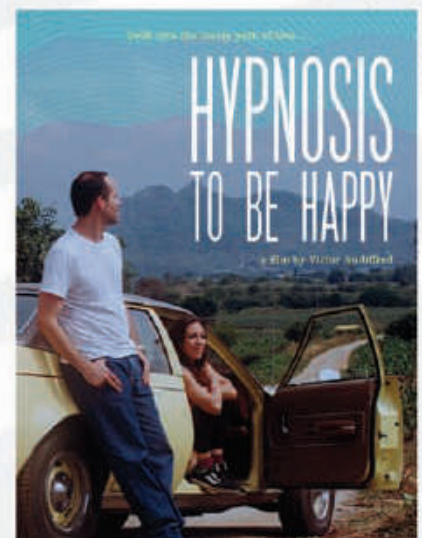
"Successfully combines horror and comedy... A must-see" – *Mako*



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Two young adults in Shanghai break out of their postmodern loneliness.



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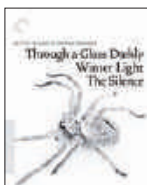
**SOUND
VIEW**
audio-visual

(1964), Marais is cynical reporter Fandor, who ridicules the police for blaming a crime wave on the mysterious criminal Fantomas. Fandor claims this figure does not exist, but soon enough, the masked villain comes for Fandor and when the former finally pulls off his mask he reveals the face of...Jean Marais. In fact, Fantomas is both a criminal genius and a master of disguise and he commits crimes wearing the faces of Fandor and Police Commissioner Juve (Louis de Funès), the bumbling head of police. *Fantomas*, made in the wake of the James Bond phenomenon was directed by André Hunebelle, a veteran of the French OSS 117 espionage knock-off series, who also helmed the two sequels. Marais, de Funès, and Mylène Demongeot (who plays Fandor's girlfriend, newspaper photographer Hélène) return for *Fantomas Unleashed* (1965) and *Fantomas vs. Scotland Yard* (1967), which both lean even further into comedy. *Unleashed* features an array of comic Bond-like gadgets hatched by an even more inept Juve, and *Scotland Yard* drops the cast into a haunted house farce with Fantomas playing the ghost. These lighthearted supervillain larks—shot in brightly-colored CinemaScope—are hardly essential and become increasingly silly but they do have their fans. Extras include audio commentary by film historian Tim Lucas on *Fantomas*. Optional. (S. Axmaker)

A Film Trilogy by Ingmar Bergman ★★ ★ 1/2

Criterion, 3 discs, 266 min., in Swedish w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray: \$99.95

In 1961, Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman embarked on a trilogy of chamber dramas confronting the existence of God in the modern world. The Oscar-winning *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961) stars Harriet Andersson as a young woman suffering from mental illness who spirals deeper into schizophrenia when she discovers that her novelist father (Gunnar Björnstrand) plans to record her decline for his work. *Winter Light* (1963) takes on the existence of God even more directly through the story of a small-town pastor (also Björnstrand) in a spiritual crisis and a parishioner (Max von Sydow) suffering from a debilitating fear of nuclear annihilation. Ingrid Thulin and Gunnel Lindblom are sisters whose ambiguous relationship breaks down as they travel through an unnamed country on the verge of war in *The Silence* (1963), a title that evokes both the silence of God and the sisters' inability to communicate. All three are serious, provocative, philosophically heavy films that are evocatively shot in beautifully textured black-and-white in the cold winter light of Bergman's world by Sven Nykvist, creating a harsh beauty and a sense of alienation and disconnection. Restored and remastered by the Svensk Filminstitutet, extras include the five-part documentary "Ingmar Bergman



Makes a Movie" shot during the production of *Winter Light*, and archival interviews with Andersson, Björnstrand (audio), and cinematographer Nykvist (illustrated audio), as well as observations from 2003 on each film by Bergman scholar Peter Cowie, a poster gallery, and a booklet with an essay by film scholar Catherine Wheatley. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Gaslight ★★ ★

Warner, 114 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99

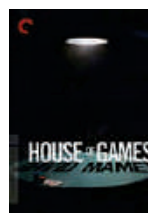
George Cukor's 1944 psychological thriller still holds up as a stylish mystery, and features one of star Ingrid Bergman's best performances as a strong woman being driven into madness. Set at the dawn of the 20th century, the story (based on a 1938 play by Patrick Hamilton) begins with the offscreen murder of famous opera singer Alice Alquist. The unknown killer's search for jewels in the diva's house is interrupted by Alice's teenage niece, Paula (Bergman), who is sent off to Italy to forget the tragedy and pursue a singing career. Instead, Paula falls for a debonair pianist, Gregory (Charles Boyer), who she marries after a whirlwind romance. Reluctantly returning—at Gregory's insistence—to the London home where Alice died, Paula agrees to Gregory's suggestion that all of Alice's furniture be moved to the attic and replaced for a fresh start. Over time, Gregory reveals himself to be a soft tyrant, taking charge of Paula's freedom of movement, blocking her social life, and making sure that she believes she has chronic forgetfulness, loses track of valuables, and commits mischief that she can't recall. The longer Paula insists that she is not responsible for Gregory's charges, the more she doubts her sanity, a fear that grows every night as she hears phantom footsteps in the attic and witnesses gas lamps dimming with no explanation. Joseph Cotten is sharp as a take-charge Scotland Yard inspector who sees the underhanded campaign against Paula, and an 18-year-old Angela Lansbury is memorable as a house servant who is equal parts snark and flirtatiousness. The film's title has entered the American lexicon as a verb meaning to manipulate someone by psychological means into questioning their own sanity. Extras include the original 1940 British version, a 1946 Lux Radio Theatre broadcast, a retrospective featurette, and a vintage newsreel. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



House of Games ★★ ★

Criterion, 102 min., R, DVD or Blu-ray: \$39.95

The 1987 directorial debut of Pulitzer and Tony award-winning playwright and Oscar-nominated screenwriter David Mamet



plays on the writer's fascination with confidence schemes and criminal psychology. Lindsay Crouse, Mamet's then-wife, is psychologist and author Margaret Ford, who visits a gambling hall in order to help a patient. Joe Mantegna, a veteran of Mamet's stage plays, costars as gambler and con artist Mike, who tries to scam Margaret out of \$6,000 in a poker game and ends up allowing her to play a role in a major con that involves \$80,000 and a wealthy businessman (J.T. Walsh) who turns out to have his own secret agenda. The plot twists and turns, and the characters are constantly playing roles within roles, from the impersonal mask of the psychiatrist pushing her patients to probe further, to the gamblers bluffing their way through hands of cards, criminal schemes, and seductions. The screenplay features the same terse, rhythmic volleys of stylized dialogue from Mamet's stage plays, at times sounding like song lyrics with their repetitions and call-and-response patterns. Mamet directs with a stripped-down visual style to match his pared-down dialogue, always appearing to show the audience everything in a straightforward manner while using misdirection and dramatic sleight-of-hand to mask the real story. This Blu-ray debut from the Criterion Collection is dedicated to Ricky Jay, the late magician and historian who both costarred and served as the consultant on confidence games. Extras include a 2007 audio commentary by Mamet, archival interviews with Crouse and Mantegna from 2007, a documentary short made during the film's production, and a booklet with an essay by critic Kent Jones. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Madame X ★★ ★

Kino, 100 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.99

This 1966 version of an oft-filmed 1908 French melodrama is as sudsy as a big screen soap opera can be, yet the sincerity of key performances by Lana Turner, Constance Bennett, Keir Dullea, and John Forsythe earn *Madame X* some respect. Turner stars as Holly, a former shop-girl who marries glorified mama's boy Clay (Forsythe), a patrician who is part of a dynastic political family. The two live together with their son, Clay Jr., and Clay's duplicitous mother, Estelle (Bennett), in an old family mansion that serves as a social hub for the rich and powerful. Clay's frequent absences on business drive lonely Holly into the arms of a playboy (Ricardo Montalban), which gives Estelle the excuse she needs to exile the daughter-in-law she hates into another life under an believing name. Clay and Clay Jr. spend the next 20 years believing that Holly is dead, while the latter gradually sinks into despair and drunkenness. *Madame X* marked Turner's third starring role in a feature by producer Ross Hunter, who hoped that legendary



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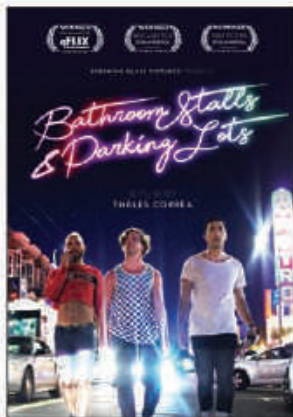
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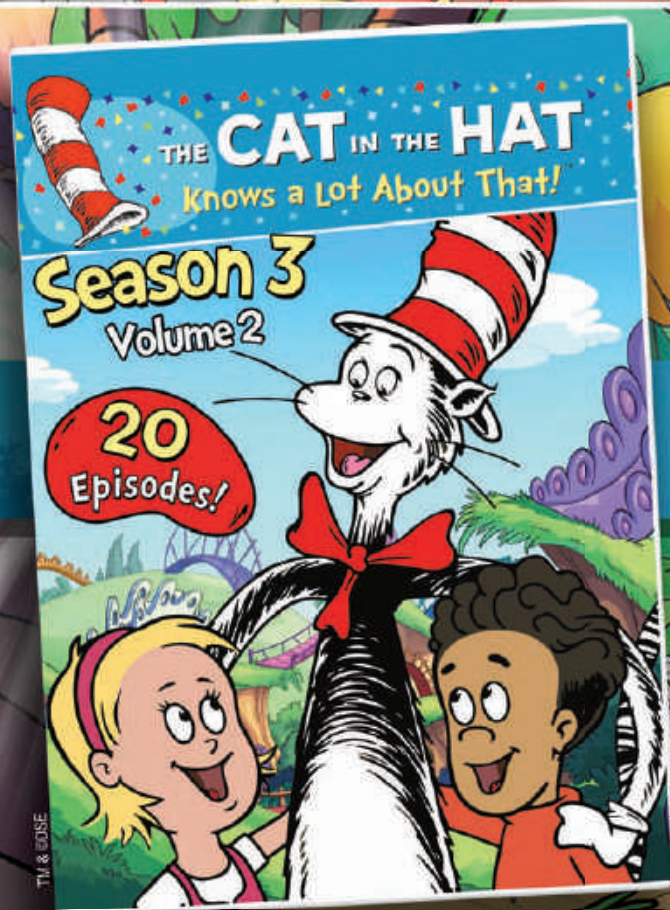
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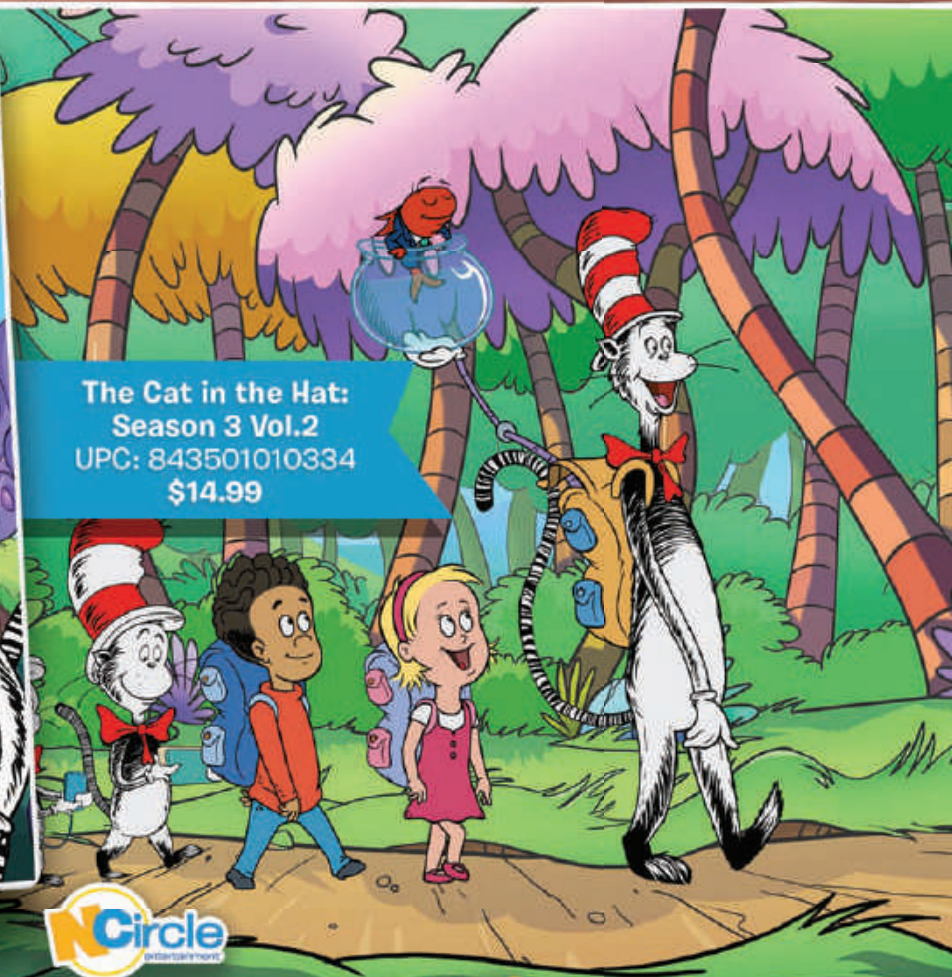
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director Douglas Sirk would helm the film, but the job went instead to competent veteran David Lowell Rich. Extras include audio commentary by film historians Lee Gambin and Dr. Eloise Ross. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

The Nun ★★★

Kino, 140 min., in French w/ English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



The second film by French New Wave director Jacques Rivette, adapted from the 1796 epistolary novel *Le Religieuse* by Denis Diderot, *The Nun* stands out from the freewheeling filmmaker's career for its controlled, classical approach. Anna Karina stars as Suzanne, the youngest daughter of a wealthy lawyer in 18th-century Paris who is forced to take vows in a convent against her wishes. Suzanne is a devout woman who loves God but simply does not feel a calling and wishes to experience the world outside. When she sues to have her vows annulled, she suffers under a tyrannical Mother Superior who cruelly punishes her, and is sexually pursued by a decadent abbess when she relocates to a more permissive convent. *The Nun* is essentially a chamber drama, taking place almost entirely within austere convent cells and chapels, and Suzanne's spirit and individuality is all but suffocated by the habit she wears and the cold, claustrophobic rooms she inhabits. Rivette treats convent life and ritual as a kind of performance, which Suzanne disrupts with her defiant protest. Karina powerfully brings Suzanne to life, and even while covered in the habit she stands out from the conformity of her sisters. Completed in 1966, the film was banned for a year in France and not seen in the U.S. until 1971. Extras include audio commentary by film critic Nick Pinkerton, a new "making-of" documentary short, and a booklet with an essay by film critic Dennis Lim. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

One Sings, the Other Doesn't ★★★1/2

Criterion, 121 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Agnès Varda wrote and directed this portrait of two women over a 15-year period as each becomes—in her own way—a part of the feminist movement in France. Valérie Mairesse plays Pauline, a rebellious high school girl in the provinces, and Thérèse Liotard is Suzanne, the wife of a frustrated photographer and an overwhelmed mother of two. When the pair meet again 10 years later at an abortion rights rally in Paris, Pauline (who goes by the name Pomme) is working with a theater group and Suzanne has founded a family planning clinic. One could call the film a feminist musical—

Pomme and her traveling band The Orchids perform socially conscious songs across the countryside (with lyrics penned by Varda)—but it's also a touching drama of friendship, sisterhood, and creating a meaningful life. Varda doesn't emphasize the conflicts that the women face while pursuing their careers and promoting female empowerment, but rather the connections they make with others, empathizing with almost every character in the film. She makes her points through the action rather than dialogue and her collaborative approach to filmmaking gives the film a warm inclusiveness. All in all, it's a minor classic of feminist cinema and a lovely portrait of self-empowerment in a time of social change. Presented with a new restoration, extras include the 1977 documentary *Women Are Naturally Creative: Agnès Varda*, Varda's short films *Response de femmes* (1975) and *Plaisir d'amour en Iran* (1976), and a booklet with an essay by film critic Amy Taubin. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Robbery ★★★

Kino, 110 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Before Peter Yates came stateside to direct Steve McQueen in *Bullitt*, which set the bar for dynamic car chases onscreen, the British filmmaker helmed the 1967 caper drama *Robbery*. Inspired by the true story of the 1963 Great Train Robbery, the film stars Stanley Baker as a criminal mastermind who works behind the scenes while his partners execute his planned robberies. Yates opens the film with a tightly-directed daylight heist and an impressive car chase through London, illustrating the skill and smarts of the team, before the leader offers his gang the crown jewel job of their careers: the Glasgow-London Night Train, which carries millions of pounds in a guarded vault. The robbery is meticulously planned and Yates follows every detail of the execution, which is nearly flawless, but a few mistakes and short-sighted decisions put it into jeopardy. James Booth costars as Inspector George Langdon, who has made nabbing the gang a personal priority, and Frank Finlay is the currency specialist shanghaied against his will from prison only months shy of his release date. Yates directs with a hard realism and gritty action, capturing the physical aspects of the robbery without dwelling on the characters (only Baker and Finlay's roles have any dimension) in this well-made if not well known showpiece. Extras include audio commentary by film critic Nick Pinkerton. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Running Man ★★

Arrow, 104 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$39.99

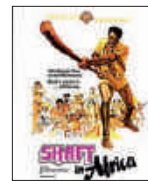
Not to be confused with the 1987 Arnold Schwarzenegger action film of the same name, this 1963 thriller by Carol Reed stars Laurence

Harvey as Rex, an English pilot who takes revenge on the insurance company that denied a claim for his airplane crash due to a late payment. With the help of his American wife Stella (Lee Remick), Rex fakes his own death in a glider crash and moves to Malaga, Spain, where he takes on the identity of an Australian sheep farmer while waiting for the money to come through. But with the change in identity also comes a change in personality—and a scheme for another insurance scam, which is tossed into jeopardy when the original insurance investigator (Alan Bates) shows up in Malaga. The premise is intriguing and the backdrop—a Spanish vacation town shot in widescreen color by cinematographer Robert Krasker, who filmed Reed's classic *The Third Man*—is lovely. Harvey's performance is lively (even if his Aussie accent tends to slip), Remick is engaging, and Bates brings a touch of loneliness to his role, but there is little suspense in the cat-and-mouse game, and a climactic car chase through the mountains of Spain to Gibraltar is more routine than thrilling. Extras include audio commentary by author Peter William Evans, a new "making-of" featurette, an audio-only recording of Remick speaking at the National Film Theatre from 1970, an isolated music and effects track, and an image gallery. Optional. (S. Axmaker)



Shaft in Africa ★★★

Warner, 112 min., R, Blu-ray: \$21.99



The idea of casting a black actor as James Bond has floated around for years (black actress Lashana Lynch will apparently be the new 007 in the untitled 25th Bond film), but one successful variation on the notion was 1973's *Shaft in Africa*, the third and final entry in the original *Shaft* blaxploitation trilogy about New York City private detective John Shaft (Richard Roundtree). Here, streetwise Shaft is on more of an international 007-like adventure, infiltrating a human trafficking ring. After passing several tortuous physical tests, Shaft is deemed strong enough to pose as one of the many Ethiopian men being lured to Europe for allegedly good-paying jobs. But once in Paris, the illegal immigrants discover that they are enslaved under the corrupt grip of a sick villain (Frank Finlay). Shaft takes to the mission with a fury and impressive physicality, scrambling over roofs, fighting stick-wielding bad guys, and riding a camel. Director John Guillermin brings his typically sharp craftsmanship to the pace and vigor of a better-than-average action movie which, somewhat surprisingly, was written by Oscar-winning screenwriter Stirling Silliphant (*In the Heat of the Night*). Without fanfare, Silliphant seamlessly incorporates Bond-like

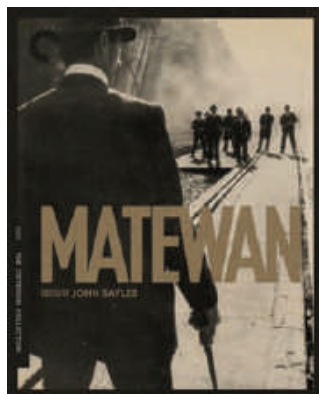


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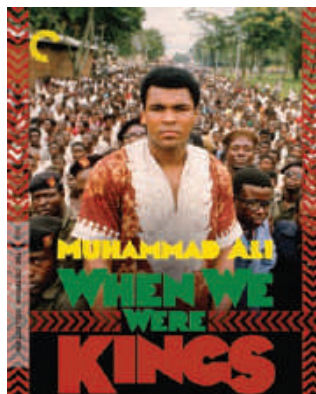
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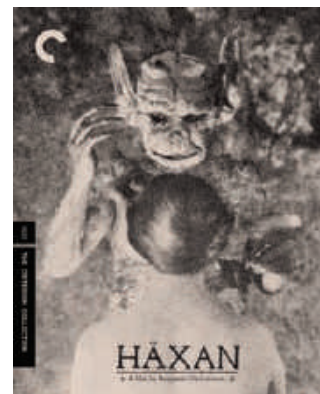
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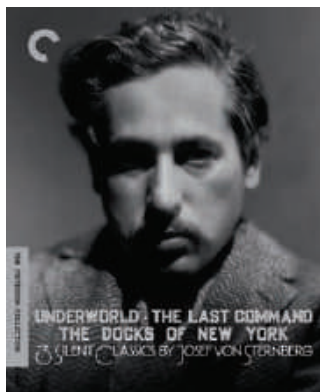
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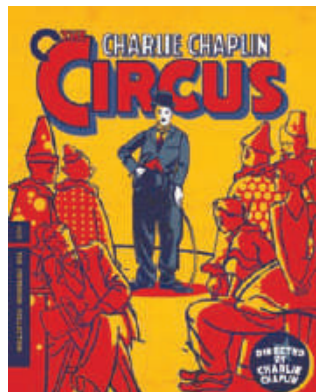
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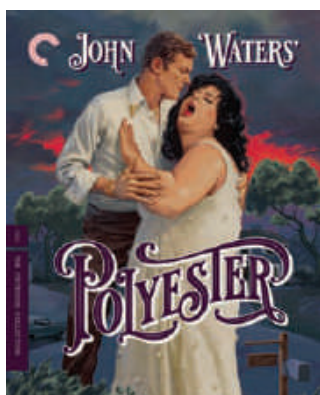
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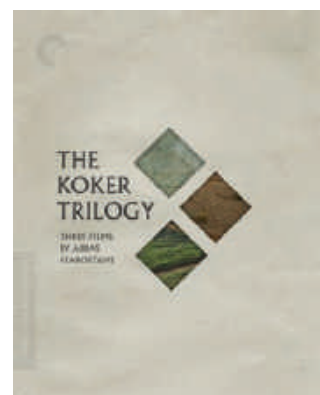
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ambitions while still embracing some of the sexual elements from the earlier *Shaft* films, and bluntly touching on a few perennially topical Third World themes, including mandatory clitoridectomy for some African women. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Summer Stock ★★½

Warner, 109 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99



Judy Garland teams up with Gene Kelly for the third and final time in this original 1950 musical, Garland's last for MGM. Garland is Jane Falbury, a young woman tasked with running the family farm alone following the death of her parents. Jane finds the spread overrun with a theatrical troupe who were invited by little sister Abigail (Gloria DeHaven), a spoiled girl with dreams of stardom and a crush on Joe D. Ross (Kelly), a charismatic entrepreneur who is trying to mount his own original musical with a group of idealistic young theater folk. *Summer Stock* is an example of the "hey kids, let's put on a show" genre that Garland and Mickey Rooney perfected as juvenile stars in the 1930s, with Kelly taking Rooney's place. Unfortunately, there's nothing original in the story and the original songs are largely forgettable; the standout number "Get Happy" is actually an older song revived for Garland that became one of her signature tunes. But this is still a lively, colorful production, featuring terrific dance numbers with Garland matching Kelly step for step and a stellar dance solo by Kelly using a squeaky floorboard, a piece of sandpaper, and a couple of sheets of newspaper to add percussion. Eddie Bracken costars as Garland's dull beau who is being pushed into marriage by his banker father (Ray Collins), and Marjorie Main and Phil Silvers play comic relief as the sardonic housekeeper and troupe clown, respectively. Extras include a 2006 retrospective featurette, a classic cartoon, an archival short, and an audio-only outtake of the song "Fall in Love." A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Swing Time ★★★★★

Criterion, 103 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were the most elegant of Hollywood's dance teams during the Golden Age of American musicals and *Swing Time* (1936) marks the peak of their 10-film output. The plot is as absurd as anything from the era: Astaire plays Lucky Garnett, a dancer and gambler who needs to make \$25,000 to marry his hometown sweetheart (Betty Furness), and Rogers is Penny Carroll, a streetwise dance instructor Lucky falls in love with along the way.

Director George Stevens brings an almost effortless elegance to a film built out of ridiculous misunderstandings and silly comedy bits (much of it carried by the sidekicks, fumbling Victor Moore and sardonic Helen Broderick), coupled with beautifully integrated musical numbers. Not only does it feature some of the best dance scenes Astaire and Rogers ever performed but they also serve to illustrate the stages of their courtship, culminating in the lovely, bittersweet "Never Gonna Dance," in which they ostensibly bid farewell to one another in one last turn around an empty nightclub floor. The superb score by Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields also includes "Pick Yourself Up," "A Fine Romance," and "The Way You Look Tonight." One of the great American movie musicals, *Swing Time* does have one sour note: Astaire dons blackface for "Bojangles of Harlem," which is an impressive tap number with art deco sets and props but slips into minstrel show clichés of the era. Extras include a 1986 audio commentary by author John Mueller, archival interviews (with Astaire, Rogers, and choreographer Hermes Pan), new interviews (with George Stevens, Jr. and film scholar Mia Mask), a featurette on the choreography and soundtrack, and a booklet with an essay by critic Imogen Sara Smith. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (S. Axmaker)

They Might Be Giants ★★½

Kino, 91 min., G, Blu-ray: \$29.99



George C. Scott stars as Justin Playfair, a retired judge who believes that he's Sherlock Holmes, and Joanne Woodward is psychiatrist Dr. Mildred Watson, who is sent to judge his sanity, in director Anthony Harvey's 1971 comedy. Playfair embraces the psychiatrist as his own Dr. Watson, pulling her into his elaborate investigation of master-criminal Moriarty, and dragging her across Manhattan in a mad dash for obscure clues. Scott's modern-day Holmes is part brilliant logician and part big-city loon, putting a magnifying glass to every clue and giving dead-on snap profiles to perfect strangers. But he's a lonely man whose heart leaps to life when he finds his Watson, a career woman with a wall around her feelings who answers his deductions with psychoanalytic observation. Jack Gilford, Al Lewis, and Rue McClanahan costar as oddball misfits and dreamers who become Holmes's Baker Street Irregulars. Based on a play by James Goldman, *They Might Be Giants* celebrates fantasy and joyful madness in a world where normalcy is rather unhinged. The climactic scene is treated as slapstick farce and is somewhat out of tune with the story but it does send the characters through a

beautiful leap of faith into pure imagination that leaves the audience to write their own ending. Extras include archival audio commentary by Harvey and film archivist Robert A. Harris, and an archival featurette. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

War and Peace ★★★★★

Criterion, 422 min., in Russian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.99



American audiences never truly got to see Sergei Bondarchuk's epic adaptation of Tolstoy's 1869 masterpiece as the director intended: the seven-hour-plus production was dubbed into English and shorn of one hour for its 1968 Oscar-winning theatrical release, while earlier home entertainment versions were either a clumsy pan-and-scan presentation or, in the case of the RUSCICO import, struck from a print badly in need of restoration. This Criterion Collection offering features the complete original Russian-language version with a glorious 2K digital restoration in the correct 2.35:1 aspect ratio. The Soviet government-controlled film industry spared no expense in staging this massive extravaganza, with hundreds of extras populating the graceful ball sequence, the disturbing Battle of Borodino, and the truly harrowing recreation of the evacuation of Moscow ahead of Napoleon's advance. And while *War and Peace* is a masterwork of grand-scale cinema, it remains highly effective as an intense emotional drama with a deeply moving central love triangle that is brought to vibrant life with fully-textured performances by Ludmila Savelyeva as Natasha, Vyacheslav Tikhonov as Prince Andrei, and Bondarchuk himself as Pierre. Extras include archival documentaries on the film's creation, a new documentary on *War and Peace* featuring historian Denise J. Youngblood, new interviews with cinematographer Anatoly Petritsky and Fedor Bondarchuk (the director's son), and a booklet with an essay by critic Ella Taylor. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (P. Hall)

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Blood ★★★

Acorn, 2 discs, 288 min., not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$39.99

Made for Irish TV, this dark psychological mystery series weaves a genuinely creepy spell while managing some clever plot twists. Cat Hogan (Carolina Main), a high-strung young woman still suffering the effects of a half-remembered childhood trauma, is distanced from her family. Returning to her hometown after learning that her invalid mother Mary (Ingrid Craigie) has died in an accident, Cat suspects that her father, Jim (Adrian Dunbar), murdered Mary—a charge that causes friction with Jim as well as Cat's brother (Diarmuid Noyes) and sister (Gráinne Keenan). She soon discovers inconsistencies in Jim's account of his movements on the day of Mary's death, as well as evidence that he was having an affair with his receptionist (Shereen Martin) and might have stolen money from an aged patient. She also enlists aid from a longtime friend (Cillian O'Gairbhi)—who her father is treating for persistent mental problems—and a local cop (Sean Duggan) who holds a grudge against Jim. And Jim does not help his case by lying about his actions and using his disolute brother (Mark O'Regan) to pressure Cat to drop her campaign against him. Thanks to crisp writing, atmospheric direction, and excellent performances—especially from Dunbar and Main—this is well worth watching. Compiling all six episodes from 2018, extras include cast and crew interviews and a behind-the-scenes featurette. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

**Jack Ryan: Season One ★★★**

Paramount, 399 min., not rated, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$42.99

Jack Ryan, the former Marine and Wall Street stockbroker turned CIA analyst created by author Tom Clancy in his 1984 debut novel *The Hunt for Red October*, has been the hero of over a dozen novels and five movies. John Krasinski takes over the role—previously played by (among others) Alec Baldwin and Harrison Ford—for this new Amazon Prime web series. Set early in his career, the show opens with Ryan uncovering a new, well-funded terrorist organization by tracing financial transactions through shell companies. He tries to convince his section boss James Grier (Wendell Pierce), a career military veteran, along with the intelligence hierarchy, that the targeted group's leader is smart, careful, and poses a serious threat to the U.S. Based on an original story by producers Carlton Cuse and Graham Roland, this is a globetrotting series that takes the characters from Langley, VA, to Paris and the Middle East and back in order to stop a terrorist attack



on American soil. Abbie Cornish costars as Ryan's girlfriend, a doctor specializing in infectious diseases (which plays a role in the terrorist threat), while John Magaro plays a drone pilot suffering a crisis of conscience, and Timothy Hutton and Blair Brown have small roles as administration officials. *Jack Ryan* is a smart, well-produced show with strong production values and a boy scout of a hero whose self-righteousness almost sabotages his mission. The young Ryan is brilliant but has a lot to learn about the practical side of intelligence work and Grier is just the seasoned veteran to mentor him. Compiling all eight episodes from the 2018 first season, extras include deleted scenes. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Killing Eve: Season Two ★★★1/2

BBC, 2 discs, 360 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

The first season of this clever and highly addictive thriller about an American analyst with British Intelligence who is tracking a brilliant yet flamboyant assassin ended with Eve Polastri (Sandra Oh), the agent, stabbing Villanelle (Jodie Comer), the killer, and then fleeing the scene in a panic. The second season opens with Villanelle surviving, slipping away to recover and get back to work with a new handler, while Eve returns to her job, living in mortal fear of retribution. But attempted murder isn't enough to douse Villanelle's fascination with Eve and the pair eventually end up working together, first in the interrogation of a rival assassin and then with the unstable Villanelle going undercover to obtain evidence against an Internet mogul who may be plotting treason. As the plots play out, Villanelle stalks Eve's husband and attempts to draw Eve into her world of violence, while Eve's boss (Fiona Shaw) keeps her own agenda guarded as she manipulates them both. Creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who guided the first season, left the series but new showrunner Emerald Fennell maintains the mix of dark humor, complicated relationships, and psychological games. *Killing Eve* is a rare show featuring three strong, unconventional roles for women. The second season earned numerous Emmy nominations, including Outstanding Drama and acting nods for Oh, Comer, and Shaw. Presenting all eight episodes from the 2019 sophomore season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

**Miss Friman's War ★★★1/2**

MHz, 4 discs, 699 min., in Swedish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.99

This Swedish TV series, aired stateside on MHz Networks, is based on the life of Anna Whitlock, an early 20th-century social reformer and advocate for women's

suffrage. Here, the eponymous Miss Dagmar Friman (Sissela Kyle) returns to her native Stockholm after living several years in allegedly more progressive London. Appalled by food poisoning cases that have stricken working-class neighborhoods, Friman gathers her like-minded lady friends to launch Swedish Homes, a grocery cooperative that sells unspoiled food to workers at reasonable prices. While Friman's new customers are deeply appreciative of her effort, she runs afoul of the male-controlled Stockholm Wholesale Association, which goes out of its way to damage Friman's cooperative. *Miss Friman's War* generated criticism in Sweden for playing very loose with the facts of Whitlock's life and for misrepresenting the depth of the sociopolitical environment of her era. Regardless, this is an entertaining celebration of indefatigable spirits who dare to challenge a repressive status quo. The costuming, art direction, and cinematography combine to make a rich visual experience, and Friman is played with charisma to spare by comic actress Kyle. Compiling all 12 episodes from the series' four-season run from 2013-17, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

**Outlander: Season Four ★★★1/2**

Sony, 5 discs, 746 min., not rated, DVD: \$45.99, Blu-ray: \$55.99

The fourth season of the hit time-traveling historical romance—based on the bestselling novels by Diana Gabaldon and airing on the Starz network—takes lovers Claire (Caitriona Balfe) and Jamie (Sam Heughan) from 18th-century Europe to the new world of the American colonies. As they build a homestead in North Carolina and Jamie tries to recruit fellow Scotsmen to settle on nearby plots, the pair become drawn into a rebellion led by Jamie's godfather (Duncan Lacroix) in protest of corrupt taxation: the first rumblings of the American Revolution. Meanwhile, their 20th-century daughter Brianna (Sophie Skelton) follows Claire back in time with her own lover Roger (Richard Rankin) close behind, to warn of events that may lead to death. As with previous seasons, this one is lively and packed with action, history, and cultural conflict refracted through the modern sensibility of Claire, and it also confronts slavery (Jamie's aunt, played by Maria Doyle Kennedy, relies on slave labor to run her farm) and racism as white settlers coexist with native tribes. The show also offers interesting character contrasts as Jamie, an 18th-century Scottish Highlander, proves more accepting of sexual equality than Roger, a Scottish scholar raised in the progressive 1960s. *Outlander* remains an adult drama in all the best ways: mature,



smart, and filled with layered characters and complex relationships. Compiling all 13 episodes from the 2018 fourth season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and a gag reel (the Blu-ray edition also features episode commentaries, additional featurettes, and deleted and extended scenes). Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Patrick Melrose ★★1/2

Acorn, 2 discs, 302 min., not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$39.99

The best thing about this British miniseries based on five semi-autobiographical novels (1992-2012) by Edward St. Aubyn is Benedict Cumberbatch's go-for-broke performance as the drug-addled, damaged titular misanthrope. It's also the worst thing, so depending on where one lies on the appreciation scale for over-the-top thespian turns, *Patrick Melrose* will either delight or alienate viewers. Directed by Edward Berger, this ambitious and handsomely mounted period epic spans 37 years in the life of its central character, opening with heroin-coke-pill-booze addict Patrick in 1982 receiving the apparently welcome news that his father David (Hugo Weaving) has kicked the proverbial bucket, after which a shaky Patrick must jet from London to New York to retrieve dad's ashes. The second episode, set in 1967, makes Patrick's animosity and self-destructive lifestyle a little clearer: as a boy he was sexually abused by his father at the family's French country estate. The last three episodes—set in 1990, 2003, and 2005 respectively—chronicle Patrick's ups and downs from full-blown addiction to delirium-tremens-inducing sobriety, while coping with marriage, children, lovers, and—most importantly—his turn-the-other-eye mother Eleanor (Jennifer Jason Leigh), who Patrick deeply resents, and whose failing health engulfs him in a bitter rivalry with a New Age healer (Jonjo O'Neill) who has won Eleanor's favor. Also featuring Sebastian Maltz as young Patrick, Jessica Raine as an on-again/off-again mistress, Anna Madeley as Patrick's wife, Prasanna Puwanarajah as Patrick's best friend, Harriet Walter in a cutting turn as Princess Margaret, and Blythe Danner as Patrick's aunt, *Patrick Melrose* is an uneven series with hit-and-miss dialogue that features a flawed but also often fascinating performance by the man many have come to love as Sherlock Holmes. Extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, and a booklet with cast and crew interviews. A strong optional purchase. (R. Pitman)

Sara Stein From Berlin to Tel Aviv: The Complete Series ★★1/2

Film Movement, 2 discs, 369 min., in German, Hebrew & Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.99

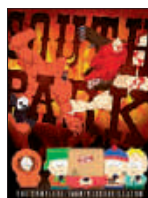
This compilation of four German-Israeli

li co-produced TV movies from 2016-19 centers on Sara Stein (Katharina Lorenz), a German police detective who puzzles her way to solutions of complex cases. In "Shalom Berlin, Shalom Tel Aviv," set in Berlin, Sara solves the killing of a Jewish nightclub DJ who has been dating a Palestinian immigrant. During the investigation she meets David (Itay Tiran), a visiting Israeli pianist, and falls in love, eventually joining him in his homeland. In "Jewels in the Grave," Sara—having transferred to the Israeli police force—struggles to gain acceptance from her new colleagues as she explores the apparent murder of an officer on their own squad, while also settling in as David's wife and learning about religious practices that diverge from her own secularist background. "Masada" takes Sara to the titular ancient mountain fortress, where the death of an archaeologist leads to evidence of a smuggling ring that exports priceless historical artifacts. The final film, "Old Friends," starts with the discovery of a severed hand on the Mediterranean coast. Identifying the victim and determining why he was killed forces Sara to investigate the past of both her husband and her partner, who served together in the Israeli army. As a police procedural set against the background of political and religious issues arising from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, *Sara Stein* is inherently intriguing. Unfortunately, the plotting can be weak and Lorenz is not the most compelling of protagonists. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

South Park: The Complete Twenty-Second Season ★★

Paramount, 2 discs, 223 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone's 22nd season of their long-running animated Comedy Central series opens with an episode ostensibly designed to shock: "Dead Kids" finds the series' desensitized fourth graders continuing their lessons as an active shooter attacks the elementary school, while Stan's dad blames his mom's hysteria about the situation on menses. The town's Catholic congregation cracks the child molestation jokes one would expect in "A Boy and a Priest"; "Tegridy Farms" finds the Marsh family moving to work at a marijuana farm; and "The Scoots" parodies the ride-share e-scooter trend. The global warming allegory two-parter "Time to Get Cereal" and "Nobody Got Cereal" brings a version of "Al Gore" into the fray, and the season-ending story arc in "Unfulfilled" and "Bike Parade" sends up Amazon and Jeff Bezos. Stock characters such as stoner anthropomorphic towel



Towelie, Sasquatch-like monster ManBearPig, Satan, and talking excrement Mr. Hankey pop up often, as the show continues to get by on constant swearing and base humor that tiredly rides the tails of current events. This season's "mock cancellation" hashtag advertising to #cancelsouthpark actually seems like a good idea to me. Compiling all 10 episodes from 2018, extras include episode commentaries and deleted scenes. Optional. (J. Williams-Wood)

Space: 1999—The Complete Series ★★1/2

Shout! Factory, 13 discs, 2,370 min., not rated, DVD: \$69.99, Blu-ray: \$109.99

Produced in England by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson (of *Thunderbirds* fame), *Space: 1999* was the most ambitious and visually impressive sci-fi TV series of the 1970s, albeit based on a silly premise. An explosion on a nuclear waste dump on the Moon blasts Earth's satellite out of orbit, sending it shooting across the galaxy like a rogue asteroid, and taking a Moon-base full of scientists along for the ride as they come across planets and space travelers. American actors Martin Landau and Barbara Bain star in the majority British cast, which also features Barry Morse in the first season and Catherine Schell, who joins the crew in season two as a shapeshifting alien. The series features the high quality special effects that the Andersons honed on their "Supermarionation" family shows in the 1960s and the production design is inspired by *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the original *Star Trek* series. The producers did not reach out to sci-fi writers as part of their creative pool, however, and the scripts—many are second-rate versions of social commentary *Star Trek* stories—reflect that, while the supporting characters never receive the kind of development or personality that the bridge crew of the *Enterprise* enjoyed. Even so, the short-lived series remains the high point for '70s sci-fi TV and it did develop a cult following. Guest stars include Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Brian Blessed, Joan Collins, Leo McKern, and Ian McShane. Compiling all 48 episodes from the 1975-77 first and second seasons, extras include episode commentaries, new and archival cast and crew interviews, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and photo galleries. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)



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In the wake of season one's climatic wave, the residents of the town adjust to the new order of life and the repercussions of the horde's appearance. Season two picks up after six months have gone by since the Returned left with Simon, Camille and her mother, and Julie, along with the mysterious boy Victor.

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★★★★★ = Excellent

★★★★ = Good

★★★ = Fair

★★ = Poor

PPR = Public Performance Rights

DRA = Digital Rights Available

Aud = Audience

K = Preschool-Kindergarten

E = Elementary (grades 1-3)

I = Intermediate (grades 4-6)

J = Jr. High (grades 7-8)

H = High School (grades 9-12)

C = Colleges & Universities

P = Public Libraries

CHILDREN'S

Ghoulia ★★★

(2018) 29 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-9749-2210-9.

Ghoulia lives in Crumbling Manor with Auntie Departed and an albino dog named Tragedy. In this iconographic-animated adaptation of writer and illustrator Barbara Cantini's 2018 picture book, silky-toned narrator Jordan Killam reminds viewers that Ghoulia is not an ordinary child but rather a zombie, with unusually pale skin, big round eyes, and the ability to pull off body parts. Auntie Departed confines Ghoulia to Crumbling Manor's front yard where the child spies on the local village kids, wishing that she could make friends. Halloween provides Ghoulia the perfect opportunity to create a costume and blend in. She uses Uncle Misfortune's head as a trick-or-treat basket and joins the neighborhood kids who think that her name is Julia. When the group decides to make scary faces, Ghoulia gets caught up in the antics and begins tossing her head into her hand, among other startling movements, after which she admits that she is a zombie, and ends up playing with her new friends at Crumbling Manor. Backed by flute and other instrumental music, this ghoulishly spooky tale concludes with some Halloween projects, including directions for making Ghoulia's costume and simple holiday treats. Also featuring a read-along option, this is recommended. [Note: the companion title

Ghoulia and the Mysterious Visitor is also newly available.] Aud: E, P. (S. Beauregard)

O Captain, My Captain ★★½

(2019) 68 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 9781974933013.

Subtitled "Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the Civil War," this iconographic-animated adaptation of author Robert Burleigh and illustrator Sterling Hundley's 2019 picture book is narrated by Chris Lutkin, with David Bendena serving as the voice of Whitman. *O Captain, My Captain* uses oil paint smears and swirls to explore the drama of wartime through dramatic vignettes as the famed poet becomes caught up in the Union cause. Visiting makeshift hospitals and wounded soldiers, Whitman is deeply disturbed by what he sees and is inspired to write poetry, with President Lincoln serving as a particular muse. Although no record exists of the two men ever officially meeting, Whitman was in Washington, D.C., during the war. In imagined scenes, Lincoln is pictured as a giant emerging from a log cabin, Whitman stands in front of the White House at night pondering which light was Lincoln's, and the poet constantly walks to a corner where he knew Lincoln's carriage would pass by. While tending the dying, Whitman often reflected on Lincoln's "grace under pressure" as the latter struggled to reunite the Union. Hundley's art is striking, although some scenes could be disturbing for younger viewers (such as amputated limbs flowing down the screen). After Lincoln was assassinated, Whitman wrote the titular poem in honor of (and grief over) the slain president. Also featured are overviews of the two men's lives, important dates during the Civil War, readings of the title poem and Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd,"

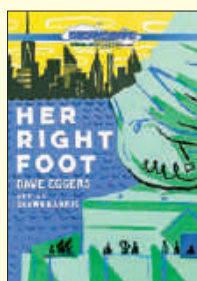
and notes from the author and the illustrator. Unfortunately, at 68 minutes, this somberly-narrated biographical profile with limited and somewhat repetitive animation is unlikely to hold the attention of the lower end of the target audience of "10 and up," although older kids might find Whitman's all-embracing sense of inclusivity inspiring. A strong optional purchase. Aud: I, J, H, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

PSYCHOLOGY & SELF-HELP

The Limits of My World ★★½

(2018) 70 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Heather Cassano draws from older and more recent home movies featuring her autistic brother Brian as a way to help her reconnect with the latter during a moment of transition in his life. A new graduate from a special needs school, Brian is moving out of his family home and into an assisted-living facility. His longtime aide is leaving and a replacement is trying to get a handle on non-verbal Brian's needs and sometimes-abrasive behaviors. Unfortunately, the viewer is also foundering: left staring at images of Brian from preschool to age 18 or so, but without much context or narrative shape, or even much effort from Cassano to explain her quest to know her brother better. *The Limits of My World* is a very personal documentary, one that will likely be appreciated by those with autistic family members or acquaintances, but it lacks the more general resonance of other autism-related documentaries such as *Deej* (VL-3/18) and *Far From the Tree* (VL-3/19). A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



Her Right Foot ★★★★★

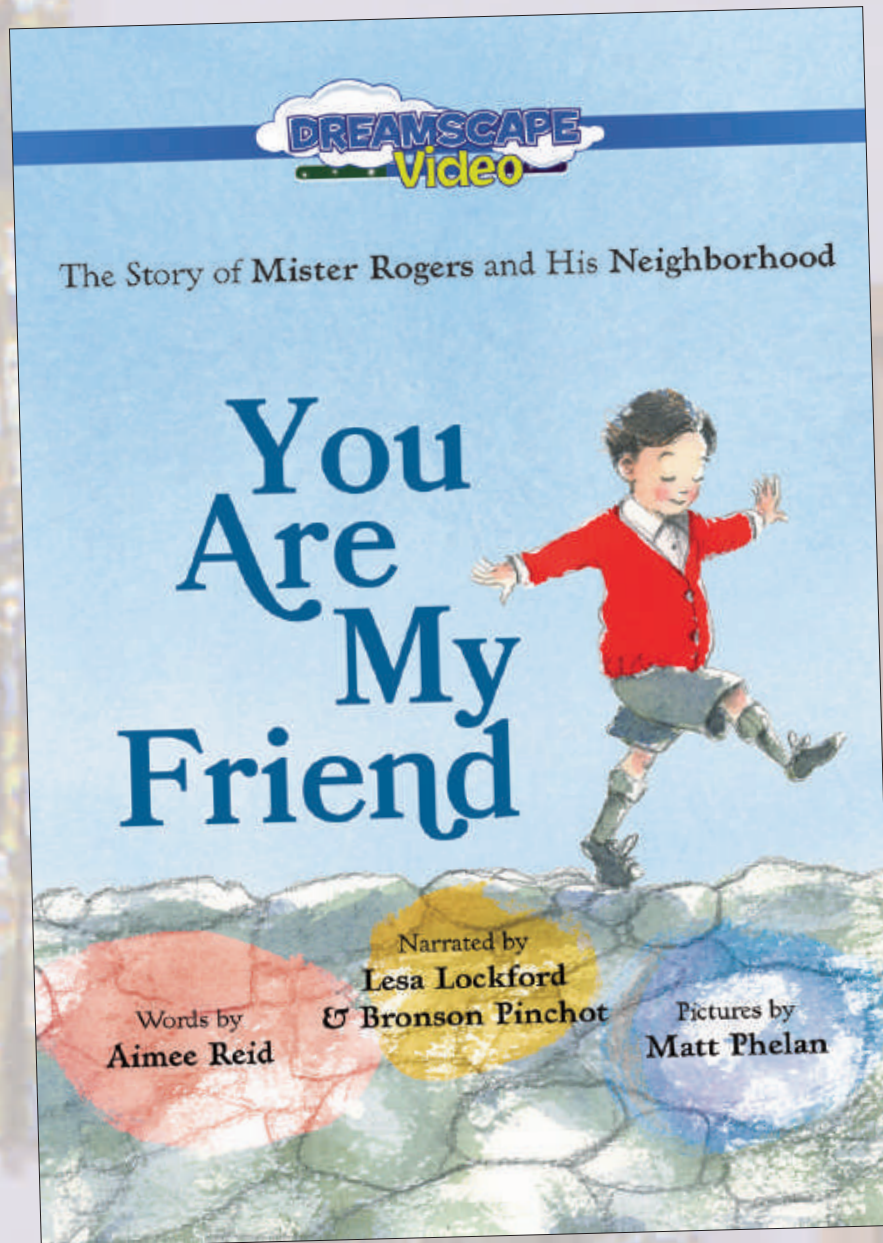
(2019) 19 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-9749-4645-7.

Johnny Heller brings enthusiasm and a sense of wonder to his narration of this iconographic-animated adaptation of Dave Eggers's entertainingly informative 2017 picture book—nicely illustrated with Shawn Harris's ink-and-construction paper collages—about the Statue of Liberty, the iconic 305-foot statue that was a gift to the U.S. from France. Heller, who confidentially says, "Perhaps you already knew this," provides interesting facts about the statue, which arrived in New York Harbor in 214 crates in 1885. And Lady Liberty's right foot? The text surmises that because the heel of the right foot is lifted in midstride, the statue appears to be walking. Where might she be going, wonders Heller, perhaps to SoHo to get a panini or to Trenton, NJ? The correct answer, according to Eggers, is that this symbol of freedom is "on the go," welcoming immigrants to the U.S. Against brief strains of the "The Star-Spangled Banner" and a photograph of Emma Lazarus's famous poem at the base of the statue, Jo Anna Perin reads the familiar text to cap off this fine introduction to a historic American statue that reminds us all of the importance of inclusion and diversity in a free land. Also featuring a read-along option, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** Aud: E, P. (S. Beauregard)

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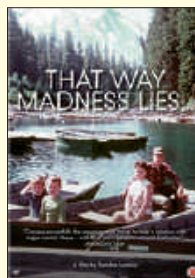
DREAMSCAPE

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That Way Madness Lies... ★★★1/2

(2018) 101 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Sandra Luckow is able to offer a unique look into mental illness and how schizophrenia shakes apart one seemingly idyllic family, by focusing on her own. Her brother Duanne Luckow, a self-employed machinist—albeit talented in numerous fields—living near their parents in Portland, OR, developed an atypical delusional disorder while entering middle age. Duanne subscribed to conspiracy theories and illegally crossed into Canada to try to claim a YouTube celebrity as his soulmate-bride (of course, she had never met him). Determining himself to be exempt from utility bills—but sending money to Nigerian and Russian con artists met online—Duanne starts paranoid feuds against Farmers Insurance Company and, ultimately, his parents and Sandra. Along the way, he loses his house and business, but by presenting a neat appearance and answering rationally at hearings, he is able to stubbornly deny his mental illness, and a dysfunctional, “reformed” health system concerned with patient rights can do little unless he turns dangerous. Duanne winds up in the real-life institution made famous by Ken Kesey in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, but is able to get out through healthcare bureaucracy (Trump-era policies would even allow him to buy a gun). Making this narrative especially intimate is the fact that Duanne has dabbled in film as well, chronicling his POV via iPhone footage and video diaries (he shares production credits in the film), as Sandra struggles to balance a bi-coastal existence of a career in NYC with the decline of her aging mother and father and Duanne’s disturbing antics out West. There are no easy resolutions in this poignant look at the toll that schizophrenia takes on a wide circle of victims and supporting players. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)



impact of a tragedy that occurred decades ago. The final segment profiles Cantor Michael Shochet of Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, VA, a former police officer who now serves as the police chaplain for Fairfax County. *Healing the Healers* seems primarily designed as an educational tool for clergy, but should still be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Reb Elimelech & the Chassidic Legacy of Brotherhood ★★★

(2012) 63 min. DVD: \$59; high schools & public libraries (\$99 w/PPR); \$99; colleges & universities (\$249 w/PPR). SISU Home Entertainment. ISBN: 978-1-56086-774-6.

The career and legacy of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1787), a founder of Hasidism, are celebrated in this film by author and lecturer Hanoch Teller, who here relates many inspirational tales about his subject. Although there are some dramatic re-creations of Elimelech’s life, as well as a sketch of the harsh circumstances that Jews were forced to endure in 18th-century Poland and Ukraine, these are distinctly secondary to the traditional parables that are told by Teller and other rabbis, which repeatedly point up the core of Elimelech’s teaching—the obligation to love other Jews and show willingness to help them in times of need. That message is reflected, the film illustrates, in the networks of social aid that exist within today’s Hasidic communities. Teller also emphasizes the connection with the divine that is expressed in mundane activities from the moment one rises—an idea linked with devotion to prayer, study, and ritual (examples of which are included here). Also featuring performances of Hasidic instrumental and vocal music, this choppy, homespun documentary is not so much an introduction to Hasidism for outsiders as it is a means of exhorting members of Hasidic communities to remember the foundations of their beliefs and practices. But while it may appeal primarily to Hasidim, others will still find that it offers a rewarding inside glimpse into orthodox Jewish life. Extras include a “making-of” featurette. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Father I Never Knew ★★★1/2

(2019) 60 min. DVD: \$14.99. DRA. Vision Video (avail. from most distributors).

In this Christian documentary, five men who ended up in gangs, committing crime, and doing prison time during their younger years here lay the blame for their former waywardness on the absence of fathers during childhood. That absence is meant in a broad sense: fathers who disappeared, simply didn’t care, or were rendered feckless through drug and alcohol addiction. In each case, the subjects sincerely believe that the lack of male guidance during early days (including shortcomings in the areas of boundaries, discipline, and a father’s love) resulted in a huge hole in personal development that they subsequently tried to fill with street life, surrogate families offered by gang membership, and the feeling of faux accomplishment whenever they got away with something. Much of the film is overly focused on the subjects’ old crimes, including several re-enacted felonies that look somewhat silly. More could have been accomplished in this well-meaning project by simply keeping the spotlight on the very real national problem of fatherless sons. But the real aim of *The Father I Never Knew* is to point viewers toward Jesus, with a promise that by accepting Christ, lost boys can become adults who successfully break the chain of abandonment in their families.

A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Healing the Healers ★★★1/2

(2019) 102 min. DVD: \$50.99 (\$125 w/PPR); public libraries; \$295 w/PPR; colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Kirsten Kelly’s five-part series looks at how religious leaders respond to their traumatized congregations when tragedy strikes their communities, as well as ways they deal with their own emotional turmoil. The first episode introduces Rev. Matt Crebbin of the Congregational Church of Newtown, CT, where Sandy Hook Elementary School was the site of the mass shooting that took the lives of students and teachers on December 14, 2012. Crebbin brings together his fellow local faith leaders to discuss how they dealt with their own and their parishioners’ spiritual needs in its wake. In the second part, Crebbin travels to St. Louis to interview Kathie Adams-Shepherd, who had been pastor at the Newtown Episcopal Church at the time of the shooting, to learn how she handles the lingering effects in her new posting. The third segment turns to communities that face continuous trauma, focusing on Hartford, CT, where Pastor Samuel Saylor, Jr. of Gardner Memorial AME Zion Church must find a positive way to confront an epidemic of violence that has also claimed his own son. In the fourth episode, Cribben interviews Fr. Basil O’Sullivan of Dunblane, Scotland, where an elementary school shooting occurred in 1996, in order to understand how a community deals with the lingering

SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES

Birth on the Border ★★★

(2018) 28 min. In English & Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$89; public libraries; \$195; community colleges; \$295; colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR. Closed captioned.

People legally cross the U.S.-Mexico border for work, to visit family, or in hopes of a better life. Pregnant women from Ciudad Juárez come across the border specifically to give birth, gaining entrance by way of border crossing cards that allow them 72

hours to conduct their business. Director Ellie Lobovitz speaks with patients and midwives on both sides of the border. Lina, a midwife from East Los Angeles, sees a lot of women who are stressed from the crossing, so her first job is to help them relax. The anxiety is understandable since border guards can be unsympathetic—if not downright hostile—and they reserve the right to refuse admittance, even if a woman's paperwork is in order. Some start to go into labor—even to crown—while en route. Gaby, who had her son in El Paso (where he now attends grade school), wanted to experience a safer birth than she would have had in Juárez, where natural childbirth is less common and obstetric practices not as advanced. Luisa, who works at a market stall in Juárez, wanted to give her son the opportunities she didn't have. Although she planned to continue her schooling, the cartel-oriented violence in the area made that impossible, with rape and murder at an all-time high. Luisa's mother also had four cesarean births, and Luisa wanted to avoid the costs associated with that kind of medical care. According to Luisa's father, "Childbirth in the hospitals in Mexico is extremely traumatic." Gaby and Luisa both believe that the risk was worthwhile, and Lobovitz treats their stories respectfully in this sympathetic documentary. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Cherry Grove Stories ★★★

(2019) 77 min. DVD: \$24.99. Breaking Glass Pictures (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Many have heard or seen pop culture references to Fire Island (just off Long Island in New York City) as being a longtime vacation spot for gay men and women. Filmmaker Michael Fisher's warm documentary *Cherry Grove Stories* chronicles the evolution of Fire Island as a relatively safe haven for homosexuals and lesbians in the pre-Stonewall era, when even revealing one's identity to family could land a person in jail. The film benefits from generosity of spirit and the storytelling abilities of a number of interviewees who became regulars on the scene at the titular Cherry Grove community on Fire Island as far back as the 1950s, when rumors of a well-known bubble-culture of nonstop hedonism, flamboyant entertainment, camaraderie, and supportive straight locals (who appreciated the seasonal tourist dollars) drew increasing numbers of visitors. A veritable mountain of amateur film footage was shot from the postwar years through the '60s, '70s, and beyond, making very clear not only the open sexuality, but also the good-neighbor policy that instituted protections from police (who eventually did try to bust members of the Cherry Grove community). The interviewees here spin informative and engaging yarns about the old days (Tennessee Williams shows up in a story and snapshot at one point), but what comes across so strongly is how much

Fire Island represented a contrast to the larger and often merciless world that existed for gays and lesbians outside its relatively safe confines. Extras include an intro by Fisher, bonus interviews, and a film festival Q&A. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Current Revolution: Transforming America's Electric Grid ★★★

(2018) 37 min. DVD: \$39: public libraries; \$79: high schools; \$150: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. SDH captioned.

Many utility customers want cheap, clean, renewable energy instead of reliance on fossil fuels. But Wall Street loves making money, escalating prices reluctantly paid by ordinary consumers in order to fund more and more fossil fuel-fed power stations. Filmmaker Roger Sorkin's *Current Revolution: Transforming America's Electric Grid* focuses on the obvious market tension: people want to go in a new direction, but an entrenched, deep-pocketed power industry resists change (unless it can figure out how to profit from change while crushing upstart competitors). The documentary looks at the state of Georgia as an example of the clash of old and new, as well as what is involved in realigning crucial relationships between utilities and power-dependent businesses such as commercial transportation. The political reach of the fossil fuel industry sparks outrage in some who are drawn to alternative energy options, particularly those who discover that investing in solar panels for their homes is hampered by rules that blatantly favor existing power companies. *Current Revolution* can be a little

dry and insular at times, but its suggestion that a generational change is coming to meet the challenges of a crashing environment is encouraging. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

The Dictator's Playbook ★★★

(2018) 2 discs. 340 min. DVD: \$34.99 (\$64.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0923-5.

Using a combination of charisma, fear, and propaganda, 20th- and 21st-century dictators have assembled a playbook on how to seize and hold power. This six-part PBS-aired series examines the lives of six dictators: North Korea's Kim Il Sung, Iraq's Saddam Hussein, Italy's Benito Mussolini, Panama's Manuel Noriega, Spain's Francisco Franco, and Uganda's Idi Amin. These men were generally raised in poverty, often bullied and belittled as children, used the military to personally advance, and indiscriminately employed terror and violence as a means of control. Kim Il Sung created an alternative reality, declaring himself a god-like figure who won a great victory over America in the Korean War, while also constructing a pervasive cult of personality that was passed on to his son and grandson. Hussein was both a wily politician and street-fighting thug, who used nationalism, threats, fear, and violence to control the population. Surrounded by sycophants, Hussein lacked any real understanding of history or the worldview of other nations. Mussolini started as a journalist, delivering words and images that helped to inspire Hitler's murderous regime. Noriega



The Devil We Know ★★★

(2018) 88 min. DVD: \$95: public libraries; \$395: colleges & universities. DRA. Tugg. PPR.

In this harrowing documentary, filmmaker Stephanie Soechtig presents a case study of harm wreaked by the release of toxic chemicals into the environment, followed by corporate malfeasance in withholding knowledge of the danger from the public. The film begins with a DuPont plant in Parkersburg, WV, that began producing Teflon (used as a non-stick coating for kitchenware) in the 1940s, and at the time assured locals that the manufacturing process posed no health threat. But a farmer who shared a stream where the plant dumped waste began losing his cattle to disease, and plant workers were also affected—women gave birth to disfigured children and others became ill, often with cancer. Schoolteacher Joe Kiger initiated a class-action lawsuit that revealed the company knew that C8 (or PFOA)—a chemical used in Teflon—was dangerous. When 3M, which manufactured C8 for use in its Scotchgard products and sold the compound to DuPont, stopped making it, DuPont's subsidiary Chemours began producing it themselves. Kiger's class-action suit led to a nearly \$700 million settlement, but many felt that DuPont got off easy. Soechtig personalizes this unhappy story by interviewing employees at the plant who have become sick or recall those who have died, and by focusing on Bucky Bailey, one of the affected children, who has had over 30 operations. She also notes that more than 99% of Americans show traces of C8 in their bloodstreams, and points to the revolving door at EPA (which creates a cozy relationship with chemical companies) as a reason why enforcement is so lax. Recommended. [Note: this is also being sold on home video by Atlas Films for \$14.99.] Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

drew on national pride, but was as much a gangster as a military man, smuggling drugs and arms, while also laundering money. Franco was calculating, gaining consent from religious figures and elites, while also purging enemies and wielding violence as a tool, believing that any show of mercy was a weakness. And Amin relied on the politics of distraction, ethnic expulsions, wars against neighbors, and state-sanctioned torture and murder to hold power. *The Dictator's Playbook* notes that the dictators also learned from one another, employing the modern media to confuse, fan hatred, and indoctrinate; building public works for self-glorification; and getting secret police and henchmen to do their dirty work, while appearing to stay above the fray. Insightful comments from scholars and historians are interwoven with archival footage to present an unflinching, cautionary look at a modern-day political plague. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Game Girls ★★

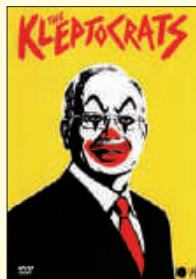
(2019) 82 min. DVD: \$24.99. *Breaking Glass Pictures* (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Polish filmmaker Alina Skrzyszewska's documentary portrait of life on the streets for two Southern California misfits is more sensational than enlightening. Homeless African American lesbian couple Teri and Tiahna struggle with mental illness, periods of incarceration, trouble in the Skid Row section of Los Angeles, conflicts with social services, and battles with each other. Over the course of a year, Skrzyszewska follows older and tougher Teri and younger Tiahna as they try to hold onto love and comfort in their union despite constant challenges. But as pressures mount and some hopes don't work out, the two get into scrapes over numerous issues (some of them pretty absurd, such as literally spilled milk). And when a serious domestic crisis breaks out at one point, *Game Girls* can't help but resemble something out of tabloid video. Skrzyszewska's problem is not quite knowing what to do with much of her well-intended material, which veers dangerously close to voyeurism in the absence of a clearer theme and stronger narrative. Extras include additional interviews. Optional. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

House in the Fields ★★½

(2017) 86 min. In *Tamazight with English subtitles*. DVD: \$34.95: individuals; \$160: public libraries; \$320: colleges & universities. DRA. Documentary Educational Resources. PPR.

Filmmaker Tala Hadid's documentary focuses on a pair of teenage sisters living in an Amazigh community in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Sixteen-year-old Khadija has her mind set on becoming a lawyer while her older sister Fatima is being made to quit school because her family has arranged for her to be married to a man she barely knows. Fatima



The Kleptocrats ★★★½

(2018) 82 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Sam Hobkinson and Havana Marking's documentary shines a spotlight on one of the most astonishing political scandals to impact Asian politics: the connection between Malaysian banker-philanthropist Jho Low and Malaysia's prime minister, Najib Razak (who served from 2009-18). Low gained notoriety for his extravagant parties and friendship with Hollywood stars including Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert DeNiro, but behind the glitz he was focused on a money-laundering scheme of mammoth proportions. The core of Low's mischief was the Malaysian wealth fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), which was created to invest Malaysian funds into projects that would enrich the country's coffers. A \$1 billion investment in 2010 into the start-up Petro Saudi seemed more than a bit curious, and a battalion of investigative journalists began to piece together how 1MDB was being used to enrich Low and Razak. While Razak could use his office to crack down on Malaysian reporters trying to uncover the truth, journalists affiliated with U.S. media outlets including the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and *Hollywood Reporter* kept digging and discovered a tale of greed that had little precedent on either side of the Pacific. A fast-moving, compelling portrait of high-finance corruption, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

would like to continue her studies and enter the workforce after marriage, but she has no idea if her husband will allow that. The sisters' relation will also be tested because Fatima is set to move with her new husband to Casablanca. Until that time, the film follows the siblings as they engage in their family's farm work, which includes harvesting, milking goats, and collecting grass in large baskets. But they also see the outside world via TV and are made aware of the more progressive policies that guarantee equal rights for women in their country. Despite its rather quotidian title, *House in the Fields* is a very insightful and captivating film about the complexities of modern Islamic society as it relates to the rights of women and the educational aspirations of teenage girls. Hadid's film beautifully frames the sisters within their domestic setting and the wider Moroccan society, and handles the balance between daily chores and personal dreams with grace and sincerity. A powerful documentary filmed in a section of North Africa rarely seen in the media, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

In Exile ★★★

(2016) 72 min. DVD: \$375. DRA. Grasshopper Film. PPR.

While living under Myanmar's 20-year military dictatorship, director and cameraman Tin Win Naing could only film in secret and was unable to share his work publicly. "What they feared most were cameras," he states, a stance that greatly restricted members of the media and filmmaking communities (who risked 10-year prison sentences under the Electronic Law Act). In 2007, Naing filmed the Saffron Revolution, a protest movement led by monks, and in 2008, he captured the aftereffects of Cyclone Nargis. A year later, authorities began to arrest his associates and he started to worry about

the fate of his family if he were to end up in prison, so Naing goes into exile in Thailand. At first, it's a life of poverty and loneliness, but then he gets a job as a bike courier and meets some Myanmar migrant workers (he estimates there are two-to-three million in Thailand, most illegally). Naing decides to document the lives of some (which allows him to continue his own filmmaking project), including Kyaw Moe Win, a child corn picker, and Ko Zaw and Ma Cho, a couple who work on a lime and papaya plantation. Naing learns that managers pay less than they promise and that malaria is a constant threat. When two workers are caught stealing cow dung to sell, they are shot (one survives, and is then set on fire). Meanwhile, Naing's father falls ill, which only increases his desire to go home. In 2010, Myanmar finally releases opposition leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi from a 17-year house arrest and President Sein welcomes back refugees and political exiles, clearing the way for Naing to return. While there is a happy ending for Naing, his film makes it clear that he was one of the lucky ones. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

The Two Faces of a Bamiléké Woman

★★★

(2016) 76 min. In French & Bamiléké w/English subtitles. DVD: \$348. Icarus Films. PPR.

In a deep, hypnotic voice, filmmaker Rosine Mbakam narrates a trip back home to her native Cameroon, a former French colony, in this video essay that in style falls somewhere between the experimental films of Chris Marker and the autobiographical cinema of Ross McElwee. At the time, the country was celebrating 55 years of independence, and Mbakam, who had been living in Belgium, brought her young son with her. Just as she has two Bamiléké names—one from her

mother's side, the other from her father's—she wants her son to take part in the same tradition. Mbakam's mother, Mâ Brêh, who wears traditional printed dresses, describes her daughter's work as "taking photos so that we can see them at the cinema." Considering that she has only visited a theater once, it's not surprising that movies are a mystery to her (when she saw people shooting and killing each other on screen, she naturally thought it was really happening). During the day, Mâ Brêh sells fresh produce and dried fish from a market stall. Her own mother was one of three co-wives, just as she was one of two, but when her husband died, she married her co-wife's son. In the film, Mbakam talks to her mother about almost every aspect of her life as the latter cooks, cleans, and looks through old photographs. Offering a glimpse into a vanishing way of life, which the director approaches with a mix of curiosity, sorrow, and affection, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Why the Jews? ★★★

(2018) 70 min. DVD: \$95; public libraries; \$395: colleges & universities. DRA. Tugg. PPR.

Filmmaker John Curtin's documentary asks why the Jews, as a small and unremittingly persecuted people, have excelled in so many areas of human activity. Following a brief introduction enumerating notable Jewish thinkers over the centuries and pointing to the large percentage of Jewish Nobel Prize winners, Curtin turns to interviews with figures in a wide variety of fields who offer observations about the causes for Jewish overachievement relative to other groups—among them the late Israeli statesman Shimon Perez, lawyer Alan Dershowitz,

author and broadcaster Dr. Ruth Westheimer, novelist Howard Jacobson, chess grandmaster Judit Polgár, architect Daniel Libeskind, psychologist Steven Pinker, and theorist Noam Chomsky. One segment explores Jewish accomplishments in music, while another looks at Israeli innovation in technology, including such areas as drip irrigation and desalination, both of which are essential to prosperity in the arid Middle East. So, what is the answer to the titular question? Many of the commentators, such as Rabbi Reuben Poupko, point to Judaism's essential quality as a religion of the word that has predicated its very survival on education. Others argue that persecution has made the drive to succeed even more urgent, and that envy of Jewish accomplishment has in turn exacerbated anti-Semitic prejudice. A fascinating film that raises provocative issues, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

TEEN ISSUES

Straight Talk about Sexual Harassment

★★★

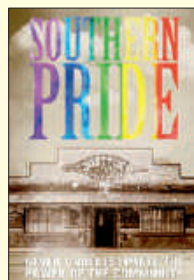
(2019) 17 min. DVD: \$149.95 (study guide included). Human Relations Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62706-114-8.

This well-produced program on the perennially timely topic of sexual harassment states that nearly 50 percent of middle and high school students and 60 percent of college students have experienced some form of harassment. The video identifies different types of harassment, discusses long term effects, and offers suggestions on handling and reporting incidents. Important issues raised along the way include the fact that

Southern Pride ★★★

(2019) 86 min. DVD: \$24.99. Uncork'd Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

Donald Trump becomes president, and among those feeling marginalized and unprotected in a polarized, crueler America are the LGBTQ communities in two small Mississippi towns, as witnessed in filmmaker Malcolm Ingram's eye-opening documentary *Southern Pride*. The film serves up what are essentially linked stories about gay bars in Biloxi and Hattiesburg, both of which are operated by strong-willed women who understand their roles as anchors for minorities who would otherwise be isolated and even endangered (a series of murders of transgender women in the state becomes a chilling backdrop to the story). The major focus here is on Biloxi's Lynn Koval, a white lesbian whose team of supporters has helped her turn her bar into a community hub where fundraising events raise tens of thousands of dollars, and poor LGBTQ folks come to find jobs and emergency resources. When Koval decides that it's time to respond to haters with the first Pride parade in town, she and fellow organizers quickly run up against obstacles thrown in their path. Meanwhile, in Hattiesburg, black lesbian Shawn Perryon's efforts to put together a Black Pride parade are bumping into similar resistance that is mixed with white supremacy. Ingram's ambitious film sometimes strays from the central narrative (material on Hurricane Katrina and Mardi Gras feels tangential), but overall *Southern Pride* is a bold and necessary film about defending one's right to be part of the tapestry of American life. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



50 years after man's first step on the moon in 1969, the earth's satellite is at the core of geopolitical and economic stakes. The Moon has also become a new source of energy and resources. Despite International treaties stating it cannot be appropriated by any state or company, the Americans, Russians, Chinese, Koreans and Indians are already making plans for the Moon, alongside companies privately funded by billionaires who see it as their new Eldorado, further blurring the boundaries between geostrategic and economic issues.

2019 | 52 mins | SDH subtitles

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sexual harassment involves abuse of power, everyone has a right to feel safe and protected, and cultural messages do shape attitudes and beliefs. The executive director of a national organization devoted to sexual education clearly explains various facets of unwelcome behaviors, while teens talk about personal harassment incidents, and an adult who experienced verbal and physical abuse in his teen years because he was perceived as homosexual recounts his experiences. Digital bullying and federal laws protecting victims in school and the workplace are also covered, and viewers are encouraged to report misbehaviors to appropriate adults. Combining helpful commentary with short dramatizations, this solid classroom-discussion starter is recommended. Aud: J, H, P. (S. Beauregard)

LAW & CRIME

Crime + Punishment ★★★

(2018) 112 min. DVD: \$129; public libraries; \$349: colleges & universities. DRA. Good Docs (avail. from www.gooddocs.net). PPR. Closed captioned.

The controversy surrounding the misuse of the NYC police force to increase city revenue is the subject of filmmaker Stephen Maing's unsettling documentary, which focuses on quota policing and how it has led to systemic racism in practice. *Crime + Punishment* opens with Officer Sandy Gonzales discussing a departmental culture in which beat cops face retaliation if they fail to meet minimum numbers of summonses and arrests—which put money into the city's coffers—each month. Those assigned to minority areas come under special pressure to comply. The film then

expands to consider the NYPD12 (a group Gonzalez belongs to), which includes Edwin Raymond, an African American repeatedly denied promotion to sergeant, and other police officers who protest the quota system and mount a class-action lawsuit. Various members disclose instances of retaliation in group discussions and individual interviews. The impact of the practice on the public is illustrated by the case of Pedro Hernandez, who after repeated arrests was locked up in Rikers when he refused to confess to false charges of threatening a man with a gun. With the assistance of his mother and investigator/former police officer Manuel Gomez, Hernandez is eventually exonerated and released, but not before serving a considerable stretch of time. Pointing an accusatory finger at Police Commissioner William Bratton as a smooth-talking politician who tries to justify the system, the documentary closes with NYPD12's case still awaiting resolution. Presenting a strong critique of profit-based malfeasance within the NYPD, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

In Pursuit of Justice ★★★½

(2018) 98 min. DVD: \$89; public libraries; \$295: colleges & universities. DRA. The Video Project. PPR. Closed captioned.

On September 26, 1991, Greg Taylor's Nissan Pathfinder got stuck in mud near a cul-de-sac in Raleigh, NC. The next morning, the body of a young woman was found roughly 100 yards from where the vehicle ran into problems. Taylor and his traveling companion, Johnny Beck, were arrested for murder, but while the charges against Beck were dropped, Taylor was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Taylor's case was

eventually taken up by the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission, which found substantial prosecutorial misconduct, including sloppy forensic work by investigators, crucial evidence that was withheld from defense attorneys, and a reliance on two convicts who gave false testimony against Taylor in exchange for favorable treatment. After serving 17 years for a crime he did not commit, Taylor was exonerated by a three-judge panel in February 2010. Filmmaker Gregg Jamback presents a disturbing and provocative examination of Taylor's case, detailing the viciously deliberate attempt by prosecutors to frame an innocent man, while also telling the heartbreaking story of Taylor's family's indefatigable belief in his innocence and the severe emotional and financial hardship they suffered in order to secure his freedom. While the film makes it clear that this is not a broad indictment of law enforcement and the legal system as a whole, it does effectively illustrate how the fragile legal system can be brutally manipulated. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

To a More Perfect Union: U.S. v. Windsor ★★★

(2019) 63 min. DVD: \$19.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

In the march to legal recognition of same-sex marriage in the United States, the definitive *Obergefell v. Hodges* case decided by the Supreme Court in 2015 may hold pride of place, but the 2013 ruling in *United States v. Windsor* was an important step along the way. New Yorkers Edie Windsor and her longtime partner Thea Spyer married in Toronto in 2007, but when Spyer died two years later of multiple sclerosis, Windsor was required to pay hundreds of thousands in inheritance taxes because the marriage was not recognized under provisions of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act. The tale of the women's life together was tenderly recounted in *Edie & Thea: A Very Long Engagement* (VL-3/11), and this documentary from Donna Zaccaro might be considered a sequel. Following a brief sketch of the progress made by the gay rights movement from the 1960s to the close of the last century, the film proceeds to Windsor's decision to sue the government, and lawyer Roberta Kaplan agreeing to take on the case. Zaccaro skillfully melds archival footage and interviews with Windsor, Kaplan, legal experts Jeffrey Toobin and Nina Totenberg, and some supporters and opponents, making clear the hurdles the plaintiffs had to surmount and the strategy Kaplan devised to appeal to Anthony Kennedy, the swing vote on the court, which resulted in a 5-4 victory. Zaccaro also shows the immediate impact of the decision in various states even before the broader *Obergefell* ruling came down. Windsor is an engaging personality and this documentary further secures her status as a gay rights heroine.

Guilty Until Proven Guilty ★★★

(2018) 52 min. DVD: \$19.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. A disproportionately high number of Americans of color routinely become entangled in an uncaring justice system, in which individuals charged with a crime can wait years behind bars before receiving their day in court. Within America, the state of Louisiana has the harshest laws regarding the legal disposition of defendants (only 10 out of 12 jurors need to agree on a finding of guilt, for instance). And within Louisiana, the city of New Orleans has the worst reputation for excessive and abusive police tactics (in fact, the police department was under a consent decree from the Department of Justice at the time this heartbreaking documentary was filmed). Filmmaker Harry Moses's *Guilty Until Proven Guilty* focuses on the experience of Tim Conerly, an African American man arrested in 2014 in connection with an armed robbery, who waited 28 months for a trial. The film finds that the district attorney's office that covers New Orleans is not just gung-ho on battling crime, but suspiciously overzealous and arguably strategic in overloading courts, thereby keeping the accused indefinitely in prison. A Louisiana chapter of the national nonprofit Innocence Project—tasked with freeing prisoners unfairly convicted and imprisoned for many years—plays a heroic role here, but what sticks with the viewer are the faces of men whose terrible treatment in notorious prisons such as Angola has left them embittered and angry. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Attenborough and the Sea Dragon

★★★1/2

(2019) 53 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0932-7.

On the placid shore of southern England, a Jurassic ocean once stretched for 100 miles from Devon to Dorset, and was home to the Ichthyosaur, a huge, fearsome “fish lizard”—or sea dragon—that dominated the waters for 150 million years. In filmmaker Sally Thomson’s PBS-aired *Nature* documentary produced by BBC Earth, Sir David Attenborough looks at the rapidly eroding cliffs where fossil hunters dredge secrets that are often unearthed after turbulent sea storms. The early dragons were air breathers, birthed live young, boasted keen eyesight, and originally migrated from the land, becoming the ultimate predator in terms of jaw power. The creature traveled widely in search of prey, eating anything it could find, and even cannibalizing its own species. To the great excitement of the fossil hunters here, bones are uncovered in the cliff in a rare find that is mostly complete, but missing the head. Remains are sent to the lab for analysis, including fossilized dung droppings, which could reveal what these monsters ate. The dragon’s bite was twice as powerful as that of a saltwater crocodile, and more information is presented on its mode of navigation, use of paddles, body size and shape, and similarities to modern sea dwellers such as the dolphin or Indonesian crocodile. Despite its fearsome presence, this “king of the Jurassic sea” died out for reasons unknown millions of years ago (Attenborough and others speculate that it fell victim to an even bigger predator). A captivating scientific mystery-adventure, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Homo Spatius ★★★

(2018) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-1006-4.

America’s first manned space flight in 1961 lasted all of 15 minutes, but over the decades humans have spent an increasing amount of time in space. Now, as NASA eyes trips to Mars, that period may lengthen into years. Are humans ready and suited for longer life in space? Filmmaker Jean-Christophe Ribot’s PBS-aired documentary explores human fitness to live in prolonged periods of weightlessness, with relatively limited social interaction, and isolation from the sights, sounds, and smells of life on Earth. The first problem that astronauts encounter with weightlessness is nausea, coping with an environment in which there is no up or down. Indeed, one astronaut was rendered completely unproductive by nausea during



Genesis 2.0 ★★★1/2

(2018) 112 min. In English & Russian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.98 (\$345 w/PPR from www.kimstim.com). KimStim (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmakers Christian Frei and Maxim Arbugaev’s moody documentary looks at the darker side of *Raising the Mammoth* and similar gee-whiz Discovery Channel and National Geographic science celebrations. On the Arctic island of New Siberia, climate change has caused such extensive ice melting that numerous mammoth carcasses and bones have come to light. Now, expeditions of latter-day “mammoth hunters”—mostly impoverished peasants deep in debt—spend seasons there in isolation, prospecting for ancient tusks that emerge from the permafrost. Ancient ivory in pristine condition is coveted by faraway Chinese businessmen (and the mammoths currently offer a way around the embargoes on poaching and butchering present-day species). But there is also a network of scientists and mammoth obsessives (chiefly Russian brothers Peter and Semyon Grigoriev) who are looking for preserved frozen carcasses. Any living cells still viable after thousands of years, they believe, will allow the revival of these extinct giants via either cloning or hybrid “chimera” embryo-implantation. The filmmakers visit George Church, America’s “rock star” of genetic engineering, and scandal-stained South Korean cloning expert Woo Suk Hwang, but the action invariably returns to the harsh, Werner Herzog-style narrative on New Siberia, where an ordeal of simple subsistence plays out amidst loneliness and deprivation, far from the schemes and vainglorious projects of the wealthy who are anticipating a DNA breakthrough. In both cases, the viewer is left with an uneasy feeling that whatever develops from these frontiers of science, ego, and exploitation, it will be tainted by less-than-noble agendas. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

his six-day trip. The next problem is muscle loss and a weakening of bones. Astronauts must be vigilant about working out, striving to remain terrestrial in the world of outer space (of course, the heart is also a muscle, so astronauts must be in top shape before launch). And the artificial lighting and controlled air can feel monotonous, especially without any sounds of nature. The documentary presents insights from Russian, Japanese, French, Italian, and American astronauts, who discuss sensory deprivation and dealing with occasional boredom and depression. On the positive side, most experience an awe and wonder looking at Earth from space, while using coping mechanisms to handle the broken bond with home. Humans are social animals, but being comfortable alone is essential. Women comprise only 10 percent of astronauts, but maintaining boundaries while performing bodily functions is a challenge, although the question of sexual relations during long spaceflights must wait for a future era. Offering an interesting look at these “guinea pigs of science,” this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

In the Starlight ★★★1/2

(2019) 52 min. DVD: \$39.95. DRA. Film Ideas. PPR.

Filmmaker Mathieu Le Lay’s *In the Starlight* follows French-Canadian photographer Paul Zizka on several adventurous and sometimes risky expeditions to discover the unique natural beauty in out-of-the-way places. Living amidst the Canadian Rockies with his wife and daughter, Zizka has filmed the

Rocky Mountains for national photography magazines and written six books. Here, he climbs with two friends in Banff National Park to capture the magnificence of one of the highest peaks in North America (in one tense overhead shot, the three climbers are seen traversing a dangerously narrow walkway with severe vertical drops on either side as they approach the summit). Next, Zizka sets out alone to photograph the lights and shadows of the Namib Desert and the night sky in Southern Africa. Along the coastline, where shipwrecks are buried in the sand, Zizka makes one vessel seem to come to life with his camera in the evening skylight. Lastly, Zizka travels to Southern Greenland to film the icecap and barren granite mountains of this remote land. He photographs beautiful turquoise pools of water formed from glaciers melting on the icecap in the summer, and also kayaks a splendid fjord, and walks across a harsh landscape where few have ever visited. Saving the best for last, Zizka captures the nighttime wonder of the aurora borealis—vivid green and pink lights dancing above in the sky. A visual delight, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Root)

Ocean Quest: A Race to Map the Ocean Floor ★★★

(2019) 49 min. DVD: \$19.99. DRA. Vision Video (avail. from most distributors).

In filmmaker Shane Vermooten’s spirited documentary, a group of junior high and high school kids enter the international XPRIZE Global Ocean Mapping Challenge competition to map the ocean floor. The

Inventing Tomorrow ★★★

(2018) 87 min. In English, Spanish & Indonesian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$129; high schools & public libraries; \$349: colleges & universities. DRA. Good Docs (avail. from www.gooddocs.net). PPR.

The six high school students who attend the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in Los Angeles in Laura Dix's inspiring documentary all have the potential to make the world a better place. In Bangka, Indonesia, Nuha Anfaresi says that tin mining fuels her country's economy but devastates the environment. In order to excavate the tin, which is used in a wide range of electronic devices, legal and illegal operations are carried out that produce lead, which in turn poisons marine life. Nuha has created a filter to minimize the damage. Jared Goodwin, a third-generation Hawaiian, has created a map identifying arsenic deposits on Hilo created by dry board factory runoff, a problem that is exacerbated by tsunamis. Through ponds, the arsenic seeps into the soil, causing adverse health effects. Sahithi Pingali, hailing from Bangalore, India, laments that hundreds of lakes have disappeared due to sewage contamination produced by the tech boom, while many that remain are flammable due to phosphates and other untreated chemicals. She has created an app to make testing easy and accessible. Concerned about the smog generated by diesel fuel, Jesus Martinez, Jose Elizalde, and Fernando Sanchez, from Monterrey, Mexico, have created paint with photo-catalytic properties to counteract the effects of carbon dioxide. In L.A., all six contestants present their inventions to judges—which puts their communications skills to the test—and it's hard not to root for all of them. The underlying subtext here is clear: the future scientists who will be most likely to save the environment need a supportive family, access to college-level resources, and events like ISEF to help bring their ideas to fruition. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (K. Fennessy)



team from Valley Christian Schools in California, along with their teacher and guide, know they can't possibly win, but that isn't the point. Their goal is create a plan to meet a discipline-crossing STEM challenge, apply themselves to making it work, and learn from the experience, come what may. The boys and girls are a delightfully nerdy bunch who willingly lose sleep when things get tight (including a middle-of-the-night plumbing crisis at a hotel where the team stays). And the kids ride an emotional roller coaster as their project (mastering a finicky "autonomous underwater vehicle" meant to capture images of the sea floor) hits high and low moments. In the end, the team does far better in the competition than one might have expected, but the real victory lies in knowing that these 13-to-16-year-old students now have a greater measure of confidence and pride from achieving something hard. An inspiring true story, this is recommended. Aud: J, H, P. (T. Keogh)

Rise of the Rockets ★★★

(2019) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0950-1.

No Americans have been launched into space from U.S. soil since 2011, although they have hitched rides on spacecraft from other countries. But recent years have brought exciting new ideas, notably privately funded commercial rocketry, as deep-pocket entrepreneurs have pledged to back and build rockets to be used for research and space tourism. Filmmaker Christopher Riley's PBS-aided NOVA documentary explores

alternatives to large-scale NASA launches, including re-usable rockets, vertical landing space craft, and even rockets launched from aircraft. The film chronicles the history of rockets, from the pioneering research of Robert Goddard, to the catch-up space race efforts of the U.S. missions to the Moon, as well as the never-ending search for lighter, cheaper, but also safe fuels to boost the heavy payload. Space travel is quite expensive, off limits to all but a few entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Richard Branson. Visionaries like Musk are inspired by science fiction and the adventuresome spirit of the space program's early days, but there are still big risks to consider alongside the potential rewards in the next generation of space exploration. Manned flights to Mars may remain decades away (if ever), but missions to the Moon and space tourism could begin in the 2020s. Combining illustrative examples with insights from experts, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Shedding Light on Energy: Energy Efficiency ★★★

(2018) 30 min. DVD: \$44.95. DRA. TMW Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned.

This entry in the *Shedding Light on Energy* series explores how scientists and engineers have increased the efficiency of energy sources to produce more energy at lower cost. Energy efficiency is a measure of useful output compared to the amount of energy input. The first lesson covers improvement in efficiency for light bulbs. While the incandescent bulb

has delivered light for over 100 years, only a small percent of the electrical energy is actually transformed into light; the remaining energy is lost to heat. Newer LED bulbs are much more efficient, generating greater light with far less heat emitted. Turning to chemical energy, the narrator points out that gas-powered cars are only 25% efficient in utilizing fuel while the remaining energy is expended as heat through exhaust or used by the brakes. Walking is technically more efficient than running in terms of energy conversion and biking beats both since less effort is required to move the body. Dropping an inflated ball from various heights illustrates the power of gravitational pull to transform energy into kinetic energy, as the ball will bounce back up when it hits the surface but lose energy on each rebound. This concept is featured in prosthetic limbs that make use of the arch of the foot and tendon to capture and retain kinetic energy for the next step. A solid primer on various types of energy transformation that also explores the possibilities for future advances in energy efficiency, this is recommended. [Note: the other titles in the series are *Forms of Energy* and *Measuring Energy*.] Aud: J, H, P. (T. Root)

HEALTH & FITNESS

Cancer Rebellion ★★★

(2018) 100 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Roger Daltrey of legendary rock band The Who has long been a champion for kids with cancer, raising money for research and for new clinics and hospital wings in the U.K. and U.S. that are devoted to treating teenagers and young adults. Daltrey is credited as executive producer (and appears in the film) for this deeply-felt documentary made by cancer survivor Hernan Barangan—a young American adult who learned of his diagnosis at age 15—as he travels to all 50 states to hear from other young people with cancer experiences. This is not an easy challenge, as Barangan now requires a wheelchair, but he hits the road and makes the acquaintance of numerous teens who recall first hearing of their diagnoses from shattered parents who were informed of the news before the patients. Barangan's interviewees take viewers through the many physical and emotional stages of cancer treatment, from the side effects of chemotherapy (like putting gasoline in your body, one young man says) to the guilt of knowing that the financially crippling costs of care can ruin a family. The stories vary—one veteran of the war in Iraq, a medical helicopter pilot, describes becoming ill while serving in the military—and *Cancer Rebellion* sometimes feels a bit scattershot, but it does offer a touching tribute to a wide

range of young people who have worked to transcend the limitations imposed by a brutal disease. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Plane Truths ★★½

(2018) 33 min. DVD: \$225. Bullfrog Films. PPR. SDH captioned. ISBN: 1-948745-03-8.

Mark Dworkin and Melissa Young's short documentary focuses on the audio havoc created by the U.S. Navy on Whidbey Island in Washington state. While the Navy had maintained a presence at Naval Air Station Whidbey for years without incident, its use of the EA-18G "Growler" jets for flight training brought significant new concerns. These jets are much louder than their predecessors, and the regularity of the training flights has increased substantially. As a result, the Whidbey Island residents have begun to experience hearing-related problems that have been traced directly to the Naval Air Station. Complicating matters is the base's use of the PFOA and PFOS chemicals for firefighting at the station's landing strips—chemicals that have seeped into the local water system, forcing many locals to rely on bottled water. Although the Whidbey Island residents state that they are not anti-Navy, they nonetheless expect the military to respond to these issues. The film features a single Navy officer answering questions, although it is obvious that he has no power to correct matters, while a news clip with former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis nonchalantly answering a question during a Senate hearing on the situation suggests

little interest on the part of the Pentagon. Presenting a prime example of military indifference to real-world issues, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Qi Gong: 30 Day Challenge ★★★

(2018) 215 min. DVD: \$29.95. YMAA Publication Center.

Master trainer Lee Holden presents a stress-relieving exercise program in which participants can challenge themselves to perform a seven-minute qi gong routine for 30 days. Holden emphasizes flowing and stretching movements designed to energize the body, calm the mind, and promote relaxation. He developed this challenge for time-strapped individuals, who can simply select the day's set of exercises from the DVD menu. As Holden performs each exercise, he describes the purpose and benefit of each movement, stressing the importance of maintaining consistency for the best results and noting that the routines can be performed any time of the day. The daily exercises are occasionally repeated on other days—sometimes with variations—enabling participants to gain competency and familiarity as the month progresses. Taken together, the routines equal over three hours of exercises that will help relieve tension in the head, neck, shoulders, and back, as well as improve range of motion, strength, and flexibility, while restoring vital energy to the body. The picturesque California coast background adds a relaxed atmosphere for exercising. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Root)

The Good Breast ★★★

(2016) 94 min. DVD: \$29.98 (\$298 w/PPR from www.icarusfilms.com). Icarus Films Home Video (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Bernadette Wegenstein's documentary follows four breast cancer victims from diagnosis through treatment and post-operative follow-up—including surgery, problems arising from procedures, and counseling when outcomes do not meet expectations. All are patients of Dr. Lauren Schnaper, Director of the Breast Cancer Center at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center, and her associate, Dr. Sheri Slezak, a plastic surgeon specializing in breast reconstruction. Schnaper, whose manner is compassionate but straightforward, emphasizes the importance of mammography but also expresses some provocative ideas about the prevalence of radical mastectomy as the treatment of choice, and Wegenstein includes archival footage of Dr. William S. Halsted, who pioneered and promoted the procedure, to provide historical context (the film also presents quite explicit footage of the operation itself). But while concentrating on the medical and psychological realities of the four cases, *The Good Breast* also adopts a wider cultural perspective, discussing the Christian legend of third-century martyr St. Agatha, who was tortured by having her breasts cut off. Now recognized as the patron saint of breast cancer victims, Agatha is venerated at an annual festival in her honor at her birthplace of Catania in Sicily, with Wegenstein following Schnaper and Slezak as they attend the event in order to attain a greater understanding of the importance of the breast as an ancient symbol of female strength. The film serves a practical purpose by explaining breast cancer treatment for patients and their families, while also commenting on female empowerment. Extras include additional scenes, and a featurette on the music score. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



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Qi Gong for Beginners ★★★

(2018) 85 min. DVD: \$29.95. YMAA Publication Center. ISBN: 978-1-59439-672-4.

Qi Gong is an ancient Chinese practice that was only relatively recently introduced to the outside world (the American public was first exposed to qi gong in Bill Moyers's 1993 PBS series *Healing and the Mind*). Several types of qi gong exist; here, master trainer Lisa B. O'Shea introduces beginners to both a novice and an intermediate routine of Fragrance Qi Gong. As energy flows through the body, senses may be heightened, and healing can occur. Dressed in comfortable clothing, with a beautiful view of the Cape Cod harbor, O'Shea first gives instruction for the eight movements of the beginner routine, and then repeats the entire 15-minute sequence quietly to lovely music (she uses the same approach for the intermediate routine). The beginner exercises consist of 15 easy palm and arm movements while standing (although these could also be performed sitting down), including circling the palms, bringing the palms to the ears, moving the palms back and forth across the abdomen, and more. The intermediate exercises combine palm and arm movements with leg action in two stances. O'Shea alternately locks and unlocks each knee, thereby rocking the hips, and then moves her hips by changing weight from one leg to the other. The various palm and arm movements are coordinated with the leg movements in an easy to follow routine. Offering a simple set of exercises that should leave viewers feeling energized and relaxed, this is recommended. Aud: P. (T. Root)



The Goddesses of Food ★★★

(2016) 94 min. In English & French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95. DRA. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors).

It should come as no surprise that the world of gastronomy, as with those of business, politics, and sports, is a microcosm of entrenched social biases and many uphill efforts to bring about change. Filmmaker V  rane Fr  diani's *The Goddesses of Food* might sound like a fun title for foodies, but the documentary deals with gender inequality issues, #MeToo horrors, and archaic defenses of patriarchy in the kitchen and dining room. Offering an ambitious survey of women chefs on three continents, the film finds a lot of commonality in the experiences of female professionals whose culinary artistry is often lost in the shadows of celebrity male chef culture. Part of the narrative delves into an early 20th-century history of French women chefs who became well-known but were against allowing other women into their kitchen "brigades." More contemporary matters focus on the unwillingness of magazines and TV to veer from the overwhelming championing of male chefs, and the tendency of Michelin guides and the various foodie organizations that award "master" designations to often be dismissive of women. Fr  diani is sometimes a little too general in her point-by-point contrasts between what women and men bring to gastronomy, but the former are in agreement that they are more intuitive about food and better at multitasking because of their traditional domestic roles at home. The darkest material here sounds terribly familiar, as women in the kitchen note that they eschew makeup in order to avoid sexual harassment. Viewers are ultimately left with the hope that these problems—along with so many others—will be solved generationally, as sexist traditions finally go the way of dinosaurs. Extras include deleted scenes. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY

Before Homosexuals: From Ancient Times to Victorian Crimes ★★★

(2017) 87 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Appearing in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots that marked the beginning of the modern gay liberation movement, filmmaker John Scagliotti's documentary completes a historical trilogy that includes 1984's *Before Stonewall* (with Scagliotti serving as producer—and also newly available on DVD in an anniversary edition) and 1999's *After Stonewall*, which Scagliotti directed. Now he offers a prequel of sorts, drawing on literary and artistic evidence to trace the history of homosexuality from prehistoric and ancient times up to the late 19th century, complementing the visuals with commentary from such scholars as the late Louis Crompton (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Bernadette Brooten (Brandeis University), and James Saslow (The City University of New York). The film concentrates on the West, discussing homosexual practices in ancient Greece and Rome and the persecutions of those accused of sodomy (as it came to be called) in the medieval and early modern periods, closing with a 19th-century overview that places emphasis on figures such as Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde, as well as others who struggled against societal condemnation of those who today are called gay, lesbian, and transsexual. But it also touches more briefly on such non-Western locales

as ancient Egypt, China, and Japan. Hosted and narrated by Scagliotti in an accessible homespun style, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

FOOD & SPIRITS

Baristas ★★★

(2018) 98 min. DVD: \$24.95. Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Documentary filmmaker Rock Baijnauth's 2015 film *Barista* followed five competitors vying for the U.S. Coffee Championship title. His charming and suspenseful sequel *Baristas* expands the scope, focusing on the World Barista Championship, specifically four National Barista Champions: Chloe from Germany, Miki from Japan, Niall from Ireland, and Kyle from the U.S. The cameras capture competitors as they prepare for the grueling challenges that lie ahead in Seoul, which include creating original blends and giving a talk to judges about how baristas do what they do. The film is driven by the unique personalities of the sundry contestants and the influences of their respective home cultures on their work. Of course, there are many other national champions beyond Baijnauth's subjects who are seeking that World crown, which makes the chances of any one of the quartet here triumphing much dicier. But watching the hard work and passion that goes into earning a place at the competition is indeed moving and this should definitely appeal to coffee lovers. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

PETS

Catwalk: Tales from the Cat Show Circuit ★★★

(2018) 75 min. DVD: \$11.99, Blu-ray: \$12.99. Gravitas Ventures (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Canadian filmmakers Michael McNamara and Aaron Hancox serve up the most nakedly indulgent cat-watching documentary since *Kedi* (VL-11/17), following a series of regional competitive cat shows (mostly in Canada, but with a few visits to the USA) and profiling the attendant personalities—human and feline—who participate in the ritual judgments via awarded points and collecting of ribbons. While the breeds Maine Coons and Norwegian Forest cats make an appearance, the narrative

mainly boils down to a lighthearted champion horse race—or cat race, as depicted by CGI—between Bobby, a personable Turkish Angora in his prime, and the outrageous powder-puff that is Oh La La, a striking Red Persian on the verge of aging out of competitions but who still stupefies judges. While these top cats' respective owners, Kim and Shirley, spend a great deal of time and money chasing cat-show glory, their rivalry is healthy and convivial (no actual fur flies). The overall attitude is nicely summed up by a competitor who brings in a luxurious white shelter-rescue cat named Maestro (who supposedly relishes classical music): the point is to share these beautiful, adored pets with as many admirers as possible, and no cat lover would fault that. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Billion Dollar Bully ★★1/2

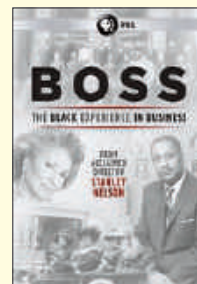
(2019) 88 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Kaylie Milliken attacks the influential, reader-rating, consumer-advisory Internet site Yelp with guns blazing (all from one side; Yelp did not respond to interview requests or on-the-street executive ambushes). Interviewees including freelance journalist Amy Lane charge that the company—which profits substantially off ad revenue—is practically mafia-like in its approach: enterprises that are being reviewed can either pay up and magically see any bad Yelp reviews disappear from their listings via a “filter”...or not buy, and suddenly receive a large number of negative notices. A disillusioned ex-Yelp staffer says that a big change came about with Yelp's first IPO; afterwards, ad sales were subject to high-pressure boiler-room tactics. Anecdotes abound about vindictive and ignorant “Yelpers” hurting small businesses, although a lot of the complaints come across as basic yowls against social-media culture (what qualifies these strangers to publish opinions, how dare someone review Auschwitz as a travel destination, where is government oversight, etc.). One might suspect—especially in the case of restaurants, a notoriously high-failure-rate business—that Yelp, even with its billions in valuations, is getting somewhat scapegoated by casualties of the tough free market. Still, there are some possible lessons to be learned here about unexpected consequences in the online realm—including that the filmmakers had no trouble raising their budget via crowdsourcing, although many donors wished to remain anonymous, no doubt for fear of (Yelp) retaliation. A timely, albeit one-sided, documentary, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Boss: The Black Experience in Business ★★★1/2

(2019) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-1005-7.

For many African Americans, owning a business is a means of being independent and “making a way out of no way.” Money was always important, initially as a means for slaves to buy their freedom from servitude. After the Civil War, many blacks were hopeful, working with the newly created Freedman's Bank to buy tailoring or barber shops, as well as grocery stores. Filmmaker Stanley Nelson's PBS-aired documentary, narrated by Tamara Tunie, describes the epic struggle of African Americans to use their brains, skills, and hard work to rise to prosperity, or at least a decent standard of living. Blacks suffered a triple blow when white swindlers looted the Freedman's Bank, Reconstruction ended, and punitive Jim Crow laws were instituted. The film looks at the related roles of black newspapers, the Great Migration north, and the fierce white backlash, particularly in a prosperous black business district in Tulsa, OK in 1921, when envious and bigoted whites rioted, leading to hundreds of injuries and deaths. Every step forward was followed by temporary defeats, such as the Great Depression, the urban riots of the 1960s, and a loss of capital for black-owned businesses, although some blacks eventually gained entry and acceptance into white corporations. Other topics include a growing black middle class, and the appearance of publications such as *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence*, which allowed blacks to control their own narrative. The music of Motown achieved a crossover landmark in its appeal to white audiences, while a prouder and more assertive image led to success in hair care and grooming products, the financial juggernaut of hip hop and rap, and the more rarefied realm of high tech. Race-related economic inequalities still plague America, but blacks continue to draw inspiration and lessons from the hard-won gains and challenges of the past. Drawing on numerous examples, coupled with historical anecdotes, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



Diesel: The Industry's Smokescreen

★★★

(2019) 55 min. DVD: \$59.99 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Remember “Dieselgate”? That shocking automotive scandal that began in 2015 is the subject of filmmaker Jules Giraudat's documentary. Beginning with the discovery by three researchers that Volkswagen was installing software in its cars to fool emissions tests regarding the amount of pollution released by their vehicles, the film tracks the expanding focus of the investigation to include Renault, Citroën, Volvo, Fiat, and Jeep Renegade. All of these models exceeded European nitrogen oxide limits by up to 10 times in real-world driving (i.e., not in a test situation). Besides laying out these facts, the film also engages in a kind of chase-the-culprits journalism that involves taking the fight to industry figures who would rather not speak on camera about breaking laws and betraying consumers. Not surprisingly, the CEOs come across as weasels, who are either running from the filmmakers or providing vague answers to pointed questions. Ultimately, one can't help but be stunned by the corrupt arrogance of the software ploy at the center of this automotive controversy. Offering a solid examination of corporate malfeasance, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

SPORTS, GAMES & RECREATION

350 Days ★★★

(2018) 108 min. DVD: \$14.99, Blu-ray: \$16.99. Gravitas Ventures (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Until Ken Burns makes a documentary saga on pro wrestling, filmmaker Fulvio Cecere suffices with an impressive undercard of old-time stars from the grappling circuit, going back to the old barnstorming days before Vince McMahon's immensely popular WWF/WWE. In a bluesy talking-head (and gravel-voiced) format, Bret “Hitman” Hart, Ted “Million Dollar Man” DiBiase, “Superstar” Billy Graham, Abdullah the Butcher, Lex Luger, George “The Animal” Steele, and other luminaries reminisce about their lives in “sports entertainment,” where wrestling 350 nights per year in small towns in and out of North America was not unusual. Wendi Richter, the only lady wrestler here, fled a repressive home to embark on a wrestling career and never looked back (but her devotion made having children and a personal life a hardship). Wrestlers describe ghastly injuries and illnesses (Paul “Mr. Wonderful” Orndorff blames steroid use for his cancer), camaraderie on the road, and “ring rat” female groupies (along with other marital stresses). Viewers are told that calling pro

wrestling performances “fake” insults the athleticism (and pain tolerance) developed by these practitioners, and actors Bill Murray and Sylvester Stallone are cited as Hollywood types who “got it” when they shared the screen with wrestlers. Dedicated to interviewees now sadly deceased, including Ox Baker (who wrote a cookbook in retirement), this engaging tribute is recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

3100: Run and Become ★★½

(2018) 78 min. DVD: \$50.99 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films. Closed captioned.

Runner and filmmaker Sanjay Rawal’s documentary combines spirituality and sports, focusing on the Self-Transcendence 3100 Mile race that takes place each June-August in New York. In addition to profiling two of the competitors, Rawal looks at other running competitions or traditions with a spiritual underpinning. Ashprihanal Aalto, a newspaper courier from Finland, is a long-distance runner like Sri Chinmoy, who founded the race. Chinmoy, who died in 2007, was dedicated to the belief that sports could serve as a means towards peace. The 52-day race, which attracts participants from around the world, requires that runners consume 10,000 calories and complete at least 60 miles per day. Winners receive trophies rather than (or in addition to) cash prizes. Aalto, the top-ranked runner, has a history of 31 finishes and eight victories. Ultra-marathoner Ray “The K” Krolewicz attributes his success to his compact size, quipping that he’s a “bird.” Rawal also profiles Shamita Achenbach-König, an Austrian cellist who almost died in a race 20 years before, so her husband, Dohai, worries about her. “Although you don’t want to hear this,” he says after days of heat and dehydration, “you should quit.” By the end of the race, two of the 12 runners have dropped out. Other races involve a solo runner in the Navajo Nation of Arizona, the San Bushmen of Malawi’s Central Kalahari Game Reserve, and a Buddhist monk at Mount Hiei in Japan. While these stories are compelling, they don’t necessarily fit together as a whole, particularly the Bushmen section, which captures a vanishing way of life more than an athletic endeavor. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennesy)

THE ARTS

Henry IV ★★★

(2014) 131 min. DVD: \$24.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

This 2014 abridgement of both parts of *Henry IV* was the second in Phyllida Lloyd’s trilogy of all-female Shakespearean productions at the Donmar Warehouse



Ferrante Fever ★★★

(2017) 74 min. In Italian & English w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. DRA. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

Novelist Elena Ferrante is—ironically—best known for the anonymity that she has studiously maintained, from the publication of her first book in 1992 up through her bestselling “Neapolitan Quartet,” although many have speculated about her identity. Giacomo Durzi’s documentary cannot ignore the mystery, but for the most part simply gives admirers the chance to explain why they find her books compelling. Hillary Clinton, heard in a radio broadcast, calls Ferrante’s writing hypnotic, while novelist

Jonathan Franzen, who enthuses over the distinctive voice he finds in her prose, also envies her ability to stay out of the publicity machine that he finds so irksome. Ferrante’s English-language translator describes how she was moved to undertake her work simply as a result of reading one of the author’s books. Directors who have adapted her novels for the screen recall how her written comments improved their screenplays, and literary critics discuss why they think she deserves prestigious prizes. Ferrante herself also offers perspective on her books (and her desire to let them speak for themselves) through excerpts from letters and interviews, read by actress Anna Bonaiuto over grainy shots of a woman walking down city streets. In addition, there are short animated versions of scenes from some of the novels, as well as clips from movie adaptations. *Ferrante Fever* will appeal primarily to Ferrante’s fan base, but that is a large and growing group. Extras include a bonus featurette. Recommended. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)

theatre in London—a groundbreaking series bookended by *Julius Caesar* (2012) and *The Tempest* (2016) that some initially derided as a gender-blind gimmick but most came to praise as not simply daringly imaginative but also extraordinarily powerful. Reduced to a compact two-hour format through a creative process involving the Clean Break drama company at Askham Grange Prison and York St. John University’s Prison Partnership Project, the composite play is conceived as being performed by incarcerated convicts who bring their varied accents and contemporary attitudes to the characters while conveying the theme of generational conflict between traditionalist father King Henry IV and his dissolute son Prince Hal, with the latter finally forced to assume his family responsibilities by confronting the rebel Hotspur and disassociating himself from his long-time partner in revelry, Falstaff. Under Lloyd’s imaginative direction, the play—performed in the round with grubby costumes and only minimal (and humorously improvised) bits of stage paraphernalia—generates extraordinary tension, largely due to the intense performances by Harriet Walter (Henry IV), Clare Dunne (Hal), and Jade Anouka (Hotspur), along with a knockabout comic turn as Falstaff by Sophie Stanton (who also musters the necessary pathos). The result is a paradoxically virile take on the play, even becoming a commentary on machismo in the combat sequences between Hal and Hotspur that are here presented as boxing matches. While clearly not a traditional version of *Henry IV*, this is a refreshing and effective rethinking. Extras include an introduction to the play, audio commentary by Lloyd, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a cast gallery. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

King Lear ★★★

(2017) 194 min. DVD: \$24.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

Kevin R. McNally is not one of those luminaries of the British stage who, after a long career treading the boards, finally tackles what is considered the Everest of Shakespearean roles. Although he has done occasional work in theatre, he has primarily been a character actor in film and TV, and is probably best-known for his role as Jack Sparrow’s first mate in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series. But in Nancy Meckler’s 2017 production at London’s Globe Theatre, McNally delivers a strong performance as the king who unwisely excludes the youngest of his three daughters from any part of his inheritance simply because she is insufficiently effusive in expressing her love for him. Afterwards, he suffers humiliation as the two older siblings and their husbands refuse him and his friends the respect he considers his due in retirement. McNally’s *Lear* is no doddering old man, but a leonine figure who stalks the stage and recites the verse vigorously—not, perhaps, in an especially subtle reading, but definitely a viscerally powerful one. Meckler’s vision is predicated on a simple concept: the actors are homeless people who take over the stage to perform the play, although the premise seems little more than a device to allow for a minimalist staging, with rickety sets and raggedy costumes. The rest of the cast is adequate, but only in a few cases exceptional, notably Joshua James as Gloucester’s son Edgar, who assumes the persona of the beggar Poor Tom. Overall, this is a solid presentation, ultimately worth seeing mostly for McNally’s surprisingly effective turn. Extras include interviews with Meckler and McNally, and a cast gallery. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

Will Work for Views: The Lo-Fi Life of Weird Paul ★

(2017) 86 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

The theme of filmmakers Joseph Litzinger and Eric Michael Schrader's documentary *Will Work for Views* is that of persistence—holding on to a dream of success year after year that may one day arrive as a reward for one's work and vision. Unfortunately, the example of determination offered here is of a middle-aged man named Paul Petroskey, who has spent decades trying to achieve media stardom by shooting juvenile videos of himself acting like a dork. Although his passion preceded the arrival of the Internet, Petroskey found his perfect home as a YouTube performer. When he's not acting the fool or playing original music online, Petroskey is seen working in his job at a video store and trying desperately to attract attention on a street corner for a club date where he'll be singing his nonsense tunes (in fairness, he does have a small cult audience that turns up at these unpaid gigs). It's not that a viewer should feel contempt for Petroskey—the guy can live his life however he wants—but why would anyone want to squander 90 minutes of their own lives watching class-clown silliness from Petroskey's archives, or listen to his despair over whether he'll one day be recognized as a cultural asset. Not recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

HISTORY & CURRENT EVENTS

Combat Obscura ★★★

(2018) 70 min. DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Oscilloscope (avail. from most distributors).

As a United States Marine stationed in Afghanistan in 2011-12, filmmaker Miles Lagoze was tasked with shooting video footage of the war (some of which has shown up in media outlets like CNN). But Lagoze, who worked his shaky camera during firefights with the Taliban, also kept it rolling in many other situations, resulting in a mountain of revealing outtakes of the Forever War that he has held onto all these years. That delay was not because Lagoze was fashioning a glossy tell-all documentary dripping with political context. In fact, *Combat Obscura* is comprised of the roughest of barely-edited raw footage, and has the look of a major event on cable news before a producer determines what can be shown and what the narrative should be. What Lagoze captures are moments of fatal mistakes and overreach by American occupiers, from shelling the wrong building to rounding up men in a village because their gathering looked to an officer like a Taliban meeting (it wasn't). But there is also gripping real-time drama of battle, including a fraught scene in which a helicopter crew—aiming to

transport a dying Marine during the middle of a grueling fight—struggle to reach the wounded soldier. *Combat Obscura* provides valuable extended footage of the war on the ground, and while several years have passed since this material was filmed, it seems unlikely that the fight in 2019 looks all that much different. Extras include an interview with Lagoze, and the director's official Department of Defense videos. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Creating Woodstock ★★★

(2019) 111 min. DVD: \$19.99. Cinema Libre Studio (avail. from most distributors).

Viewers will not hear much live music from the legendary three-day rock festival that took place on Max Yasgur's farmland a half-century ago in filmmaker Mick Richards's memory-driven documentary *Creating Woodstock*. What they will get in this stream of recollections shared by a number of Woodstock's behind-the-scenes producers is a sometimes surprising oral history of the incredibly complicated logistics and financial challenges involved in pulling off the festival. As many already know, Woodstock quickly turned to chaos when hundreds of thousands of attendees overwhelmed the admissions staff, forcing organizers to declare the event free. But well before the concert there was plenty of drama as land-use permits were granted and then denied by hippie-fearing officials, and ad-hoc deals with promoters, backers, unions, and others had to be finalized. The most interesting and (in retrospect) often funniest stories involve complications with getting artists to the stage amidst an audience that was nearly half-a-million strong. Improvisation was key: historic performances by Ritchie Havens, Arlo Guthrie, and John

Sebastian happened because somebody on the stage crew literally grabbed the unprepared musicians and pushed them out in front of the audience (those who recall or know about Country Joe McDonald's notorious "fish cheer" will enjoy the backstory of how that came about). Among the recognizable faces here is that of Michael Lang, the cherub-faced organizer who is seen riding a motorcycle around the festival in the classic 1970 documentary *Woodstock*. As of this writing, Lang has failed to put together a 50th-anniversary version of Woodstock. Extras include bonus scenes. Offering fascinating insights into this landmark cultural event, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

The Long Ride ★★★

(2019) 77 min. DVD: \$39, Blu-ray: \$49: individuals; DVD: \$250, Blu-ray: \$260: community colleges; DVD: \$350, Blu-ray: \$360: public libraries, colleges & universities. Share Productions (www.shareproductions.com).

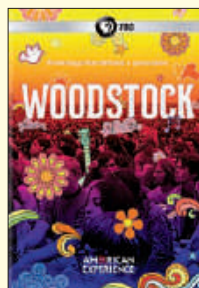
With attitudes toward immigrants hardening in the wake of 9/11, leaders of the San Francisco hotel and restaurant employees' union in 2001 protested for the rights of immigrant workers, who were often targeted by their bosses. Inspired by the Freedom Rides of the 1960s, they organized a cross-country bus caravan to Washington, D.C., to lobby Congress for legislation that would create a path to citizenship for all immigrants and protect against workplace mistreatment. Filmmaker Valerie Lapin Ganley's documentary draws on footage from this 2003 "long ride," which was widely publicized to generate public support. Cameras recorded the camaraderie among the 900 riders who occupied the 18 buses that left various cities to meet in the nation's capital for a rally. Excerpts are included from



The Man Who Shot the Great War ★★★1/2

(2016) 59 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199.99 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Brian Henry Martin's BBC-aired documentary offers the first-ever public viewing of hitherto unknown photographs from the Western Front during the height of World War I. The photos were taken by Lance Corporal George Hackney, a Belfast soldier and amateur shutterbug who brought his portable camera into military service. Although Royal Army rules forbade soldiers from taking unofficial photographs in the trenches, Hackney managed to create hundreds of pictures of his comrades. Hackney's photographs were only known to his family until he donated his collection to the Ulster Museum shortly before his death in 1977, but the contents were archived and never shown until Martin first learned about them in 2014. The archival photos reveal that Hackney's camerawork under difficult circumstances was both polished and sophisticated, capturing the emotions of British soldiers in relaxed candid moments before battles and later in haunted expressions following bloody conflicts. Hackney's illegal actions were never detected by his superiors, but after the war he put away his camera and rarely talked about his military service. Actor Ian McElhinney appears in dramatic re-creations of Hackney late in life. Offering a fascinating glimpse of the Great War from a different angle, this will certainly appeal to history buffs. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (P. Hall)



Woodstock: Three Days That Defined a Generation

★★★1/2

(2019) 95 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0977-8.

Not to be confused with Michael Wadleigh's famous 1970 *Woodstock*, filmmaker Barak Goodman's PBS-aided *American Experience* documentary offers a 50th-anniversary perspective on what made the three-day event not just a cultural but a sociological phenomenon, filling enormous gaps in the general knowledge related to the Woodstock festival that transpired over the weekend of August 15-18, 1969. Taking a soup-to-nuts approach, the film begins with a story about how surprising opportunities presented to two sets of business partners—who were willing to break social and class norms to strike a deal together—led to a get-rich-quick plan to produce an outdoor music and arts festival. Months later, the trouble started when the town of Wallkill in upstate New York revoked permits to use a stretch of land after investors had already sunk a ton of money and preparation time into developing the site. Dairy farmer Max Yasgur offered his enormous natural amphitheater field in Bethel as an alternative, which the promoters gratefully accepted. But with limited time, manpower, and box office oversight before opening day, most of the fencing was not built (at zero hour, the choice came down to fences or the stage, and the latter naturally won), so eventually hundreds of thousands of people without tickets streamed in. Much of this is familiar lore, but less widely known are the many pieces of the mosaic that illustrate why Woodstock really was a shining example of how various cultures—young and old, military and civilian, urban and rural, etc.—combined to create a peaceful event that would be remembered as a watershed '60s moment (four months later it would all go wrong at Altamont). *Woodstock* interweaves voiceover interviews (many archival, with no talking heads shown) with performance clips of Richie Havens, Country Joe and the Fish, Joan Baez, Santana, the Who, and others, along with copious archival footage shot in and around the concert that looks like it could have been outtakes from Wadleigh's classic doc. A generous number of stories detail many kindnesses: Wavy Gravy and the Hog Farm offering aid and food to festival attendees; nearby farmers (including Yasgur) and rural communities organizing food drives to feed the hungry concertgoers; and military medical personnel helicoptering in to provide assistance. A half-century later, Woodstock still inspires. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

interviews with citizens and non-citizens, who were met by supporters along the way as well as protesters. One bus was stopped by INS inspectors, who ordered non-citizens off for interrogation before allowing them to proceed. *The Long Ride* also features brief appearances by Representative John Lewis, who joined the convoy for a time, and Senator Edward Kennedy, who spoke at the rally (participants also stopped by Nancy Pelosi's office). As a postscript filmed 11 years later demonstrates, the riders still look back with enthusiasm, even if their major goal—a path to citizenship—might seem further away than ever. A memento of an important episode in the struggle for immigrant rights, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Memory After Belsen ★★★1/2

(2019) 73 min. DVD: \$19.99. DRA. Vision Video (avail. from most distributors, Oct. 15).

Memory After Belsen begins as a tale of 30-year-old Robyn Thaler Hickey's search for connection to her late grandmother and the latter's harrowing experiences during WWII of being shuttled from one extermination camp to another and then finally surviving Bergen-Belsen. But that's just the beginning

of filmmaker Shiva Kumar's ambitious documentary, which really focuses on the question of how civilization hangs onto the memory of the Holocaust over time as eyewitnesses die. The film explores various efforts to tell and retell the horrors of those events through diverse agents: survivors and their descendants, museum directors, historians, artists, and more. The challenges of reconciling different subjective accounts and conflicting details are also covered, as well as some fascinating post-war chapters (accompanied by remarkable archival footage) about the significance of displaced persons camps, the rebirth of Jewish community and tradition, and the founding of Israel. Kumar probes important questions about what and how we will tell future generations about the Holocaust, so that humanity never forgets. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Nicholas & Alexandra: The Letters

★★★1/2

(2018) 100 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-1018-7.

A prime example of love stories without happy endings is the marriage of Russia's

Tsar Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra, who drank from the "poisoned chalice" of history. Through a combination of bad luck, bad timing, and bad decisions, their love story led to the violent downfall of a regime that had endured for 300 years. Hosted by Dr. Suzannah Lipscomb, this PBS-aided documentary explores the tragic tale of a couple who profoundly affected 20th-century world history. The related pair met at a wedding when Nicholas was 16 and Alexandra 12, the latter a German princess with strong English connections. Nicholas was smitten and determined to marry Alexandra when she got older, although the Russian royal family thought the union was inappropriate. Nicholas is characterized here as a "nervous virgin," while Alexandra was prissy, priggish, and deeply religious, at first resisting calls to convert to the Russian Orthodox church. When young, Nicholas—who wasn't particularly intelligent—was shielded from state affairs, but after seeing his grandfather assassinated he turned fatalistic. The pair tried to create their own world and its rules, with pet terms of endearment, but the real world intruded in the 1905 uprising and Communist agitation. Alexandra unwisely counseled her husband to be more autocratic and roll back reforms, and when their hemophiliac son was born, they enlisted the help of the self-proclaimed healer and mystic Rasputin. When war broke out, Nicholas toured the eastern front in an attempt to inspire the troops, although he spent much of his time working on puzzles. Meanwhile, things unraveled back home, and exhibiting a combination of "iron will and monumental stupidity," Nicholas waited too long to abdicate, leading to the merciless slaughter of his family. Drawing on the royal couple's letters, this cautionary history lesson about hunger, war, and revolution is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Shoah: Four Sisters ★★★★★

(2017) 273 min. In French, German, English & Hebrew w/English subtitles. DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray: \$30.99. Cohen Media Group (avail. from most distributors).

Claude Lanzmann's monumental 1985 oral history of the Holocaust, *Shoah* (VL-10/87), is justifiably considered a classic of both documentary filmmaking and communal testimony regarding the greatest horror of the 20th century. Shortly before his death at the age of 92 in 2018, Lanzmann released this tetralogy of interviews with female Holocaust survivors (which were not used extensively in *Shoah*) that serves as a fitting coda to his masterwork. The stories differ in details, but each reflects common grief and guilt. Hannah Marton defensively recounts her escape on a train of mostly well-to-do Hungarian and Romanian Jews that was arranged, controversially, by Rez-

so Kasztner with Adolf Eichmann. Paula Biren ruefully recalls life in Poland's Lodz ghetto, where she was a member of a women's police force that was inevitably collaborationist. Ada Lichtman recounts how she was one of the Polish prisoners in the Sobibór camp chosen to clean and dress dolls taken from Jewish children so that they could be given to the daughters of their former owners' killers. And in the most agonizing segment, Ruth Elias describes how Josef Mengele singled her out for experimentation when he discovered that she was pregnant. There are haunting moments in each interview—Elias singing Czech folk songs while accompanying herself on the accordion; Lichtman fussing with the dolls she has collected, while her husband, also a Sobibór survivor, sits tearfully beside her; Marton obsessively consulting her husband's diary to be precise about how he worked to secure their inclusion on Kasztner's list—but all four, simply edited with minimal archival additions, are powerful acts of memory bound together by shared suffering. Bonus features include a conversation with scholar Bernard-Henri Lévy about Lanzmann's work filmed at the Streicker Center of New York City's Temple Emanu-El. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

BIOGRAPHY

Andrew Carnegie: Rags to Riches, Power to Peace ★★★

(2015) 75 min. DVD: \$50.99 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films. Closed captioned.

You don't have to be a librarian to know who Andrew Carnegie is, the steel magnate and philanthropist who donated approximately \$356 million during his lifetime, funding nearly 3,000 libraries and other institutions, including Carnegie Hall in New York City. But there was also much more to Carnegie, according to Vicky Matthews's documentary, which begins with Carnegie's birth in 1835 in a small village in Scotland. Due to an economic downturn, Carnegie's parents left for the U.S., settling in Pittsburgh. Carnegie's first job was as a "bobbin boy" in a factory, and through "Scottish determination" he was able to work his way up, taking risks and ultimately building a fortune in the steel industry. In an authentic Scottish burr, Brian Cox reads text inspired by the words of Andrew Carnegie, while in later segments Corey Johnson narrates Theodore Roosevelt's comments. The two men forged a relationship because of Carnegie's work as a pacifist,

although in this respect the pugnacious Roosevelt would let Carnegie down. Historians, authors, philanthropists, professors, and family members talk about Carnegie, combined with archival and contemporary footage and photos along with animated maps to help track his accomplishments. Although some descendants of Carnegie speak onscreen, the film mainly concentrates on Carnegie's professional accomplishments, philanthropic acts, anti-war endeavors, and other interests. Despite occasionally loud background music, *Andrew Carnegie* presents an evenhanded look at the steel magnate whose legacy lives on through buildings, trusts, and foundations. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Beauregard)

Gandhi's Gift ★★★

(2017) 59 min. DVD: \$24.95: individuals; \$295: institutions. Heaven on Earth Creations. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-0-9787572-1-2.

Filmmaker Kell Kearns's documentary combines narration, archival material, newly-shot footage, and excerpts from interviews with scholars, followers, and relatives—including grandson Rajmohan Gandhi and granddaughter Ela—to present a moving portrait of Mohandas Gandhi's final years, covering the period from his release from prison in 1944 up through his assassination in 1948. Gandhi's protest method of



LORRAINE HANSBERRY: SIGHTED EYES/FEELING HEART

The first ever feature documentary on the fascinating life and work of writer, activist and feminist Lorraine Hansberry, best known for *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Peabody Award Winner

Notable Video —American Library Association

★★★★★ Highly Recommended! Editor's Choice —Video Librarian

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non-violent, passive resistance would prove instrumental in finally securing the end of British colonial rule in 1947, and he hoped that the new nation would be a united, religiously pluralistic state, but he found himself at odds with both the Muslim League led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and many of his own Hindu colleagues, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, who ultimately agreed on partition along religious lines. When the split between India and Pakistan took place in August 1947, sectarian violence erupted, and Gandhi worked to mitigate it, undertaking two hunger strikes while preaching tolerance and calm. He was murdered in January 1948 by a Hindu extremist. Kearns emphasizes Gandhi's serenity during these final months as he rejected admonitions to accept protection in the face of threats and adopted an attitude that could be termed fatalistic, hoping that if he were killed his death would help bring peace to the new country. Kearns also discusses the possible involvement of Vinayak Savarkar of the militant Hindu Mahasabha Party in the assassination. *Gandhi's Gift* portrays Gandhi's final years not, as some have argued, in terms of waning influence, but rather as a period in which he most fully exemplified the ideals he espoused. Recommended. Aud: C, P. [Note: the companion documentary *Gandhi's Awakening* is also available at the same prices.] (F. Swietek)

Iyengar: The Man, Yoga, and the Student's Journey ★★★

(2018) 106 min. In English & Kannada w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95 (\$349 w/PPR from www.kinolorberedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors).

An ancient practice with roots in India, yoga gradually became a 20th-century phenomenon in the West largely due to the influence of B.K.S. Iyengar, who died at the age of 95 in 2014. Filmmaker Jake Clennell's informative documentary profile combines loads of archival material with more recent footage of Iyengar's public activities to tell his story. A sickly child from an impoverished family, Iyengar suffered from tuberculosis, malaria, and malnutrition before his brother-in-law, a yoga instructor, taught him the fundamentals of the discipline, and throughout his subsequent life Iyengar would credit yoga for his physical and spiritual health. *Iyengar* includes numerous expected scenes of Iyengar's public demonstrations of rigorous yoga exercises, but there are also some surprises, such as 1950s TV footage of Iyengar with his friend, violinist Yehudi Menuhin, a relationship that proved to be pivotal to Iyengar's exposure in Europe and the U.S. Scenes of a sometimes stern, nonagenarian Iyengar with his students are fascinating for the (literally) measurable precision that he demanded in sessions. For anyone who has ever wondered how yoga came to be so popular in America, this film serves up a portrait of the man who was re-



The Gospel According to André ★★★

(2018) 93 min. DVD: \$19.98. Magnolia Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

André Leon Talley isn't a fashion designer himself, but several well-known haute couture figures appear in Kate Novack's documentary, since Talley made his name as a fashion editor. Best known for his decades-long stint at *Vogue*, Talley is semi-retired now. When he isn't hosting his satellite radio show and dressing journalist Tamron Hall, he looks back at his career from the perspective of his well-appointed home in White Plains, NY. Talley grew up in the Jim Crow South of Durham, NC, where he took inspiration from his strict, stylish grandmother. What she lacked in wealth, she made up for in style. "My escape from reality," Talley remembers, "was *Vogue* magazine." His interest in French culture led him to learn the language—and earn a master's degree in French literature at Brown University—which would serve him well during his conversations with members of the fashion set. In 1974, he moved to New York, where he secured a gig as assistant to *Vogue* editor Diana Vreeland for a fashion show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which led to jobs with *Interview*, *Women's Wear Daily*, and eventually *Vogue* itself. As designer Tom Ford notes, "He's so big and he's so grand, I think a lot of people think he's crazy." His regal bearing led *Interview* colleague Fran Lebowitz's mother to believe that he was an African prince (Talley's 6' 6" height has also encouraged him to embrace capes and caftans). While Talley might have seemed to be an unlikely fashion guru in the 1970s, Novack's admiring portrait—which explores issues of race as much as style—makes it hard to imagine a field in which he would have been better suited. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

sponsible. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Joseph Pulitzer: Voice of the People

★★★★1/2

(2018) 90 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-1002-6.

As a Jewish immigrant from Hungary, Joseph Pulitzer (1847-1911) came to America with a burning hunger for freedom and democracy, eventually becoming convinced that newspapers were a tool to advance reform and inform the masses. Filmmaker Oren Rudavsky's PBS-aided *American Masters* documentary, narrated by Adam Driver and featuring the voice of Liev Schreiber as Pulitzer, traces Pulitzer's eventful life and his enormous influence on journalism, which is still felt today. After arriving during America's Civil War, Pulitzer joined a German-speaking fighting unit. A workaholic, after the war he became part of the nation's westward push, finding employment at a St. Louis paper. His reporter's instinct led him to believe that stories should be "short, smart, and snappy," although his quick temper and crusading spirit made him lots of enemies, so he turned his attention to the *New York World*, where he could reach a national audience. Manhattan was a hub of commerce and politics, with dozens of papers serving immigrant and ethnic enclaves. Pulitzer won fame for his campaigns and crusades, notably championing a free-transit Brooklyn Bridge and sparking a fundraising drive to build a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. While Pulitzer himself led an opulent lifestyle, his newspapers railed against the "privileged" classes and excesses of the Gilded Age. Always looking to dig up stories, Pulitzer was accused of sensational-

ism, yet he felt comfortable straddling the worlds of politics and journalism. He promoted the adventure-travel reporting of Nellie Bly, and attracted non-readers with comics (one strip character led to the term "yellow journalism"), while also including sheet music and cut-out dress patterns. Later years were marked by a rivalry with newspaper owner William Randolph Hearst, Pulitzer's promotion of a war with Spain, and growing blindness and sensitivity to noise that ultimately led to a reclusive life. Interviews with historians offer insights on Pulitzer's life and legacy. Extras include an interview with the director and additional scenes. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

The Marquis of Wavrin: From the Manor to the Jungle ★★★1/2

(2017) 85 min. In French w/English subtitles. DVD: \$398. Icarus Films. PPR.

Filmmakers Grace Winter and Luc Planteier's fascinating documentary celebrates the work of a nearly-forgotten pioneer of visual anthropology. Between 1913 and 1937, Belgian nobleman Robert Frédéric, Marquis of Wavrin (1888-1971), traveled through the wilds of Paraguay, Ecuador, Brazil, and Venezuela, visiting remote areas and filming indigenous peoples never before seen by Europeans—such as the Shuar tribe, whose *tsantza* ritual of shrinking the heads of defeated enemies was shown in one of the feature films constructed from his footage that caused a sensation back home between 1924-37. Not that the marquis had gone to South America out of idealistic or scholarly motives: he was fleeing a prison sentence for shooting two boys (seriously wounding one)

he found pilfering nuts from his estate, and he spent his early days abroad hunting rather than exploring. But once he embraced the idea of documenting the lives and customs of remote tribes, Frédéric proved indefatigable, building a genuine rapport with people considered to be dangerous savages by outsiders. Forced to remain in Belgium after World War II, Frédéric gradually faded from view, and his copious footage was deposited at the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, where Winter discovered and carefully restored it. Combining an intriguing tale with a priceless record of tribes that no longer exist, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Peacemaker ★★★

(2016) 88 min. DVD: \$375. DRA. Grasshopper Film. PPR.

Filmmaker James Demo's documentary centers on Padraig O'Malley, a native of Ireland who has spent more than 40 years as an amateur diplomat with no formal affiliation to a government and no official portfolio to pursue in the interest of world peace. Even so, he has made significant headway in bringing together enemies in Iraq, as well as in the former Yugoslavia and South Africa. Weirdly, O'Malley began his mission by buying a bar, The Plough and Stars, in Cambridge, MA, and then using profits to fund a sometimes-drunken yet successful summit of warring forces from Northern Ireland, getting all parties involved to mingle and communicate. The location of that gathering was the bar itself, a site that looms large for O'Malley, a recovering alcoholic. Viewers see him at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, sometimes speaking in blurry abstractions, and also meet a former longtime lover of his—now a friend who has accepted that for O'Malley the work of diplomacy comes first. In fact, O'Malley says at one point that he doesn't love anyone (he also has a grown foster daughter). An odd portrait of a conflicted man struggling to assuage global conflict, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Sam Spiegel: Conquering Hollywood ★★★

(2019) 60 min. DVD: \$99; public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. Seventh Art Releasing.

The African Queen. On the Waterfront. The Bridge on the River Kwai. Lawrence of Arabia. Betrayal. Those prestige films—some Oscar winners—are part of the remarkable cinematic legacy of the late, independent film producer Sam Spiegel (1901-1985). Filmmakers Robert de Young and Stephen Wellink's lively and entertaining documentary looks at Spiegel's amazing filmography, the means and methods by which he made top-notch movies in a radically changing Hollywood, and the great directors he managed to employ (David Lean, John Huston, Elia Kazan, etc.). Spiegel's somewhat murky background as

the child of a Jewish family living in what is now an area of Poland is also explored, as is his time working in Berlin for Universal. The story of how someone told Spiegel in 1933 to walk to a train station and leave the country immediately is startling but understandable, given Hitler's electoral success. Spiegel's rise in Hollywood, his taste for strong stories and characters, and his working relationships with the likes of Orson Welles, Marlon Brando, and Joseph Losey, are the subjects of irresistible commentary by actors (Ben Kingsley, Janet Suzman) and various collaborators. Only glancingly noted is Spiegel's reputation as a sexual predator of young women in the industry, a pattern that seriously darkens what should have been a magnificent career. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Who is Arthur Chu? ★★★

(2017) 90 min. DVD: \$24.95 (\$300 w/PPR). Dadada Films (avail. from www.arthurchufilm.com).

Before the *Jeopardy!* stardom of James Holzhauer, one of the quiz show's name-recognition contestants was Ohio's Arthur Chu, whose aggressive style of gameplay caused him to be labeled a *Jeopardy!* villain, subject to online criticism that included insults about his Chinese heritage. In this PBS-aired *Independent Lens* documentary, Chu uses his newfound high-profile status and financial windfall to be an activist standup comic/lecturer/writer. Chu particularly targets cyber-bullying in our digital era's popular culture, calling it a malignant outgrowth of the "angry nerd" mindset, to which Chu, who grew up a lonely first-born Asian-American in a high-achieving family, can relate. Filmmakers Scott Drucker and Yu Gu follow Chu on bi-coastal trips and interview *Jeopardy!* host Alex Trebek. And in a rather meta turn, Chu even finds employment with the production outfit making this very documentary. But Chu's self-serving routine also stresses his marriage to a college sweetheart. In *Jeopardy!*-speak, the film might be accused of "jumping all over the board," dealing with ethnicity, relationships, sexism, and racism, but it does ultimately shine a light on celebrity in the Facebook/Twitter age through the prism of one complicated guy's attempt to do something constructive with his flukey fame. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during September and October, including: *93Queen*, *Alan Jackson: Small Town Southern Man*, *Brave Girls*, *Charley Pride: I'm Just Me*, *A Concerned Citizen: Civics in Action*, *Einstein's Quantum Riddle*, *Freedom Fighters*, *Good Luck Soup*, and much more!

Series Update

The following titles are new additions to series previously recommended. Titles are available from most distributors unless otherwise noted.

Octonauts: Season Three (290 min., DVD: 2 discs, \$17.99)

is the latest compilation of episodes from NCircle Entertainment's computer-animated series following the titular underwater rescue team as they encounter creatures ranging from barracudas and humpback whales to hammerhead sharks. See review of *Octonauts: 15 Underwater Adventures* in VL-11/16.



Newly available from Cinedigm is *Sesame Street: Dance Party!* (132 min., DVD: \$14.99), featuring neighborhood friends Elmo, Abby Cadabby, Zoe, and others as they gear up for a fun dance party in this music-filled addition to the educational series that features guest stars Jason Derulo and Janelle Monáe. See review of *Sesame Street: Be a Good Sport* in VL-5/14.

PBS Home Video has recently released *Wild Kratts: Creepy Creatures!* (75 min., DVD: \$6.99), the latest entry in the educational PBS Kids series that finds Kratt Brothers Martin and Chris taking part in zoological-themed adventures set around Halloween. See review of *Wild Kratts: Creature Adventures* in VL-7/11.

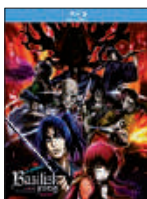
Universal's most recent holiday-themed addition to the popular BBC animated series *Peppa Pig* is *Peppa Pig: Pumpkin Party* (70 min., DVD: \$14.99), featuring the adorable young pig dressing as a witch for Halloween while Miss Rabbit hopes to get Grandpa Pig's huge pumpkin to a competition on time. See review of *Peppa Pig: My Birthday Party* in VL-5/14.

New character Shirley Shawn the Unicorn makes her debut in *The Wiggles: Big Ballet Day!* (71 min., DVD: \$14.99), the latest addition to Kino Lorber's children's entertainment series that features the fun Wiggles crew teaming up with dancers of the Australian Ballet. See review of *The Wiggles: Go Santa Go!* in VL-11/17.



Basilisk: The Ouka Ninja Scrolls, Part One ★★★

(2018) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Based on Masaki Segawa's popular manga series, this is a sequel to the earlier *Basilisk: The Kouga Ninja Scrolls* series, and while knowledge of the initial series is not mandatory, it does help lay the groundwork for subsequent character development and story trajectory. Set in the year 1626, some 10 years after the original series, *Basilisk: The Ouka Ninja Scrolls* introduces a slew of male and female ninjas who display supernatural powers that range from the curious (one has the ability to control centipedes) to the downright bizarre (another can remove his eyes and send them into the field for observation). The story centers on the continuation of two regal bloodlines: the Iga, whose glory is carried on by female warrior Hibiki Iga, and the Kouga, with male inheritor Hachiro Kouga taking the helm. But the show's energy derives from the odd mix of *X-Men*-style battle powers transplanted into a highly unlikely 17th-century Japanese setting. Also playing into the tale is something called Destiny's Passage, a mirror that wreaks havoc on anyone who looks into it. While the series is not perfectly logical, it does compensate with stylish violence and exhilarating surrealism. Presenting the first 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include an episode commentary. Recommended. [Note: *Basilisk: The Ouka Ninja Scrolls, Part Two* is also newly available.] (P. Hall)

Chio's School Road: The Complete Series ★★★

(2018) 2 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Chio is a normal, nerdy student who is below-average in her high school classes and given to late nights playing American video games online. She walks to school each day with her best friend Manana, usually arriving on time despite a ridiculous variety of encounters along the way. And that is the entire world of *Chio's School Road*, which indeed never steps inside the school and uses every opportunity to lovingly satirize its own characters. Chio puts her video gaming fantasy life to good use, whether taking to the rooftops to avoid a roadblock or facing down a gangster with false bravado after knocking over his bike. Her friendship with Manana is a highlight, sincere but fractious, and incredibly real despite their outrageous situations. Based on manga by Tadataka Kawasaki, the series features some juvenile sexual content, from the plethora of upskirt shots, to a well-endowed grope-y lesbian

upperclassman, to the cheap adult humor of Chio's online handle that also doubles as her gangster sobriquet: "Bloody Butterfly." The animation is not particularly notable, but the voice actors ably bring the characters to sharp, hilarious life. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-14, this is recommended. (L. Martincik)

Dances with the Dragons: The Complete Series ★1/2

(2018) 2 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Not to be confused with the similarly-titled fifth book in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, this sci-fi action anime inspired by Labo Asai's long-running light novel-manga series is set in an alternate world divided between the Dragon Empire, where magic-wielding creatures dwell, and a human realm consisting of a seven-city alliance torn by political intrigue. To confront the dragon danger, mankind depends on master swordsmen who employ a technique called jushiiki, which enables them to use magic in combat. The focus is on two jushikiists, Gayus and Gigena, whose dissimilar personalities and techniques—the former being a cautious intellectual, while the latter is an arrogant risk-taker—make for an unlikely partnership. As the pair assail one another with streams of caustic banter—intended to be humorous but failing miserably—they also face off against dangers from the Empire while getting caught up in the convoluted schemes of their own leaders. The plotline is as fractured as their world: one thread involves a serial killer targeting jushikiists, who turns out to be the vengeance-seeking wife of a dragon that the heroes killed. Another centers on a cunning politician who enlists them in his supposed peace-keeping efforts. But the various elements are never brought together in a coherent whole and too much remains ill-defined, including the nature of the alliance and the specifics of jushiiki. And despite efforts to humanize the protagonists (such as Gayus's relationship with his girlfriend or Gigena's love of high-end furniture), the pair never become really fleshed-out (or even likable) characters. *Dances with the Dragons* boasts some eye-catching battle sequences, but the animation is mostly mediocre. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-MA, this is not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Darling in the Franxx: Part One ★★1/2

(2018) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).

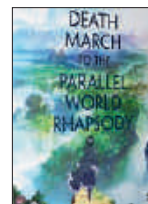
Darling in the Franxx premiered in Japan simultaneously on TV and streaming services

as an original work from prominent anime artists, although despite all the hype, viewers may find this to be familiar mecha genre stuff, albeit dressed up (or undressed, as the case may be) in much adolescent erotic innuendo. Far-future humanity—more accurately, post-humanity, given the number of cyborgs—has retreated to a domed underground "plantation" city, under siege by biomechanical monsters called klaxosaurs. The counter-response: raise children in couples (usually, but not always, boy-girl) to pilot "Franxx" armored fighting suits that would look right at home in a Cirque du Soleil production. The pubescent juveniles—nicknamed "parasites"—are lab-reared without basic knowledge of sex and biology; yet while operating a Franxx, they assume very suggestive body positions. Young Hiro, who is downcast over fear that he's failed his squad, finds himself paired with an enticing, brash, super-powered girl called Zero Two, who has klaxosaur DNA (and horns) and a predatory reputation for eventually killing her partners. The will-she-or-won't-she element (applicable to both sex and death) provides the dynamic storyline with gravitas, which it begins losing over time as the vibe see-saws uncomfortably between the comedic and the dystopic. Presenting the first 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include audio and video episode commentaries and a behind-the-scenes featurette. A strong optional purchase. [Note: *Darling in the Franxx: Part Two* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)



Death March to the Parallel World Rhapsody ★★1/2

(2018) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$84.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).

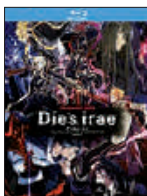


Based on a novel series, this moderately diverting gamer-inspired adventure centers on a monkish computer-games programmer/moderator, 29-year-old Ichirou—nicknamed "Satou"—who works long hours in the office one weekend. Subsequently, while asleep, he finds himself a teenager again, exploring (with aid from floating pop-up menus and list graphics) a magical realm that is a pastiche of fantasy-game clichés—a land of medieval-style settlements, wizards, animal-people, elves, and warnings about the return of a once-defeated "demon lord." Blending into society as a merchant, Satou "levels up" with skills and weapons and emerges victorious in adventures that also result in a growing harem of nubile female questing companions. It turns out that this is not an otaku dream or virtual reality but rather some kind of afterlife (gamer heaven?), and

Satou is not the only person with keyboard/controller mojo involved, although much remains unresolved by the finale. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include an episode commentary. A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Dies Irae: The Complete Series ★★½

(2017) 2 discs. 468 min. Blu-ray: \$69.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



A Japanese narrative-based video game inspired this horror-fantasy anime series that begs for the adjective “Wagnerian”—assuming that Richard Wagner’s operas trafficked in huge-breasted women, harem-comedy sex misunderstandings, and incomprehensible violent plotlines (which, actually, they sort of do). Here, Hitler’s Third Reich secretly hosts legions of the “Obsidian Round Table,” a horde of dark wizards and evildoers with various agendas. Their ritually murderous rampages in modern Japan draw in Ren, an orphan teen (created as a test-tube homunculus) who is both unaware that his best pal is a monster-fighter and that Ren himself is fated to inherit great power. The fiends continue their timeless Nazi carnage while also training Ren to be their greatest enemy so that he can kill them, thus breaking an endless circle of destructive existence. Gore, puzzling resurrections and transformations, and the mythology of Wagner’s Ring cycle are often visually striking here but just as often embrace the anime-kitsch aesthetic of courageous boy warriors and nubile maidens battling alongside. Overall, this is a bewildering, tantalizing, and possibly even offensive series, the latter due to much SS-type regalia (and cleavage) along with profanity. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2017 and six additional ONA (original net animation) episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-MA, this is a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Golden Kamuy, Season One ★★★½

(2018) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$84.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



This anime series based on Satoru Noda’s acclaimed manga serves up an interesting plot that mixes Japanese history with old-fashioned adventure. Saichi Sugimoto is a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War who has taken up gold prospecting in order to provide for the widow of a fallen comrade. A drunken friend named Goto tells him a story about a man who killed a group of Ainu—an indigenous people of Japanese and Russian heritage—and stole their gold. The killer hid the treasure and tattooed its location on a

map that stretched across the bodies of 24 escaped prisoners. When Goto is killed by a bear, Saichi discovers one of the maps on Goto’s body. Saichi then meets a young Ainu girl named Asirpa, who confirms the tale and reveals that her father was among those slain for their gold. Saichi and Asirpa, joined by a rare Hokkaido wolf named Retar, search out the escaped prisoners with the map tattoos on an adventure that is full of peril and danger. *Golden Kamuy* has everything working in its favor: a superior storyline, excellent animation, fully textured characters, and a genuine sense of historical perspective mixed with a respectful consideration of Ainu culture. Presenting all 12 episodes from the 2018 debut season in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include 12 bonus animated shorts. Highly recommended. [Note: *Golden Kamuy, Season Two* is slated for release on Oct. 15.] (P. Hall)

Haruchika—Haruta & Chika: The Complete Series ★★★

(2016) 2 discs. 300 min. In Japanese w/English subtitles. Blu-ray: \$29.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Based on a novel series, this teen-classroom drama would appear on the surface to be largely music-oriented but is actually comprised of a set of modest-scale mysteries. Athletic co-ed Chika changes her goals when she sees an orchestra performing and decides that she would rather be a “cute girl” flute player (despite having no musical background) than a volleyball champ. Fortunately, the underpopulated student band society needs members, so they accept her. Chika bonds in odd-couple fashion with the gay French horn player leading the group, Haruta. Both of them have a crush on music teacher Mr. Kusakabe—who mysteriously abandoned a successful conducting career for this obscure post—and want to turn the club into a first-class competitive ensemble to honor him. The process of recruiting new instrumentalists and securing practice space invariably plunges Haruta, Chika, and their bandmates into solving enigmas, dilemmas, and scandals involving their schoolmates’ cloistered personal lives—puzzles that are unlocked by Haruta thanks to his Sherlockian sleuthing talents and encyclopedic knowledge. *Haruchika* is a cleverly written offbeat series that spawned a live-action adaptation in 2017. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2016 in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, in Japanese with English subtitles, rated TV-14, this is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Junji Ito Collection: The Complete Series ★★★

(2018) 2 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).

Manga artist Junji Ito is one of the most

popular contemporary practitioners of J-horror, but this anime anthology featuring adaptations of 24 of his stories will likely disappoint both fans and newcomers. On the printed page, Ito’s sinister images can have a deliciously creepy effect, but while a few of the tales included in this series (“Slug Girl” and “Shiver,” for example) remain genuinely unsettling, most have lost a good deal of their impact in mediocre animated form, partially due to visual repetition but also because the narratives—which usually involve a supernatural power unleashed against a terrified protagonist—are one-note affairs, featuring an abundance of sequences in which victims are pursued endlessly through forest and streets by various evil entities. The majority of the tales are standalone entries, although two focus on a strange student named Souichi who uses punishing magic to address grudges held against classmates, and one features an appearance by Ito’s most famous character—Tomie, a manipulative girl who feeds on others to maintain her immortality. Although the *Junji Ito Collection* can be applauded for bringing the work of a well-regarded *mangaka* to a wide audience in a new form, its execution leaves much to be desired. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-MA, extras include two OVAs. Optional. (F. Swietek)



Kakuriyo—Bed & Breakfast for Spirits, Part One: Episodes 1-13

★★½
(2018) 2 discs. 325 min. Blu-ray: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Romantic and supernatural elements combine in this anime series based on the light novel-manga series by Midori Yuma. Aoi inherited her late grandfather’s ability to see the supernatural spirits—or ayakashi—who visit the human realm. After assisting one who wears a distinctive mask, Aoi is kidnapped and taken to the ayakashi world, where handsome innkeeper ogre Odanna tells her that her grandfather offered her as a wife to him in payment of a debt. She refuses to marry Odanna, preferring to work off the debt, and eventually opens a successful restaurant. Aoi encounters spirits—like shape-shifter Ginji—who become her allies, as well as others who see her as a dangerous interloper, while also constantly trying to determine who might be the masked figure she originally met. *Kakuriyo* boasts a few moments of suspense, but the series is mostly a fairly lighthearted portrait, with such a heavy emphasis on Aoi’s kitchen prowess it could sometimes be mistaken for a cooking show. Although the animation is routine, the show benefits from an engaging premise and a parade of peculiar characters.

Presenting the first 13 episodes from the 2018 first season in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-14, this is a strong optional purchase. [Note: *Kakuriyo—Bed & Breakfast for Spirits, Part Two: Episodes 14-26* is slated for release on Sept. 3.] (F. Swietek)

Maria the Virgin Witch

★★★1/2

(2015) 2 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$29.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Maria is a witch living during the Hundred Years War. Despising battle and embracing the beauty of life, she sends her succubus familiar to pacify soldiers in their tents and conjures mythological creatures on the battlefield to disrupt the fighting—actions that mystify her fellow witches and enrage the mercenaries who depend on war for their living, as well as the English and especially the French who argue that a swift and decisive victory would actually save lives. Most importantly, Maria draws the attention of the Archangel Michael, who rebukes her for interfering in earthly affairs and declares—wildly—that should she lose her virginity she will also lose her magical powers (he also threatens her life). The biggest clash in *Maria the Virgin Witch* is not on the battlefield but rather with the series' tone as it veers into clumsy sex farce. And the homophobic jokes don't belong in a show that examines the philosophical importance of personal and sexual freedoms. Maria's virginity is generally treated as a topic of amusement, but prompts a sexual assault in an attempt to de-power her. All of which is very disappointing, because *Maria* does take the time to build nuanced characters, from Maria herself, to the religious leaders she clashes with, to the mercenary camp woman scavenging the battlefields. And the historical setting and costumes are outstanding, aside from the skimpy, modern-ish clothes of the witches and familiars (that handily serves to make them seem otherworldly). Ultimately, like Maria herself, this series is alternately appealing and repellent. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-MA, extras include audio commentaries. A strong optional purchase. (L. Martincik)

The Master of Ragnarok & Blesser of Einherjar: The Complete Series

★★★

(2018) 2 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



High school student Yuuto Suou is magically transported to Yggdrasil—a fantasy world suffused with elements of Norse mythology—where kingdoms engage in war for territorial dominance. Fortunately, Yuuto brought along his smartphone, which allows

him to maintain contact with Mitsuki, the girl he left behind, and gives him access to the Internet. Drawing on both his schoolboy knowledge and online information about military tactics, Yuuto becomes the highly respected leader of the Wolf Clan, whose forces he reorganizes and leads to victory over numerous rivals. Yuuto has also become the darling of the clan's Einherjar—girl warriors with mystical powers—who vie with one another for his attention and affection. *The Master of Ragnarok* begins in *medias res* with Yuuto already established in his leadership role, and only gradually reveals how he came to Yggdrasil and advanced. But throughout he remains a bland character, surrounded by equally uninteresting girls and dull enemies battling in unimpressive action sequences. In the end, the dilemma that confronts Yuuto is whether to return permanently to the “real” world where his beloved Mitsuki awaits, or stay with his adoring harem, but the solution is a cop-out, allowing him to have his cake and eat it too. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-14, extras include a promo video. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

Modest Heroes

★★★★1/2
(2018) 54 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$24.99. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.



Created by Japan's four-year-old Studio Ponoc—a natural successor to the legendary Studio Ghibli—this anthology of three strikingly original anime tales, each unique in visual style and narrative tone, is the product of former Ghibli (and other) talent looking for a new anime frontier. In the first, stunningly gorgeous work, a pair of amphibious siblings living in a stream become separated from their Neptune-like father while their nurturing mother is delivering babies. The kids gather their courage to survive the predators above and below the water's surface in order to save dad. The second story is about a young boy with a deadly allergy to eggs and egg by-products. The vigilance his mother maintains sometimes reminds him that he is set apart from other children, and is always vulnerable. The final short is also about an outsider—a literally invisible man who goes completely unnoticed in all of his endeavors. His lack of mass means that he can float into the stratosphere helplessly, and can't even buy bread at a grocery store, leading to isolation and a lack of purpose that ultimately becomes a source of misery in search of a miracle. Presented in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo edition, rated PG, extras include a featurette on Studio Ponoc, a film completion press conference, Japanese cast interviews, and an art gallery. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)

Okko's Inn

★★★★
(2018) 95 min. DVD: \$16.99. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$26.99. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.



In this lively anime feature film, an orphaned girl finds purpose when she goes to live with her grandmother, the aging innkeeper of a small spa in a country vacation town known for the healing waters of its natural springs. Okko, an urban girl who loses her parents in a devastating car wreck, struggles with her grief and resists her new living situation, but she finds unexpected help from a pair of child ghosts: Uribo, a playful boy who watches over Okko's grandmother, and Aki-no, the sister of Okko's rival at school. Adapted from a series of children's novels, *Okko's Inn* is a simple story that deals with painful emotions—loss, grief, anxiety—in ways that mix seriousness and playfulness. As the junior innkeeper, Okko finds both satisfaction and purpose in assisting patrons who come to the inn. Along the way, she learns important life lessons in humility and compassion and gathers the strength to heal and stand on her own. While that might sound heavy, director Kitaro Kosaka brings a colorful cast of supporting characters to Okko's odyssey and a fleet pace to the storytelling, dropping in bits of slapstick as well as moments of insight, joy, and triumph. Presented in a dual-language edition in separate DVD and Blu-ray/DVD Combo releases, rated PG, extras include interviews with the director and the Japanese voice actor playing Okko, and a Q&A at the film's premiere. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Teasing Master Takagi-San: The Complete Series

★★★
(2018) 2 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



In this small-scale classroom comedy inspired by Japanese comics, Takagi is a self-assured, winsome schoolgirl who constantly springs little tricks and mind-games upon classmate Nishikata (barely related plot tangents involve a few other female students), who in turn fantasizes almost obsessively about playing his own pranks on Takagi to get revenge. But Nishikata always fails—Wile E. Coyote style—due to his own self-consciousness and lack of guile. Of course, the irony is that despite his being a secret follower of a shōjo manga and anime series about “unrequited love,” Nishikata seems incapable of realizing that Takagi has a crush on him, or that her continual teasing is fond flirtation. How their relationship evolves drives this cute series that features gentle humor. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2018 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-14, this is recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Attila ★★★1/2

(2016) 116 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$31.99, Blu-ray: \$41.99. C Major (dist. by Naxos of America).

Giuseppe Verdi's 1846 opera plays fast and loose with the facts about the untimely death of the infamous titular 5th-century Hunnish chieftain, whose march on Rome was halted by the intervention of Pope Leo I. Following the lead of an 1809 tragedy by Zacharias Werner, librettist Temistocle Solera attributes the warlord's sudden demise to assassination at the hands of Odabella, Attila's intended Italian bride, whose father, the lord of Aquileia, he had killed. Others involved in the Machiavellian goings-on include Odabella's lover Foresto, an Aquileian knight who also wants to kill Attila and temporarily doubts Odabella's loyalty to the cause, and Ezio, a Roman knight who joins the conspiracy. This 2016 production from the Teatro Comunale di Bologna is musically the equal of an earlier one from Parma (VL-3/13), boasting a vigorous account of the score by the company orchestra and chorus under Michele Mariotti and powerful singing from bass-baritone Ildebrando D'Arcangelo (Attila), soprano Maria José Siri (Odabella), tenor Fabio Sartori (Foresto), and baritone Simone Piazzola (Ezio), although D'Arcangelo's voice occasionally sounds a bit light for the role. As with the Parma production, the physical side of the staging is small-scaled, with spare sets and rather bland costumes, while Daniele Abbado's direction is thoroughly conventional. But on the whole, this performance does a fine job of conveying the young composer's style as it was developing during the 1840s. Presented in DTS 5.0 (DTS-HD 5.0 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



Coppélia ★★★★★

(2018) 100 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99. Bel Air Classics (dist. by Naxos of America).

Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet outdoes itself with this absolutely charming 2018 performance of Léo Delibes's 1870 ballet, based on a story by E.T.A. Hoffmann about Swanilda, a village girl who rescues her fiancé Frantz when he becomes besotted with Coppélia, the beautiful life-sized doll that Dr. Coppélius has created and hopes to bring to life by infusing it with the poor lad's spirit. To foil the inventor's plan, Swanilda dresses up as Coppélia and fools Coppélius into thinking that he has succeeded, and after escaping, she and Frantz are happily wed. This production uses the full three-act score of the 1870 Paris premiere, with Sergey Vikharev's choreography based on Marius Petipa and Enrico Cecchetti's for the 1894



St. Petersburg revival. Such reverence would hardly matter, however, if the performance lacked the necessary effervescence. Happily, conductor Pavel Sorokin conducts a sparkling reading of Delibes's delightful score, and the dancing is superb. Margarita Shrayner is a spunky, strong-willed Swanilda, and Artem Ovcharenko a droll and dopey Frantz, and even though Alexey Loparevich is a less sinister Coppélius than some, he catches the character's desperation nicely. The mounting is bright and colorful, with lovely costumes by Tatiana Noginova and sumptuous sets by Boris Kaminsky, including a roomful of highly animated automata in Coppélius's study. While there are other good versions of *Coppélia* available, this one is among the best. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (F. Swietek)

Der Freischütz ★★1/2

(2017) 135 min. In German w/ English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.99. Naxos (avail. from most distributors).

Carl Maria von Weber's 1821 opera was hugely influential, inaugurating the German romanticism that later flourished in Wagner and Richard Strauss, but today it is rarely performed outside German-speaking countries, making Matthias Hartmann's 2017 production at Milan's La Scala a notable event. Musically, the result is a mixed bag: the orchestra plays splendidly for Myung-whun Chung, but his emphasis is on tonal loveliness over sheer energy, and while soprano Julia Kleiter sings beautifully as Agathe, the forester's daughter whose hand many seek, her demeanor is rather static. As Max—the titular marksman seduced into making a pact with the devil to ensure that he will win the shooting contest that will decide the groom—burly Michael König sounds vocally frayed at the start, although he improves as the evening progresses. Both are outclassed by bass Günther Groissböck as Max's rival, the villainous Kaspar, whose forging of the magic bullets in the famous Wolf's Glen scene is a highlight, even if the presence of prancing devils here and elsewhere feels faintly ridiculous. And that is but one oddity of Hartmann's staging, which mixes traditional costumes (including an absurdly oversized bow in the hair of Agathe's cousin Ännchen, sung well by Eva Liebau) with neon tubes for the outlines of buildings. Finally, there is a curious change of ending, in which Max and Agathe scamper off together although the holy hermit has imposed a year's penance on Max for consorting with the Evil One. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and PCM stereo, this is an uneven production, albeit one with as many virtues as defects. A



strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Die Schöpfung ★★1/2

(2017) 138 min. In German w/ English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.99. Naxos (avail. from most distributors).

Any production from the Catalan theatre company La Fura dels Baus is sure to be an eye-popping affair, and that is certainly the case with Carles Padrissa's staging of Franz Joseph Haydn's 1798 oratorio, based on the creation narrative in Genesis. Musically, it is a joyous work, moving from an orchestral opening depicting chaos up through the biblical seven days of God's work, capped by a lovely duet for Adam and Eve, and a resounding final choral celebration. Filmed at France's Auditorium, La Seine Musicale, Île Seguin, in May 2017, the musical side of this production is quite good: the original-instrument band Insula and the Accentus choir acquit themselves ably under Laurence Equilbey's baton, while the vocalism by soprano Mari Eriksmoen (doubling as the angel Gabriel and Eve), tenor Martin Mitterrutzner (Uriel), and baritone Daniel Schmutzhard (Raphael/Adam) is fine. But the gargantuan staging too often overwhelms the score, with cranes that hoist the soloists (outfitted in elaborate costumes) high into the air, ultra-bright lights, flamboyant video projections (often featuring banal aphorisms or footage of oversized animals and insects), an aquarium in which the singers are periodically dunked, and scads of luminous helium balloons. And a narrative thread involving refugees, in which the choristers hold modern tablets, only adds to the sense of overkill. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray edition) and PCM stereo, extras include a "making-of" featurette. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Fatima, or The Brave Children ★★★1/2

(2015) 63 min. In German w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99. Belvedere (dist. by Naxos of America).

One of the most charming contemporary operas to come out of Europe is Johanna Doderer's 2015 fantasy-adventure created for the Vienna State Opera. Although conceived as a children's opera and comparatively short, this inventive creation will also be enjoyed by adults. Siblings Hassan and Fatima are dealing with an acute food shortage and an ailing mother. Hassan learns of a castle that is hiring children for manual labor, but the overbearing lord has a peculiar employment contract: he will pay one gold coin per week for wages, but will take away the money and steal the dreams of the juvenile workers if they get angry. Hassan's cheery optimism is



no match for the noble's deviousness, and it is up to plucky sister Fatima to teach the man a long-overdue lesson and liberate the children's dreams that are kept locked in dungeon cages. While casting adult performers Carlos Osuna and Andrea Carroll as the young siblings might initially seem disconcerting—especially when they are surrounded by child performers—each beautifully exhibits the complex reactions of youngsters who find themselves challenged by extraordinary physical and emotional circumstances. Sorin Coliban's castle lord is the ideal villain one loves to hate, luxuriating in his wickedness with gusto. Jan Meier's costumes and set design effectively create extremes in rapture and terror with minimalist flair. And Doderer's music, which is innovative and rather mature for a children's opera, is ably played by the orchestra under the baton of Benjamin Bayl. Presented in stereo, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Giulietta e Romeo

★★★1/2

(2018) 161 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$34.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Dynamic (dist. by Naxos of America).



Nicola Vaccaj (1790-1848) was a second-tier composer of the *bel canto* era whose name and works are almost completely forgotten today. This rare 2018 production of his most successful opera—an 1825 version of the familiar tragedy of Romeo and Juliet—shows that while not the equal of his dominant contemporary Rossini (whose style he obviously emulated), or of Donizetti or Bellini, Vaccaj was still a skilled craftsman whose music is highly effective without being particularly distinctive. In this mounting from the Festival della Valle d'Itria in Martina Franca, Cecilia Ligorio's staging makes a compelling case for the work. Sesto Quatrini draws rich, expressive playing from the Orchestra Accademia of the Teatro alla Scala, and the singing of Leonor Bonilla and Raffaella Lupinacci, as Giulietta and Romeo, is outstanding (with minor exceptions, the vocalism of the secondary soloists is also strong). Alessia Colosso's imposingly tall set serves as both the balcony of Juliet's room in the first act and a burial ground in the second, while Luciano Novelli's lighting design is properly moody, and Giuseppe Palella's striking black-and-white costumes clearly distinguish between Capuleti and Montecchi. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a brief interview with Ligorio. A fine staging of an unjustly neglected opera from the period of "beautiful singing," this is highly recommended for those willing to venture beyond the standard repertory. (F. Swietek)

Il Castello di Kenilworth

★★★

(2018) 139 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Dynamic (dist. by Naxos of America).



The first of Gaetano Donizetti's quartet of operas about Tudor England was a failure at its 1829 premiere, and while the later three (*Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda*, and *Roberto Devereux*) have retained a place in the international repertory, *Il Castello di Kenilworth* has largely faded from view. This rare 2018 revival at the Donizetti Festival in Bergamo (the composer's birthplace) shows it to be a mature work (though only in his early 30s, Donizetti had already written more than 20 operas) that is well worth discovering. This production follows the original score, rather than the composer's 1836 revision, although it does not use the 1829 title—*Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth*, which points to the centrality of Queen Elizabeth I, who also appears in *Maria* and *Roberto*. Here, Elisabeth visits the castle of her favorite Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, who has secretly wed Amelia Robsart. Dudley enlists his stable master Warney, who also loves Amelia, to hide his wife while the queen is present, but Warney attempts to abduct her, and she escapes and encounters Elisabeth, who is furious with Leicester before ultimately forgiving the couple and punishing Warney. This is a powerful production, with soprano Jessica Pratt a commanding Elisabeth, and Xabier Anduaga (Dudley), Carmela Remigio (Amelia), and Stefan Pop (Warney) providing strong support, while Riccardo Frizza leads the chorus and the Donizetti Opera Orchestra in a vividly dramatic reading of the score. The only drawback is Angelo Sala's bland set, although Ursula Patzak's excellent costumes offer visual compensation. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

La Fresque

(2017) 71 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.99. Naxos (avail. from most distributors).



French choreographer Angelin Preljocaj's 2016 ballet *La Fresque* (*The Painting on the Wall*) is based on an 18th-century Chinese fable in which two travelers named Chu and Meng take refuge from a storm in a temple, where an aged monk shows them a fresco that depicts a group of beautiful girls in a pine grove. Chu is immediately smitten with one of the maidens, and magically enters the picture, where he weds her and spends several rapturous years before being ejected by warriors. Chu suddenly finds himself back in the temple, where Meng tells him that he went missing for only a few minutes, but when the pair

inspect the painting again, the maiden's hairstyle now indicates that she is married. Preljocaj presents this rather simple tale in an elegant succession of ensembles and solos, in which Mirea Delogu dances with finesse as the young woman, Victor Martinez Caliz makes a pleasing partner for her as Chu, and the rest of the company offers fine support. Although Preljocaj is a modern dance specialist (and Nicolas Godin's score is—with the exception of an interlude of synthesized Bach—decidedly contemporary), his work here also exhibits some classical stylistic elements. Constance Guisset's sets are relatively spare, but her video projections are remarkably effective, and Azzedine Alaïa contributes striking costumes and masks. Extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Presented in PCM stereo, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Le Corsaire

(2016) 120 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.99. Naxos (avail. from most distributors).



Adolphe Adam's 1856 final ballet may be today eclipsed in popularity by his earlier *Giselle*, but it was a huge success in its time, and recently has enjoyed a renaissance, with this 2016 Wiener Staatsballett production joining recent mountings from Toulouse (VL-5/14) and the English National Ballet (VL-7/15). The libretto remains quite silly, centering on a pirate named Conrad who is determined to rescue Médora, a noblewoman who has been abducted and placed in a pasha's harem. And even Luisa Spinatelli's opulent sets here cannot do complete justice to the final shipwreck sequence that so thrilled the premiere audience. But Manuel Legris (using a score augmented with music by Delibes and Pugni among others and choreographic hints from Petipa and his successors) stages the piece brilliantly, and the dancers not only exhibit élan in their solos, duets, and ensembles, but also skill in the pantomime that was an essential part of French ballet in the mid-19th century. Robert Gabdullin is an athletic Conrad and Maria Yakovleva an elegant, if rather cool, Médora, and both are admirably supported, especially by Davide Dato, as the disloyal Birbanto, and Kirill Kourlaev as the villainous bazaar operator Lanquedem. And the Wiener Staatsoper delivers fine orchestral playing under the baton of Valery Ovsianikov. Presented in DTS 5.0 (DTS-HD 5.0 on the Blu-ray edition) and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Nino Rota: La notte di un nevrastenico / I due timidi

(2017) 105 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Dynamic (dist. by Naxos of America).

Nino Rota (1911-1979) was famous as a composer of film scores (including several Fel-

lini classics and *The Godfather*), but this double-bill of two one-act operas demonstrates that his skill extended beyond the screen. Both are set at hotels and employ romantic melodies in the style of Puccini to tell very odd stories with a farcical tone that often seems out of sync with the music. *I due timidi* (1950) centers on a young man and woman who are both so shy that they cannot reveal their love for one another. An accident leads to both winding up with other partners—he with the mature lady who runs the hotel, she with a doctor called in to treat her. The second, *La notte di un nevrastenico* (1959) is about an insomniac who is so desperate for quiet that he pays for three rooms—his own and adjacent ones on either side. Trying to make some extra cash, the manager rents out the other rooms a second time—one to a soldier who drops his shoe on the floor while undressing, and the other to a couple who make love very loudly. Naturally, the noise wakes the sleeping man, who is infuriated at the disturbance and makes his anger clear to everyone. The performances, filmed at Italy's 2017 Reate Festival, are decent rather than exceptional, but Gabriele Bonolis coaxes solid playing from the orchestra, and the singers handle Rota's often demanding vocal lines quite comfortably. Also featuring pleasing sets and costumes, this is a minor but amiable production that would appeal to anyone wanting to explore the byways of 20th-century Italian opera. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)



Noah ★★★

(2019) 110 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Sight & Sound Theatres, with venues in Ronks, PA, and Branson, MO, specializes in family-friendly musical extravaganzas inspired by stories from the Bible. In this videotaped recording of the titular stage show, God instructs Noah to build an ark, stirring conflict between Noah and his clan and the wider society, which views the family as kooks. The highlight is the arrival of the animals—a mix of live creatures and inventive puppetry—along with an imaginative staging of the rains that bring about the great flood that engulfs the world and sends Noah's ark on a 40-day journey. The production admittedly shares some issues that plagued earlier Sight & Sound mountings such as *Jonah: The Musical* (VL-1/18) and *Moses* (VL-1/19)—namely, wildly uneven acting from the large cast and a score (credited to four composers) that often feels like a second-rate riff on old-school Broadway melodies. But the style here more



than compensates and the sheer spectacle of the ark's massive interior with its zoological occupants is a truly stunning feat of engineering in contemporary theater. Presented in 5.1 surround sound, extras include featurettes on Sight & Sound's history and the development of *Noah*. Recommended. (P. Hall)

Pretenders with Friends

★★★

(2017) 66 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99 (audio CD included). MVD Entertainment Group (avail. from most distributors).



Filed at the Decades Rock Arena in Atlantic City's Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, this 2017 concert features original Pretenders members Chrissie Hynde, the former rock critic turned sultry rock singer/guitarist, and Martin Chambers (guitar), along with a small backup band and guest artists. Weighing in at a little over an hour, the emphasis here is on the "friends" of the title, with the pop/rock/New Wave Pretenders only soloing six of the 12 Pretenders songs (out of 16 tunes total), including the hits "Back on the Chain Gang," "Precious," "Mystery Achievement," and "Brass in Pocket." Is it worth it to miss "Time the Avenger," "My City Was Gone," and "Night in My Veins" in order to hear "The Bucket" (Kings of Leon), "Drive" (Incubus), and "Candy" (Iggy Pop)? In a word, no; in fact, the only joint effort that stands out here is Hynde and Shirley Manson (of Garbage) singing "Talk of the Town" and "Only Happy When It Rains." And the all-hands-on-deck closer "Middle of the Road" suitably rocks. But overall this is a disappointing concert, and Pretenders fans would be much better served by the fine *Pretenders: Loose in L.A.* (VL-1/04). Presented in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo edition in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, extras include a bonus audio CD and brief interview snippets with the Pretenders and guests. Optional. (R. Pitman)

The Rolling Stones: Bridges to Babylon

★★★

(1998) 150 min. DVD: \$24.99 (audio CDs included), Blu-ray: \$29.99 (audio CDs included). Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



The original bad boys of British rock are in fine fettle in this generous 22-song concert filmed (not in widescreen, unfortunately) in 1998 in Bremen, Germany, during the band's tour in support of 1997's *Bridges to Babylon* (one of their worst albums, although thankfully only five cuts are performed here). This is one of the best Stones line-ups of all time, with Mick Jagger (mostly vocals, some guitar), Keith Richards (mostly guitar, some vocals), Ronnie Wood (guitar), and Charlie Watts (drums) backed by Darryl Jones on bass, Chuck Leavell on keyboards, the late and

great Bobby Keys on sax, Blondie Chaplin on percussion, and Lisa Fischer on backup vocals. The setlist features plenty of hits, kicking off with the group's signature "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and also including "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Honky Tonk Women," "Paint It Black," "Miss You" (with Jagger, ahem, licking Fischer's toes), "Start Me Up," "Tumbling Dice," "Gimme Shelter," "Sympathy for the Devil," and "Brown Sugar." This is classic Stones, with the band totally in their element cranking out beloved tunes and introducing the now *de rigueur* B-stage breakout mini-set. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include four bonus tracks from a Chicago performance and two audio CDs capturing the entire concert. Recommended. (R. Pitman)

Swan Lake ★★★1/2

(2018) 138 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Choreographer Liam Scarlett's 2018 staging of Tchaikovsky's ever-popular classic—the first new mounting by The Royal Ballet in more than 30 years—presents an almost perfect version of the dark fairy tale, reworking many of the numbers while adding a few uncontroversial wrinkles (a prologue showing the evil Von Rothbart changing Odette into a swan, more dance for the prince's friend Benno, and a new *pas de deux* for Odette and Prince Siegfried in the final act). But Scarlett also makes a couple of choices some might find debatable: namely, having Von Rothbart appear at the royal court in the early scenes and showing Siegfried carrying Odette's corpse from the lake in the final tableau. Overall, however, he sticks with the tried-and-true, modeling his work after that of Petipa and Ivanov and even retaining Ashton's popular Neapolitan dance in Act 3. The combination of the new and the familiar proves delectable, especially when buttressed by magnificent new sets and costumes in the traditional style by John Macfarlane. The production is also blessed with superb dancing from Marianela Nuñez, as Odette and her dark twin Odile, and Vadim Muntagirov as the fickle Siegfried, whose love for the former is tested by his attraction to the latter. The other soloists, particularly Bennet Gartside as Von Rothbart and Alexander Campbell as Benno, provide stellar support, the *corps de ballet* is well-drilled, and the Opera House Orchestra plays exuberantly for Koen Kessels. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and LPCM stereo, extras include an introduction to the ballet, a featurette on Macfarlane's design, and an interview with former Royal Ballet principal dancer Darcey Bussell on the swan troupe. One of the best versions available on disc, this is highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

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Hollywood Blues

It's a fact that as people age they go to see movies in theaters less. When I was younger, I assumed this phenomenon was due to elders slowing down mentally and physically as they headed into the proverbial sunset years. Now, as I swiftly approach that Beatles' song milestone in "When I'm Sixty-Four," I have a somewhat different take.

Namely, Hollywood movies today suck.

I recently saw Amy Scott's fine documentary *Hal* (reviewed on page 19) on director Hal Ashby, whose remarkable string of critical hits in the 1970s included *Harold and Maude*, *Shampoo*, *Bound for Glory*, *The Last Detail*, *Coming Home*, and *Being There*. As many others have attested, the '70s were a particularly fertile time for American films, a Golden Age spurred in part by the social and political upheavals that rocked the nation in the late '60s and early '70s, which were reflected in the movies.

Some of this carried into the 1980s and early '90s, as witnessed in the rise and flourishing of independent cinema in the films of David Lynch, John Sayles, Quentin Tarantino, Jane Campion, and many others. From 1989-92, I wrote a column for *Library Journal* called "Video Movies," and when that ended with

the arrival of a new editor (who I was told did not own a VCR), I launched a short-lived companion newsletter to *Video Librarian* called *Video Movies*. During that time, I saw everything that was playing in theaters.

And I distinctly remember the two films that marked a turning point for me. In April 1993, my wife Anne and I sat in an otherwise empty theater watching *Who's the Man?*, starring Dr. Dre and Denis Leary. Halfway through, we both migrated to the back of the venue and began doing calisthenics out of sheer boredom. And in July 1993, I found myself (Anne at that point would sooner be home changing the oil in our car) sitting amongst pre-teen girls as I struggled to stay awake during the farm comedy *Son in Law* with Pauly Shore. This, for me, was the final turkey in the straw, and I asked myself that age-old existential question: "Why am I here?"

Fast forward to today. I cannot speak highly enough of our indefatigable movie reviewers—Susan Granger and Frank Swietek, chief among them—who endure loads of drek to find the cinematic jewels amongst the seemingly endless stream of kiddie movies made to sell toys, tired and raunchy sex comedies, ho-hum horror flicks, and bloated superhero epics. I truly bow before their dedication.

Anne and I have about \$200 in steadily

accumulating Regal Cinema gift cards that we will have a very hard time using up without resorting to suicidal amounts of popcorn, soda, and Junior Mints.

Unfortunately, our local theaters—like most non-metro chains—don't screen much independent cinema, so we rely on DVD, Blu-ray, and streaming to watch most movies. And many of those are wonderful films (we enjoyed a wide variety last year—ranging from the Coen brothers' Netflix indie *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* to Nadine Labaki's Lebanese film *Capernaum*).

To be clear, my curmudgeonly gripe lies purely with the profit-driven, brain-dead Hollywood flicks that form the bulk of what's found in multiplexes today.

Titles currently playing in our town include: *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (I love dogs, but please stop), *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw*, *The Lion King*, and *Spider-Man: Far From Home*.

Color me unexcited.

Although we may go see Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. If nothing else, it might remind us of what it was like once upon a time in Hollywood.

Randy Pitman



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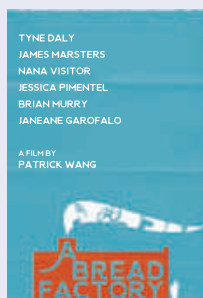
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• Discussion between Patrick Wang and critic Jonathan Rosenbaum (51 min)
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—Bilge Ebiri, *New York Times*

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"It walks so many fine lines between comedy and drama that the balancing act is **exhilarating** to watch."



"Cummings, who also wrote and directed the film, has delivered a **remarkable** tragicomic performance in the lead"

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From the Sundance-winning short film, *Thunder Road* follows officer Arnaud on a journey to raise his young daughter as a love letter to his late mom.

A tragicomic portrait of a failing authority figure in the American South, the film will have you laughing and crying, often at the same time.

*Special Features Include: *The Robbery* Short Film & An Interview With Jim Cummings by Gilles Vaudois

Narrative | Comedy | Drama | Family Studies | Psychology
92 min. | BLU RAY UPC: 602573752838 | DVD UPC: 602573752838 |
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MEETING GORBACHEV

From Academy Award Nominated Director
Werner Herzog

The New York Times
Critic's Pick

"One of Herzog's
most fascinating documentaries"

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"Herzog has a knack for extracting pithy, poetic responses from his subjects, but **here he outdoes himself.**"

CINEVUE

Werner Herzog and Andre Singer's riveting documentary, filled with unforgettable archive materials and based on three never before seen interviews, provides incredible access to arguably the world's greatest living politician.

Now 88 and battling illness, the visionary Mikhail Gorbachev, the former General Secretary of the U.S.S.R., is still gently but resolutely pushing towards his goals. Herzog celebrates Gorbachev's three remarkable accomplishments: negotiations with the U.S. to reduce nuclear weapons, cessation of Soviet control of Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc. All of this in six years! Herzog & Singer explore pivotal moments in history through a series of exclusive one-on-one interviews with the man who ended the Cold War.

Documentary | Political Science | Russian Studies | Journalism | Cinema Studies
92 min. | UPC: 888608668415 | SRP: \$24.95 | PPR: \$399.00 | Closed Captioned



KATHY GRIFFIN: A HELL OF A STORY

"**Enormously funny**
(like her or not, anyone who says Griffin isn't

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"The tale of a pilloried woman who fights back...
raw, vulgar, and smart."

Chicago Tribune

"Two years after the comedian's infamous Trump photo, she's back - battered but unbowed by right-wing cancel culture."

The New York Times

On May 30, 2017 an image of Griffin holding a mask that resembled the severed head of President Trump was released- the image went global and everything she had worked for in her life, vanished overnight.

The film chronicles the unprecedented and historic story of an iconic American comedian overcoming a political and media takedown following the release of the controversial photo.

Documentary | Comedy | Political Science | American Studies
106 min. | UPC: 602573752852 | SRP: \$24.95 | PPR: \$325.00 | Closed Captioned



THE KLEPTOCRATS

Produced by
Academy-Award Nominee Mike Lerner
(*Hell and Back Again, Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer*)

"**Gripping and Engaging**"

SCREEN DAILY

"**Jaw-dropping irony**"

DAILY BEAST

"**Bombshell Documentary**"
Page Six

It is the world's biggest white-collar heist involving government corruption at the highest level, abuse of power and international money laundering.

A hot-shot financier embezzles \$3.5 billion USD from Malaysia's wealth fund 1MDB (1 Malaysia Development Berhad); money from the audacious scam flows into New York and The Hollywood, where the thieves court A-list celebrities and even finance Leonardo DiCaprio's passion project "The Wolf of Wall Street."

But investigative journalists from the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and the Hollywood Reporter trace the money trail and unravel the scheme, the US Department of Justice gets involved, the Prime Minister and his inner circle are implicated, assets are frozen, money is seized and the Malaysian people fight back.

Documentary | Crime | Business | International Studies | Political Science | Journalism
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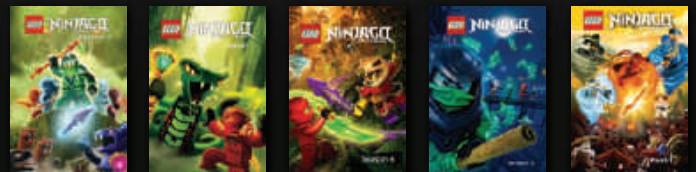


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