

July - August 2018

Video Librarian

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IN THIS ISSUE

Little Women | Miss Kiet's Children | The Freedom to Marry | Saving Brinton | The Gilded Age | Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story

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Spotlight Review

Little Women

★★★1/2

PBS, 175 min., not rated,
 DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray:
 \$34.99

Louisa May Alcott's classic 1869 novel about the experiences of the four March sisters living in Civil War-era New England has been brought to both the big and little screen several times, with the character of bookish tomboy Jo taking center stage, most notably in the Hollywood films made in 1933 (Katharine Hepburn), 1949 (June Allyson), and 1994 (Winona Ryder). Stepping into the pivotal role of Jo in this PBS-aired three-part *Masterpiece* miniseries written by Heidi Thomas (*Call the Midwife*) and directed by Vanessa Caswill is Maya Hawke (daughter of Ethan Hawke and Uma Thurman), who is impressive in her screen debut. Although it may initially feel like a lightweight period costume piece, *Little Women* quickly gains dramatic heft as the March girls—Jo, even-keeled Meg (Willa Fitzgerald), bratty Amy (Kathryn Newton), and shy Beth (Annes Elwy)—along with their mother Marmee (Emily Watson) face trials and tribulations while Mr. March (Dylan Baker) is away at the frontlines of the war. On the lighter side, the arrival of next-door neighbor Mr. Laurence's (Michael Gambon) grandson Laurie (Jonah Hauer-King) portends inevitable romance, although which March sister will wind up with the amiable lad remains uncertain until the final episode. And



Angela Lansbury winningly rounds out the major cast as the siblings' caustic-tongued great aunt. *Little Women* remains a beloved tale some 150 years after its publication: the March family finds happiness (marriages) and endures tragedy (death), but throughout remains true to core values—honesty, kindness, caring for others—that could come across as sentimental but instead seem like exactly the right kind of medicine for our troubled times. Extras include behind-the-scene featurettes and a visit to the Concord, MA, home where Alcott wrote *Little Women*. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

An excellent companion piece to *Little Women*, filmmaker Nancy Porter's insightful biographical documentary *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women* (VL-1/10), which aired on PBS's *American Masters* series, combines dramatic re-enactments, interviews, and diary entries and letters to tell the story of Alcott's life and the evolution of her work, including the writing of her most famous novel.



Cover Photo: *Little Women* cover photo courtesy of PBS

Note: *Video Librarian* editor Randy Pitman is on vacation. His "Final Frame" column will return in the next issue.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Video Newsbriefs	4	Relationships & Sexuality	57
Books Into Movies	6	Food & Spirits	57
Mixed Media	8	Beauty & Fashion	58
Video Movies	14	Sports, Games & Recreation	58
TV on Video	44	The Arts	58
Key to Star Ratings	46	Travel & Geography	61
Video Reviews	46	History & Current Events	62
Children's	46	Biography	64
Psychology & Self-Help	49	Series Update	66
Religion & Philosophy	50	Japanese Anime	67
Social & Political Issues	50	Music/Dance	70
Education	54	Distributor Addresses	73
Law & Crime	55	Title Index	74
Nature, Math & Science	55	Advertiser Directory	74
Health & Fitness	56		



**DARK
HOLLOW
FILMS**

New Releases



PEACE HAS NO BORDERS

U.S. resisters seek refuge in an increasingly conservative Canada, fighting a 10-year battle to win the right to stay in order to avoid punishment in the U.S.

"An important story about a brave group of men and women who chose to seek refuge in Canada instead of participating further in the Iraq and Afghan Wars." —Daniel Ellsberg, Pentagon Papers



ROAD TO MERCY

Canadian doctors and patients navigate the newly granted right to die under a broad Supreme Court decision—the first of its kind outside Europe.

"Powerful, provocative, philosophical."
—*The Globe and Mail*



SEED & SPROUT

Can ordinary people end hunger? This film follows eight innovative food rescue initiatives in an effort to find out.

"This film is a must see for those who care about our environment and are concerned about our hungry citizens."
—Michelle Winning,
Vista/EndHunger.org

www.darkhollowfilms.com

Video Newsbriefs

"The Tree of Life," Lubitsch's "Heaven Can Wait," Punk Scene Debut "Smithereens," and More on Criterion's August Slate

The Criterion Collection's August releases kick off August 14 with director Robert M. Young's 1982 drama *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), a passion project for producer-star Edward James Olmos, who plays the titular Mexican American farmer forced to run from Texas Rangers after a heated misunderstanding leads to the death of a lawman. On August 21, Susan Seidelman will join the collection with her trailblazing independent 1982 debut, *Smithereens* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), a punk-rock portrait of down-and-out scenesters in 1980s New York, starring Susan Berman, Brad Rijn, and Richard Hell. Also slated for August 21 is the Blu-ray debut of Ernst Lubitsch's sly 1943 Technicolor comedy *Heaven Can Wait* (Blu-ray: \$39.95), which follows deceased turn-of-the-century playboy Henry Van Cleve (Don Ameche), who asks a bemused Satan for permission to enter through the gates of Hell and proceeds to recount past sins committed despite his happy marriage to Martha (Gene Tierney). Coming August 28 is a 4K restoration of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's long-unavailable 1968 Spanish-language masterpiece *Memories of Underdevelopment* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), which is set against the tumultuous backdrop of the Cuban Revolution and follows a bourgeois intellectual (Sergio Corrieri) wandering through Havana after his family flees due to the Bay of Pigs invasion. Also arriving on August 28 is visionary filmmaker Terrence Malick's 2011 Palme d'Or-winning *The Tree of Life* (DVD: 3 discs, \$39.95; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$49.95), available in a new cut that adds nearly 50 minutes of footage to the coming-of-age story about a 1950s Texas boy (newcomer Hunter McCracken) who learns to navigate between his bitter, often tyrannical father (Brad Pitt) and his ethereal, nurturing mother (Jessica Chastain).

"The Looming Tower" Coming September 18 from Warner Bros.

The events that led to the deadliest terrorist attacks ever to take place on American soil are chronicled in *The Looming Tower* (DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.98), the powerful 10-part Hulu drama to be released on September 18 from Warner Bros. Home

Entertainment. Adapted from the bestselling Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Lawrence Wright and executive produced by Dan Futterman and Alex Gibney, the series tells the untold story of the September 11 attacks and how the secret rivalry between the FBI and the CIA may have inadvertently set the country on the path to tragedy. Featuring an all-star ensemble cast that includes Jeff Daniels, Peter Sarsgaard, and Tahar Rahim, the story follows members of the I-49 Squad in New York and the code-named Alec Station in Washington, D.C., as they travel the world fighting for ownership of information while seemingly working toward trying to prevent an imminent terrorist attack on U.S. soil. At the center is Chief John O'Neill (Daniels), who faces a deliberate lack of cooperation from other intelligence organizations within the federal government after he's convinced that the United States has been targeted for an attack by Al-Qaeda. Bonus features include behind-the-scenes featurettes, and creator audio commentaries.



"My Letter to the World" Emily Dickinson Documentary Now Available from Music Box Films

Music Box Films has newly released the documentary *My Letter to the World* (DVD: \$29.95). Offering a rich examination of the life and work of one of America's greatest poets, the film features world experts and renowned scholars who help to unravel the enigma of Emily Dickinson, who has spent the 130 years since her death being pigeonholed as a mysterious recluse. Directed by Solon Papadopoulos and narrated by Cynthia Nixon, *My Letter to the World* takes viewers on a journey through the seasons of Dickinson's life in mid-1800s New England, exploring her experiences and relationships via her impassioned letters and poems. As new theories come to light about both Dickinson's life and poetry, experts offer often-conflicting opinions. Also featuring behind-the-scenes clips from filmmaker Terence Davies's 2016 biopic *A Quiet Passion* (starring Nixon as Dickinson), bonus features include poems read by Davies and Nixon.



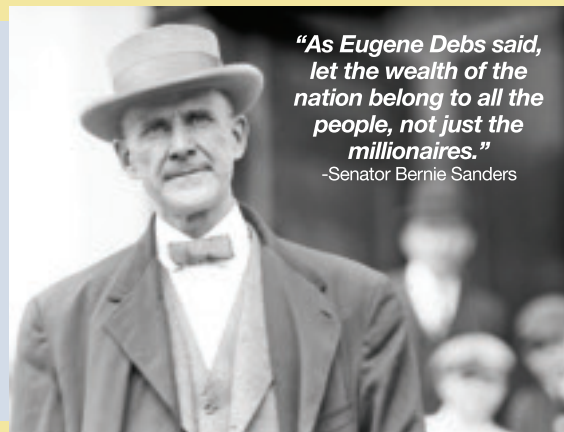
AMERICAN SOCIALIST THE LIFE & TIMES OF EUGENE VICTOR DEBS

97 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917629D
COMING TO HOME VIDEO ON JULY 3

Bernie Sanders inspired a generation – but who inspired him?

Yale Strom's new documentary traces the history of American populism by exploring the life and times of Eugene Victor Debs, the man whose progressive ideas fueled generations to come – from FDR's New Deal to Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign. Here is an objective but passionate history of the movement as founded and championed by Debs, a movement that continues to have an impact on our lives today.

"Vastly entertaining and politically insightful." -Counterpunch



*"As Eugene Debs said,
let the wealth of the
nation belong to all the
people, not just the
millionaires."*

-Senator Bernie Sanders



RAZZIA

119 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917636D
COMING TO HOME VIDEO ON JULY 24

In this searing and mesmerizing drama, five Moroccans from different social and religious strata are pushed to the fringe by their extremist government. Spanning three decades and several storylines, director Nabil Ayouch weaves an intricate tale of lost loves, forbidden desires and fragile dreams in modern day Morocco.

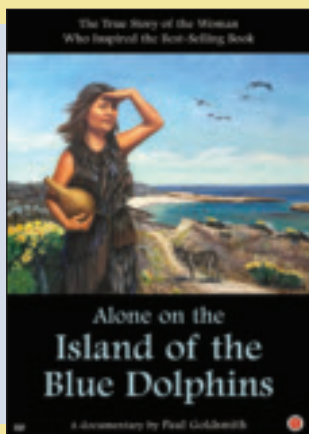
The Moroccan Entry for the 2018 Academy Awards, *Razzia* was the Opening Night Film at this year's New York Jewish Film Festival.

"A beautiful film by one of the best filmmakers coming out of North Africa." -Toronto Star



*"Powerful, intense,
explosive."*

-The Hollywood Reporter

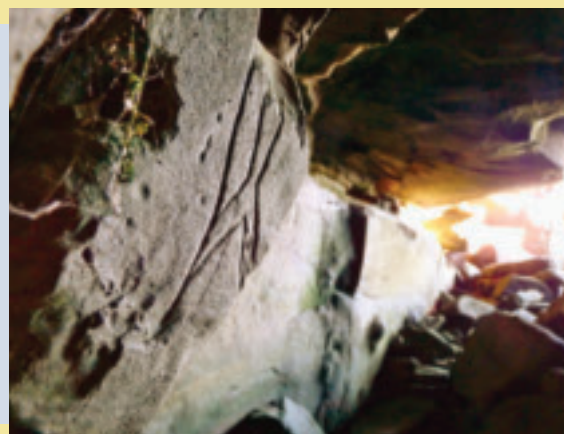


ALONE ON THE ISLAND OF THE BLUE DOLPHINS

58 minutes, color, \$19.95, FRF 917643D
COMING TO HOME VIDEO ON AUGUST 21

Every November, nearly half a million 4th graders read *Island of the Blue Dolphins* – for many, their first chapter book. Educators selected it because it's an exciting story of survival and empowerment – a female Robinson Crusoe. The book tells the story of a 12 year-old Native American girl who was left alone for 18 years on San Nicolas Island, the most remote of California's Channel Islands, in the 1800s.

The true story that inspired the book is even more extraordinary than the fictionalized retelling. This new documentary explores the girl behind the legend, and interviews author Scott O'Dell.



QUEST

105 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917544D
NOW AVAILABLE

Filed with vérité intimacy for nearly a decade, *Quest* is the moving portrait of the Rainey family living in North Philadelphia during the Obama years. Epic in scope, *Quest* is a vivid illumination of race and class in America, and a testament to love, healing and hope.

"Radiant. Director Jon Olshefski discovers an everyday American story of extraordinary strength." -Los Angeles Times

"Superb. A living, breathing, stunning documentary." -Variety



ACORN AND THE FIRESTORM

84 minutes, color, \$19.95, FRF 917605D
NOW AVAILABLE

For 40 years, the community-organizing group ACORN sought to empower the marginalized. Its critics, though, believed ACORN exemplified everything wrong with liberal ideals. Fueled by a YouTube video made by two young conservatives who posed as pimp and prostitute, ACORN's very existence would be challenged.

"A convincing look at the scandal that sparked the Trump era." -Indiewire

"Disturbingly relevant." -Salon

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

Coming in July

Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot (July 13) is an adaptation of quadriplegic author and cartoonist John Callahan's 1989 autobiography. Directed by Gus Van Sant, the film stars Joaquin Phoenix, Jack Black, Rooney Mara, and Jonah Hill.



Scotty and the Secret History of Hollywood (July 27) is based on Scotty Bowers's 2012 autobiography—*Full Service: My Adventures in Hollywood and the Secret Sex Lives of the Stars*. Directed by Matt Tyrnauer, the documentary details Bowers's career as a pimp for actors and actresses.



Coming in August

Christopher Robin (Aug. 3) is inspired by A. A. Milne's 1926 children's book *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Directed by Marc Forster, the fantasy film stars Ewan McGregor, Hayley Atwell, and the voices of Jim Cummings and Peter Capaldi.



The Darkest Minds (Aug. 3) is based on the titular 2012 first novel in Alexandra Bracken's six-part YA series. Directed by Jennifer Yuh Nelson, the film stars Amandla Stenberg, Harris Dickinson, Mandy Moore, and Golden Brooks.



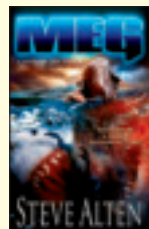
The Miseducation of Cameron Post (Aug. 3) is based on Emily M. Danforth's 2012 coming-of-age novel. Directed by Desiree Akhavan, the gay-conversion-camp drama stars Chloë Grace Moretz, Sasha Lane, and John Gallagher Jr.



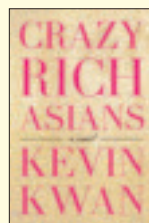
The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society (Aug. 10, Netflix) is based on the 2008 historical novel by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows. Directed by Mike Newell, the WWII-era romantic drama stars Lily James, Michiel Huisman, and Jessica Brown Findlay.



The Meg (Aug. 10) is based on Steve Alten's 1997 sci-fi novel *Meg*. Directed by Jon Turteltaub, the film stars Jason Statham, Jessica McNamee, Li Bingbing, and Ruby Rose.



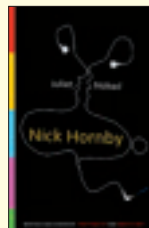
Crazy Rich Asians (Aug. 15) is based on author Kevin Kwan's 2013 novel. Directed by Jon M. Chu, the film stars Constance Wu, Henry Golding, Ken Jeong, and Michelle Yeoh.



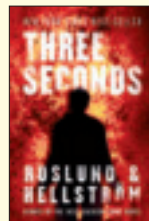
Down a Dark Hall (Aug. 17) is an adaptation of Lois Duncan's 1974 supernatural YA novel. Directed by Rodrigo Cortés, the boarding school horror film stars AnnaSophia Robb, Uma Thurman, and Isabelle Furhman.



Juliet, Naked (Aug. 17) is an adaptation of author Nick Hornby's 2009 novel. Directed by Jesse Peretz, the comedy stars Rose Byrne, Ethan Hawke, and Chris O'Dowd.



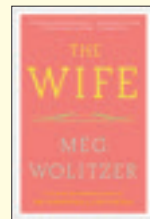
Three Seconds (Aug. 17) is based on the 2009 novel by Swedish crime-writing team Roslund & Hellström. Directed by Andrea Di Stefano, the drug trade drama stars Ana de Armas, Rosamund Pike, Clive Owen, and Common.



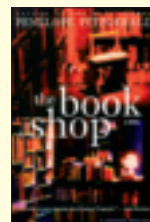
To All the Boys I've Loved Before (Aug. 17) is based on Jenny Han's 2014 YA novel. Directed by Susan Johnson, the teen romance stars Lana Condor, Janel Parrish, and Noah Centineo.



The Wife (Aug. 17) is based on the 2003 novel by Meg Wolitzer. Directed by Björn Runge, the film stars Glenn Close, Jonathan Pryce, and Christian Slater.



The Bookshop (Aug. 24) is an adaptation of Penelope Fitzgerald's 1978 Booker Prize short-listed novel. Directed by Isabel Coixet, the film stars Emily Mortimer, Patricia Clarkson, Bill Nighy, and Hunter Tremayne.



Papillon (Aug. 24) is based on safecracker convict Henri Charrière's titular 1969 autobiographical novel. Directed by Michael Noer, the film stars Charlie Hunnam and Rami Malek.



The Little Stranger (Aug. 31) is an adaption of Sarah Waters's 2009 gothic novel. Directed by Lenny Abrahamson, the film stars Domhnall Gleeson, Ruth Wilson, Will Poulter, Charlotte Rampling, and Anna Madeley.



Looking Ahead

Slated for September is **The House with a Clock in Its Walls**, based on the 1973 YA gothic horror novel by John Bellairs. Directed by Eli Roth, the film stars Jack Black, Cate Blanchett, Kyle MacLachlan, and Colleen Camp.



New Titles from PBS



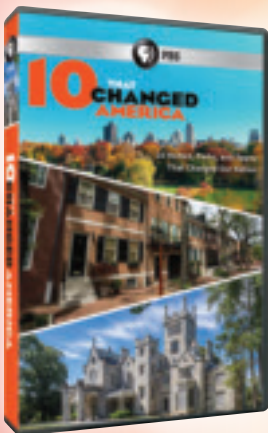
HILLARY

From his childhood in South Auckland, New Zealand, to the plane crash that killed his wife and daughter, this compelling drama portrays the life, loves, and losses of one of the most famous explorers of all time. *Hillary* is an intriguing biopic about the man who conquered more than just Mount Everest.



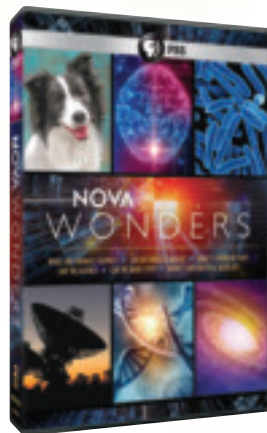
KINGDOMS OF THE SKY

A landmark three-part series made in conjunction with the BBC, *Kingdoms of the Sky* reveals the extraordinary animals and remarkable people who make a home on the iconic mountain ranges of the world. Features *Himalayas, Rockies, and Andes*.



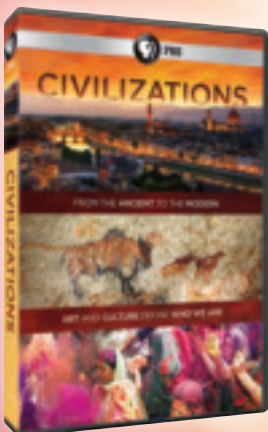
10 THAT CHANGED AMERICA, SEASON 2

Explore the stories behind ten original American monuments and the historical moments that inspired them. See how streets have connected the nation and divided communities and meet engineers who have scoffed at the laws of nature and defied naysayers with amazing feats of engineering!



NOVA WONDERS

Reporting from the frontiers of science, *NOVA Wonders* follows researchers on the winding paths of the unknown. From the mysteries of astrophysics to the technologies that could surpass the abilities of the human mind, this series reveals how far we've come, how we managed to get here, and the remarkable scientists who are transforming the future.



CIVILIZATIONS

Survey the history of art, from antiquity to the present, on a global scale. This nine-part series reveals the role art and creative imagination have played in forging humanity, and introduces viewers to works of beauty, ingenuity, and illumination across cultures. Narrated by Liev Schreiber.



THE TUNNEL, SEASON 3

The emotionally charged finale of this acclaimed bilingual crime thriller reunites Stephen Dillane with Clémence Poésy for the last outing of this unlikely Anglo-French partnership. *The Tunnel: Vengeance* is set amidst mid-Brexit hysteria, an escalating refugee crisis, and the increasing threat of terror from disenfranchised, exiled souls on whom society has turned its back.



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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

Shaq Fu: A Legend Reborn (Wired, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$29.99-\$39.99, Rated: T). Players take control of the unstoppable Shaquille O'Neal as he fights his way through the hordes of Hell and Hollywood in this side-scrolling beat-'em-up.



July 1—July 7

Red Faction Guerrilla Re-Mars-Tered (THQ Nordic, PS4/XOne: \$29.99, Rated: M). Remastered with fully reworked graphics, this Mars-based third-person shooter puts the player in the role of an insurgent human fighter with the Red Faction movement, working in a huge open-world environment offering fast-paced guerrilla-style combat.

July 8—July 14

Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker (Nintendo, Switch: \$39.99, Rated: E). Originally featured as a mini-game in *Super Mario 3D World*, this remaster follows Captain Toad in a third-person adventure that takes players through a wide variety of tricky, enemy-infested, maze-like stages to find hidden gems and nab elusive gold stars.



Earthfall (Gearbox, PS4/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: T). In this *Left 4 Dead*-like first-person survival shooter, players fight off enemy alien hordes while also building up defenses over several missions.

Hotel Transylvania 3: Monsters Overboard (Outright Games, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: E10+). Dracula, Mavis, and their monster friends are marooned on the

mysterious Lost Islands and only the player—in command of lovable little creatures called the Impa—can save them in this third-person adventure game.

MXGP Pro (Milestone, PS4/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: E). This motocross racing simulation game features every track and rider from the 2017 Official MXGP Championship, and features new bike customization options.



Octopath Traveler (Nintendo, Switch: \$59.99, Rated: T). In this third-person RPG, players can explore multiple adventures with eight different characters, each with their own distinct story featuring strategic turn-based combat.

Shining Resonance Refrain (Sega, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: T). In this remaster of the original PlayStation 3 third-person RPG game *Shining Resonance*, players step into the role of the sword-wielding Yuma and his friends as they fight the evil empire.

July 15—July 21

Adventure Time: Pirates of the Enchiridion (Outright Games, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: E10+). In this third-person adventure game, Finn and Jake are tasked with saving the Land of Ooo again as somebody has used an Enchiridion to flood the kingdoms.



Sonic Mania Plus (Sega, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$29.99, Rated: E). Everyone's favorite hedgehog and pals return for this latest side-scrolling action-platformer featuring all-new areas.

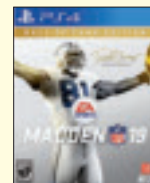
July 22—July 28

The Banner Saga Trilogy: Bonus Edition (505 Games, PS4/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: RP). In this third-person Viking-era strategy RPG trilogy, players guide their caravan across a broken world where the gods are dead, making bold leadership decisions, wise use of resources, and skillful battle choices.

Mega Man X Legacy Collection 1 + 2 (Capcom, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: T). This collection of classic *Mega Man X* side-scrolling action-platforming games includes all eight titles from the original series along with a new challenge mode.

August 5—August 11

Madden NFL 19 (EA, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E). The latest release in the most popular football franchise series lets players take control over how they build a dynasty, using all-new strategic tools and the first ever custom draft class creator.



August 19—August 25

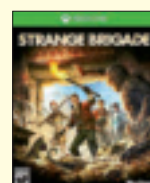
F1 2018 (Codemasters, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: RP). This latest edition in the popular racing-simulation franchise will feature all of the official teams, drivers, and circuits of the 2018 Formula 1 season.

August 26—September 1

428: Shibuya Scramble (Spike Chunsoft, PS4: \$49.99, Rated: T). In this visual novel featuring five protagonists dragged into a kidnapping case, players make choices for each character that will alter the story for others—all within a 10-hour period.

Pro Evolution Soccer 2019 (Konami, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E). The latest iteration of this popular soccer franchise will feature 4K HDR support across all platforms, and offers photorealistic visuals and lifelike player movement.

Strange Brigade (Rebellion, PS4/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: T). In this gripping third-person action-adventure game featuring puzzles and undead enemies, players travel the ancient world in a quest to stand against the fearsome power of Seteki and her army of mummified monstrosities.



Yakuza Kiwami 2 (Sega, PS4: \$49.99, Rated: M). This remake of the original PS2-era third-person action game puts players in the role of Kazuma Kiryu, who must continue his fight up through the ranks of the Yakuza in a gripping storyline.

TV on DVD/Blu-ray

Available Now

Black Lightning: The Complete First Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.98, Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). Cress Williams stars as the titular DC Comics superhero in

In the face of terror,
a community stands together.



One October: A Nightmare in Las Vegas examines the Las Vegas Route 91 Harvest Music Festival tragedy, the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. This documentary tells the story of the survivors, highlighting the resilience of a community in the face of tragedy.

"...intensely compelling [and] a first step in processing the enormity of this event."

- Los Angeles Times

Available August 28 818506023931 \$24.99

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DREAMSCAPE

the 2018 debut season of this action series that also features China Anne McClain and James Remar.

Channel Zero—Butcher's Block: Season Three (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). This 2018 third season of the horror anthology series set in the titular disturbing neighborhood stars Olivia Lucardi, Holland Roden, and Rutger Hauer.

Last Man Standing: The Complete Fifth Season and Last Man Standing: The Complete Sixth Season (Fox, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.95 each). Tim Allen stars as a sporting goods store employee and family man with conservative views in these 2015-17 fifth and sixth seasons.



The Last Post (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$24.98). This six-episode 2017 historical drama series set in 1960s Yemen and featuring the men and families of the British Royal Military Police stars Stephen Campbell Moore, Jessie Buckley, Amanda Drew, and Ben Miles.

The Mick: The Complete First Season (Fox, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95). Kaitlin Olson stars as the wacky inappropriate caretaker of her sister's three kids in this 2017 debut season of the short-lived comedy series. Also available is **The Mick: The Complete Second Season** (Fox, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.95).

NightMan: Complete Collection (Lionsgate, DVD: 9 discs, \$59.98). Based on the Marvel comic, this 1997-99 series follows a saxophone player turned bulletproof superhero (Matt McCoy) as he fights San Francisco crime.

Orange Is the New Black: Season Five (Lionsgate, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$34.98). A prison riot sets the stage for this 2017 fifth season of the Emmy-winning black comedy series that stars Taylor Schilling and Laura Prepon.

Portlandia: Season Eight (Broadway Video Group, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.95). Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein are back with this 2018 eighth and final season of the IFC sketch comedy series that includes cameos by John Corbett, Terry Crews, Jeff Goldblum, and Tracee Ellis Ross.



Power: The Complete Fourth Season (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$34.98). Nightclub owner and drug lord Ghost (Omari Hardwick) is wrongly arrested for murder in this 2017 fourth season of the Starz series executive produced by costar 50 Cent.

Will & Grace—The Revival: Season One (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). Stars Debra Messing, Eric McCormack, Megan Mullally, and Sean Hayes are back in this 2017-18 first season update of their 1998-2006 sassy sitcom.



July 3

Delicious: Series 2 (Acorn, DVD: \$34.99). The 2017-18 second season of this dark comedy series is set nearly a year after the death of the man shared by stars Dawn French and Emilia Fox.

Striking Out: Series 2 (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Dublin attorney Tara Rafferty (Amy Huberman) navigates a new path for her love life and career in this 2018 second season of the Irish legal drama series.

Trauma (BBC, DVD: \$24.99). John Simm and Adrian Lester star as two fathers bound together by tragedy in this 2018 three-part BBC miniseries drama.

July 10

Endeavour: The Complete Fifth Season (PBS, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99). Set during 1968, this 2018 fifth season of the prequel series centered on the early career of detective Endeavour Morse (Shaun Evans) continues to follow the employees of the Cowley Police Station.



Green Acres: The Final Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.95). This 1970-71 sixth and final season of the wacky rural series stars Eva Gabor, Eddie Albert, and Pat Buttram.

The Magicians: Season Three (Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98). Based on the fantasy novel trilogy by Lev Grossman, this 2018 third season of the Syfy-aired series stars Jason Ralph, Stella Maeve, and Olivia Taylor Dudley.

Mosaic (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$30.99; Blu-

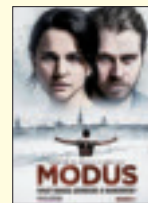
ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). Directed by Steven Soderbergh, this 2018 HBO-aired murder mystery miniseries stars Sharon Stone, Garrett Hedlund, and Beau Bridges.

July 17

The Expanse: Season Three (Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.98). Adapted from the solar system colonization novel series by James S.A. Corey, this 2018 third season of the sci-fi series stars Shohreh Aghdashloo, Thomas Jane, and Steven Strait.

The Good Place: The Complete Second Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.98). Residents of the afterlife take center stage in this 2017-18 sophomore season of the fantasy comedy series starring Ted Danson and Kristen Bell.

Modus: Season 1 (Kino Lorber, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.95). This 2015 first season of the Swedish psychological thriller series follows a profiler (Melinda Kinnaman) who works with a local detective (Henrik Norlén).



Sneaky Pete: Season One (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$38.99). Giovanni Ribisi stars as a conman who takes on a dangerous new identity in this 2017 first season of the Amazon Video series co-created by Bryan Cranston.

The Tunnel—Vengeance: The Complete Third Season (PBS, DVD: 2 discs, \$49.99). Detectives (Clémence Poésy and Stephen Dillane) handle the repercussions of a refugee crisis in this 2017-18 third and final season of the British/French crime drama.

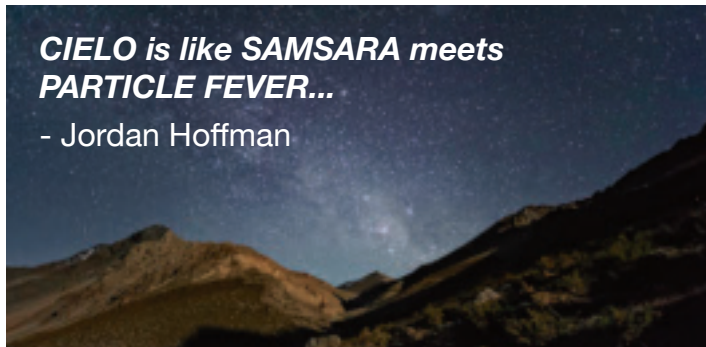
July 24

Keeping Faith (Acorn, DVD or Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99 each). This 2017 first season of the series following a solicitor whose husband goes missing stars Eve Myles, Hannah Daniel, and Bradley Freeguard.



July 31

Counterpart: The Complete First Season (Lionsgate, DVD: 3 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$39.99). J.K. Simmons stars as a



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- Jordan Hoffman

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A love poem to the night sky that transports us to a space, quiet and calm, from which we can ponder the infinite and unknown, CIELO is a cinematic reflection on the crazy beauty of the night sky, as experienced in the Atacama Desert, Chile. In English, Spanish, French, 78 minutes



The Last Refugees

The fate of refugees to the US has been the subject of media headlines since Trump's implementation of his highly contested travel ban. This documentary follows the Kalajis, one of the last families from Syria to enter the United States, as they adjust to their new life in Philadelphia. In Arabic and English, 40 minutes



Michelin Stars: Tales From The Kitchen

MICHELIN STARS goes behind the scenes to see how the stars are awarded, to talk to the chefs who work tirelessly to maintain their status, and the impact of the little red book on the world of haute cuisine. The film is a thoughtful and elegant meditation on creativity, business, and the art of perfection. In French, English and Japanese. 82 minutes



Fire and Ashes, Making the Ballet RAKU

This breath-taking film goes behind the scenes with composer Shinji Eshima and San Francisco Ballet resident choreographer Yuri Possokhov as they recount their collaboration with the original cast of the ballet RAKU, based on a novel by Mishima. In English, 64 minutes

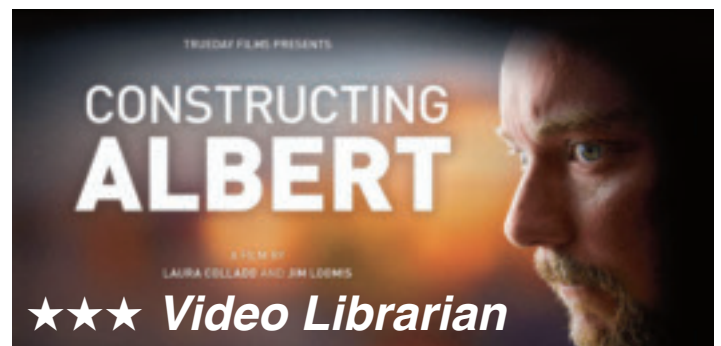


AN EPIC TALE

- Hollywood Reporter

The Train of Salt and Sugar

Hoping for a better life during Mozambique's civil war, a train under military guard must transport its passengers and goods 500 miles through guerrilla-held territory. A contemporary Western set in war-torn Africa, it is "...an epic tale of peril and endurance on an arduous cross-country journey." Directed by Licinio Azevedo. In Portuguese with English subtitles, 90 minutes



Constructing Albert

The legendary restaurant elBulli was sparked from the minds of Ferran and his younger brother Albert Adrià, who reluctantly started working in the kitchen at age 15, with no culinary aspirations, and has long remained in Ferran's shadow. He is now considered by many to be the most underrated chef in the world. In Spanish and Catalan with English subtitles. 82 minutes

spy agency employee who can cross into a parallel world in this 2017-18 debut season of the Starz-aired sci-fi thriller series.

Murdoch Mysteries: Season 11 (Acorn, DVD: 5 discs, \$59.99; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$59.99). This 2017-18 11th season of the Canadian turn-of-the-century drama clears up the previous season cliffhanger, which found Detective William Murdoch (Yannick Bisson) wrongfully imprisoned for murder.

August 7

No Offence: Series 1 (Acorn, DVD: 3 discs, \$49.99). Blunt dynamo DI Vivienne Deering (Joanna Scanlan) heads up a Manchester squad that tackles the worst cases in this 2015 first season of the police procedural, which also features Elaine Cassidy and Alexandra Roach.

Riverdale: The Complete Second Season (Warner, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.99). Loosely based on the Archie Comics characters, this action-packed 2017-18 second season of the sinister small-town drama stars K.J. Apa, Cole Sprouse, Lili Reinhart, and Luke Perry.



August 14

Arrow: The Complete Sixth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$44.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$49.98). The members of Team Arrow are unsure of the future in this 2017-18 sixth season of the DC Comics series based on superhero Green Arrow.

NCIS New Orleans: The Fourth Season (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$49.99). This 2017-18 fourth season of the military drama spin-off set in the Big Easy features a guest appearance by Jimmy Buffett as himself.

SEAL Team: Season One (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$49.99). A Navy SEAL unit is at the center of this 2017-18 debut season of the military drama starring David Boreanaz, Max Thieriot, and Jessica Paré.



August 21

Ash vs. Evil Dead: Season 3 (Starz, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.98). The titular hometown hero (Bruce

Campbell) battles more monsters and learns about a long-lost daughter (Arielle Carver-O'Neill) in this 2018 third and final season of the comedy horror series inspired by the feature films.

Blindspot: The Complete Third Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.99). This 2017-18 third season of the crime drama series stars Sullivan Stapleton, Jaimie Alexander, Rob Brown, and Ashley Johnson.

Blue Bloods: The Eighth Season (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$55.98). The law enforcement Reagan family deals with trials and tribulations in this 2017-18 eighth season of the NYC police procedural starring Tom Selleck, Donnie Wahlberg, and Bridget Moynahan.



The Coroner: Season Two (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$30.99). Claire Goose stars as the titular coastal town coroner in this 2016 second and final season of the BBC daytime drama series.

Gotham: The Complete Fourth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$44.98; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$49.99). This penultimate 2017-18 fourth season of the Batman universe Marvel Comics-based action series features a guest appearance by B.D. Wong.

NCIS: The Fifteenth Season (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$55.98). The Major Case Response team based in Washington, D.C., is back for more naval criminal drama in this 2017-18 15th season starring Mark Harmon, Wilmer Valderrama, and Maria Bello.

Police Story: Season Three (Shout! Factory, DVD: 6 discs, \$34.99). This 1975-76 third season of the LAPD anthology series features guest appearances by Dean Stockwell, John Astin, and Louis Gossett Jr.

Silent Witness: The Complete Season Six (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Amanda Burton is back as forensic pathologist Sam Ryan in this 2002 sixth season.

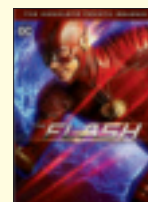


Strike Back: Cinemax Season Five (HBO, DVD: 3 discs, \$24.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$34.98). This compilation from the 2015 fifth season of the British-American action serial stars Philip Winchester, Michelle Yeoh, and Sullivan Stapleton.

August 28

Criminal Minds: Season 13 (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$55.98). Guest stars on this 2017-18 13th season of the crime drama series include Bodhi Elfman, Jamie Kennedy, and Lou Diamond Phillips.

The Flash: The Complete Fourth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$49.99; Blu-ray: 4 discs, \$59.98). Superhero Flash's time-traveling actions in the previous season create an alternate realm in this 2017-18 fourth season of the DC Comics series.



The High Chaparral: Season One (Shout! Factory, DVD: 6 discs, \$24.98). Set at the titular ranch in Arizona Territory, this 1967-68 first season of the Western series includes guest appearances by Jack Lord and Ricardo Montalban.

Lucifer: The Third Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.99). Tom Ellis stars as the literal Devil, who helps out the LAPD in this 2017-18 third season of the fantasy police procedural series.

NCIS Los Angeles: Season 9 (Paramount, DVD: 6 discs, \$49.99). Chris O'Donnell, Linda Hunt, LL Cool J, and Nia Long star in this 2017-18 ninth season of the military crime series from the sprawling NCIS franchise.

Looking Ahead

Slated for September are the debut seasons of **The Looming Tower**, **Sando**, and **Young Sheldon**, the second seasons of **Bull** and **Good Karma Hospital**, the third seasons of **East West 101** and **Supergirl**, the eighth season of **Hawaii Five-O**, the 13th season of **Supernatural**, and the never-broadcast **Doctor Who: Shada**.

Re-priced or New to DVD/Blu-ray

Capitalism (Icarus, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98). Ilan Ziv's newly re-priced 2014 documentary (VL-5/16 ★★1/2) series explores the evolution of capitalism, with commentary from Noam Chomsky, David Graeber, and Thomas Piketty, among others. Also newly available is the 2010 Karl Marx documentary **Marx Reloaded** (DVD: \$24.98).



NEW RELEASES FROM VISION VIDEO



Inheritance

The Delvecchios are a close-knit extended family, but after the death of the patriarch, two feuding brothers are left to run the family business. Then a dark family secret comes to light causing old grudges to be magnified and loyalties to be called into question. When one family member seeks to fix the ongoing turmoil, he gets more trouble than he bargained for. *Inheritance* is the story of how sons look to their fathers for identity, and how one son learns that true identity comes from a source deeper even than family. Drama, 94 minutes.

#501763D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01763 1



Many Beautiful Things

Many Beautiful Things plunges viewers into the complex age of Victorian England to meet Lillias Trotter, a daring young woman who defied all norms by winning the favor of England's top art critic, John Ruskin. But with her legacy on the line, Lillias made a stunning decision to journey to French Algeria in the late 1800's to pioneer work with women and children. Features the voices of Michelle Dockery (*Downton Abbey*) and John Rhys-Davies (*Lord of the Rings*, *Indiana Jones*). Documentary, 70 minutes.

#501727D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01727 3



C. S. Lewis Onstage

Using C. S. Lewis's own words, award-winning actor Max McLean inhabits Lewis in this powerful stage performance to take us on his rigorous journey from hard-boiled atheist to "the most reluctant convert in all England." Discover how the "Hound of Heaven" pursued Lewis relentlessly until he finally "gave in"...only to become the most influential Christian writer of the twentieth century. 77 minutes.

#501800D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01800 3



The Sin:

From Adam & Eve to Cain & Abel

The Sin tells the story of Adam and Eve and their children, Cain and Abel. By being disobedient, the first couple fell from grace and were expelled from paradise. Now, struggling to survive in the harsh wilderness, they hope that their children will restore them and reverse the curse. But their disobedience leaves a lasting legacy as Cain and Abel choose what they will believe. An insightful retelling of the stories from the book of Genesis. Drama, 48 minutes.

#501798D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01798 3



To Every Nation

In *To Every Nation* we witness the church's miraculous growth and learn how the church spread Christianity to every nation. Covering the biblical accounts in the Book of Acts chapters 9-28, this thrilling animated feature shows how the Christian faith influenced the entire world. Geared for children ages seven and up. Animated, 70 minutes.

#501725D, \$12.99, UPC 7 27985 01725 9



The Savior

The Savior is a fresh portrayal of the life of Jesus with dialogue taken directly from the Gospel of Luke. It follows Jesus from his upbringing to his death and resurrection. The project was filmed entirely in Israel and Palestine using local actors, giving it a look and feel of authenticity. Dubbed in English from the original Arabic version. Drama, 132 minutes.

#501770D, \$19.99, UPC 7 27985 01770 9



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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

And Then I Go ★★★

Passion River, 99 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95



With school shootings an abominable feature of life in America, this can be a hard film to watch due to its ticking-time-bomb story of two middle-school outcasts whose profound desperation leads to plans of retaliation against the clique-filled school of bullies who victimize the pair every day. Yet the possibility of revenge killing isn't necessarily the point of director Vincent Grashaw's drama, which is based on Jim Shepard's 2004 novel *Project X*. Edwin (Arman Darbo) is a diminutive eighth-grader whose anxiety over classwork and social isolation is escalating. His best friend, Flake (Sawyer Barth), is in the same boat but is more aggressive in his retaliation—brief moments of victory that regularly earn him a beating from peers. Edwin receives no meaningful support at home from his parents (Melanie Lynskey, Justin Long), which leaves him all the more alone and confused. When Flake comes up with a horrifying plan and enlists a dubious Edwin, the question of how far the latter will truly go builds suspense. Grashaw brings energy and dark humor to the story, especially in scenes where the two leads end up in their school principal's office or in detention. And Darbo and Barth are compelling as the tormented kids winding up to some kind of life-changing action. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Are We Not Cats ★★1/2

MVD Visual, 78 min., not rated, DVD: \$14.99



After watching Xander Robin's debut feature, viewers will probably know more about trichophagia—a medical condition involving the obsessive eating of one's

own hair—than they ever wanted to. Eli (Michael Patrick Nicholson), a pitiful fellow who has just been dumped by his girlfriend and fired from his job on a garbage truck, learns that his parents are selling their house and moving to Arizona. Before departing, his father gives Eli an old truck, which the latter then lives in and drives as a source of income. Following a hauling trip he meets Anya (Chelsea Lopez), who rips out her hair and eats it (and nothing else). Eli is attracted to Anya despite her odd habit—an unhealthy one, since hair cannot be coughed up (as cats do) or digested. Inevitably a medical crisis occurs, in which Eli must take drastic action (presented in a graphic manner that many will find hard to watch). Despite the oddity of their relationship, the tale of Eli and Anya has a strangely sweet undertone, and while the visuals related to Anya's physical condition are often unsettling, *Are We Not Cats* is a curiously touching—albeit decidedly unconventional—love story. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Backstabbing for Beginners ★★

Lionsgate, 108 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99



A real-life financial scandal at the United Nations forms the basis for this rather tame cinematic thriller. Filmmaker Per Fly's adaptation of Michael Soussan's titular 2008 memoir adds clichéd elements of romance and conspiracy to the author's account of his shocking revelations about the corruption of the U.N. Oil-for-Food program, which was established to provide basic life necessities while Iraq was enduring heavy sanctions following the First Gulf War. The resultant graft benefited Saddam Hussein, along with scores of private companies and U.N. officials. Here, Soussan is turned into Michael Sullivan (Theo James), a naïve neophyte hired as assistant to Pasha (Ben Kingsley), the undersecretary in charge of the program. Sullivan quickly becomes aware that funds are being siphoned off, and learns—through information provided by Nashim (Belçim Bilgin), a beautiful translator in Baghdad—that Saddam is manipulating the aid to starve his bitterest rivals, the Kurds. In Baghdad, Sullivan's involvement with Nashim—which soon takes a romantic turn—puts them both in the crosshairs of the regime's most ruthless enforcers, which continues even after the couple makes their way back to the United States. Unfortunately, Fly's decision to add conventional genre elements to Soussan's important work as a whistleblower undermines the film's impact, although there is some compensation in Kingsley's cunningly extravagant if admittedly hammy turn (the otherwise pallid *Backstabbing* comes alive only when he is onscreen). Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

Beauty and the Dogs

★★★

Oscilloscope, 100 min., in Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

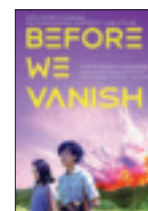


The misogyny infecting Tunisian society even after the political changes wrought by the Arab Spring is powerfully dramatized in Kaouthar Ben Hania and Khaled Barsaoui's adaptation of a 2013 book by Meriem Ben Mohamed and Ava Djamshidi. The story focuses on Mariam (Mariam Al Ferjani), a college student raped by several policemen while out walking on the beach with Youssef (Ghanem Zrelli), a young man she meets at a dance party. The couple's efforts to get help, both at hospitals and police stations, are cavalierly or cruelly rebuffed, and after Youssef, the only man who has shown Mariam any sympathy, is taken away on suspicion of revolutionary activity, she is left entirely alone to deal with the authorities, who use every underhanded means to get her to drop her complaint. Her attackers even show up to threaten her again. Presented in nine chapters, each of which is shot in a single take, the film is deliberately elliptical, only gradually clearing up ambiguities left by abrupt transitions: in fact, what precisely happened to Mariam is not revealed until very near the semi-hopeful close. Although the narrative technique gives the picture a rather distant, chilly feel, *Beauty and the Dogs* still packs a strong dramatic punch, due in great measure to Al Ferjani's committed performance. A timely foreign drama, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Before We Vanish

★★★

Virgil, 131 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$19.99



The shadow of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* hovers over Japanese director Kiyoshi Kurosawa's stately, darkly comic tale of a stealthy plan by aliens to take over the Earth. To prepare for the invasion, the extraterrestrials send three scouts to commandeer the bodies of earthlings and learn about humankind. The possessed are Shinji (Ryûhei Matsuda), a young businessman; Akira (Yuri Tsunematsu), a teenage girl who may have murdered her parents before going missing; and Amano (Mahiro Takasugi), a cocky young man who is looking for Akira. The trio of alien/humans join up with two other people they persuade to become their guides: Narumi (Masami Nagasawa), Shinji's estranged wife, who is puzzled by her husband's changed, docile personality, and Sakurai (Hiroki Hasegawa), a freelance reporter at first interested in getting a scoop, who eventually becomes complicit in Akira and Amano's plans. Kurosawa's film has moments of action, especially Akira's

"A serious-minded and...rather powerful portrait of women getting by in a world where all the men are either gone or gone mad."

— Jordan Mintzer, *The Hollywood Reporter*

The GUARDIANS

A FILM BY XAVIER BEAUVOIS



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— Manohla Dargis, *The New York Times*



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inclination to deal with obstacles by simply killing whoever poses a threat. For the most part, however, it emphasizes deadpan comedy as the alien-possessed humans go about their business of stealing ideas from various victims (who are radically altered in the process). *Before We Vanish* is not mainstream sci-fi, being more concerned with questions about what it means to be human rather than special effects, but it draws on genre conventions in quirkily amusing ways. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Beirut ★★

Universal, 110 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, July 3



Charismatic Jon Hamm is such a good actor that it's a shame his talents are wasted on this disjointed political thriller, set in war-torn Lebanon in 1982. Hamm plays Mason Skiles, a top U.S. diplomat who is married to Nadia (Leila Bekhti) and living in Beirut. Having no children of their own, the couple have taken in Karim, a 13-year-old Palestinian refugee. Over cocktails, Mason discovers that Karim's older brother is a terrorist suspected in the Israeli massacre carried out at the 1972 Munich Olympics and that Mossad agents want to question Karim. Without warning, Karim's brother barges in, guns blazing and grabs Karim, and Nadia is killed in the chaos. Cut to Boston 10 years later, where Mason has become a union negotiator and a bona fide alcoholic. One night in a bar, he's approached with an offer he cannot refuse. His CIA colleague (Mark Pellegrino) is being held hostage by now-grown Karim (Idir Chender), who demands the return of his brother from the Israelis. But the Israelis don't have his brother, forcing Mason to deal with the PLO. Milling around are cultural attaché Sandy Crowder (Rosamund Pike), CIA agent Donald Gaines (Dean Norris), and the Embassy's Gary Ruzak (Shea Whigham), each with his/her own agenda. Based on a 27-year-old script that was loosely inspired by CIA Station Chief William Buckley's 1984 kidnapping, director Brad Anderson is unable to successfully put together the pieces of this dark and murky thriller. Optional. (S. Granger)

Black Venus ★★★

Arrow, 162 min., in French & English w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman was a black South African woman who was put on display like a sideshow freak as the Hot-tent Venus in early 19th-century Europe. Award-winning director Abdellatif Kechiche (*Blue Is the Warmest Color*) dramatizes her short life and humiliating exploitation in this powerful and provocative 2010 drama. Where

Kechiche's earlier films tackled the lives of immigrants and minorities in contemporary France, this one jumps back two centuries to explore the ordeal of an African woman in Europe who is treated as less than human. Saartjie (played by first-time actress Yahima Torres) was not a slave but a South African Khoikhoi tribeswoman turned servant who agreed to partner with her boss (Andre Jacobs) to play an exotic wild woman performing "savage" dances at carnival sideshows. Her notoriety spread and she appeared in the society salons of London and Paris, where she was ogled, fondled, and presented as a subhuman specimen. Kechiche coolly observes her exploitation in freak show performances in which Baartman is ostensibly a partner, but playing out sexual and racial stereotypes that Europeans use to "prove" her racial inferiority. Kechiche makes an effort to show Baartman being dehumanized without exploiting her and he lets us see her sadness and loss as she plays her role, but mostly she's a voiceless enigma who seems to passively accept her place. A provocative and often disturbing film, *Black Venus* captures the ugliness of exploitation and the misery of Baartman's life. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Blockers ★★1/2

Universal, 102 min., R, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99, July 3



Three high-school girls make a pact to lose their virginity on prom night, while their parents try to stop them. Their story begins on the first day of elementary school, when the girls become instant BFFs. Fast-forward to high school, where the teens are still thick-as-thieves. Julie (Kathryn Newton) is the light of her overly-clingy, single mom Lisa's (Leslie Mann) life. Still suffering because her wise-cracking dad, Hunter (Ike Barinholtz), disappeared after cheating on her mom, sweet, bespectacled Sam (Gideon Adlon) suspects that she herself is gay. And athletic, adventurous Kayla (Geraldine Viswanathan) was raised in the image of Mitchell (John Cena), her softie/jock dad. Before they take off for the prom, Julie tells Sam and Kayla that she's planning to have sex with her longtime boyfriend Austin (Graham Phillips), filling them in on all the details. This inspires Sam and Kayla to plot their own deflowering. But when Julie goes on prom night, she inadvertently leaves a message app running on her laptop. Lisa spies the somewhat bewildering, emoji-riddled group texting, which concludes with the unmistakable #sexpact2018. Lisa is determined to prevent Julie from making the same mistakes she did. Springing into helicopter parental action, Lisa, Mitchell, and Hunter embark on their own overly-protective pursuit, countering myriad mishaps along the way. Kay Cannon makes her directorial debut in

this sex comedy that is sporadically funny but unable to find a consistent tone. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

The Boy Downstairs ★★

FilmRise, 90 min., PG-13, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95



Awkward, indecisive, ordinary people are at the center of filmmaker Sophie Brooks's dull, low-key rom-com. Returning to New York after spending three years in London, thirty-ish Diana (Zosia Mamet) is an aspiring writer who ostensibly works in a bridal shop, but—judging by her spacious Fort Greene apartment—is still being financially supported by her indulgent father. It isn't until after she has moved into the apartment building, which is owned by a widow (Deirdre O'Connell), that Diana realizes her old boyfriend, a musician named Ben (Matthew Shear), lives on the ground floor with his new girlfriend (Sarah Ramos). Frequent extended flashbacks reveal how the fumbling romance between squirrely Diana and snuggly Ben flamed and fizzled after she decided that she preferred freedom over commitment, which left him heartbroken. But now Diana is back in Brooklyn, filled with regrets and heavily into full-time flirting with good-guy Ben. That they will reconnect and re-ignite their relationship is an absolutely foregone conclusion. Unfortunately, sarcastic Diana is so constantly befuddled that it's hard to either identify or sympathize with her. And her hair/makeup/wardrobe choices make her look as unattractive as possible. Optional, at best. (S. Granger)

The Child in Time ★★★

PBS, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



Based on novelist Ian McEwan's 1987 novel, filmmaker Julian Farino's PBS-aired adaptation boasts formidable star power in Benedict Cumberbatch and Kelly Macdonald, playing a couple split apart by the abduction of their daughter, who disappears one day in the supermarket while her father blithely goes about his business at the checkout. Cumberbatch's character Stephen is a children's book author who spends years looking for his lost child Kate, whereas his best friend Charles (Stephen Campbell Moore) is searching for a different kind of child—his inner child. Charles is a powerful political figure and publisher who eventually retires to the countryside and proceeds to crack up, reverting back to his childhood instincts and running like a crazed lunatic around the forest outside his country house in a descent into primal madness. Of course this wouldn't be a McEwan story without a few unnecessarily morbid twists and a

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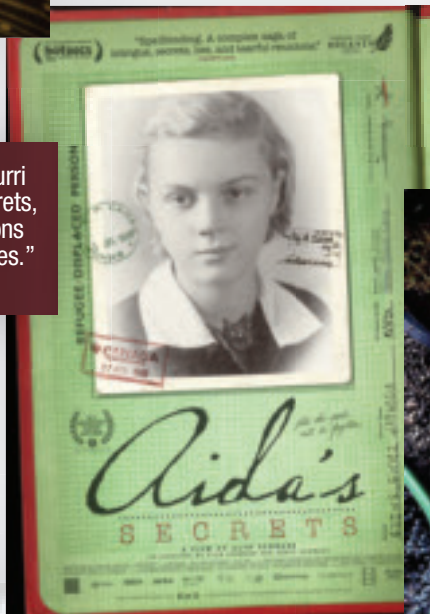


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pitch-black sense of humor (when there is any humor at all). Cumberbatch and Macdonald turn in fine performances in this typical McEwan landscape: an upper-crust world where human irrationality and psychosis is the norm. Recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Dayveon ★★1/2

FilmRise, 76 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95

A dreamy, elegiac vibe permeates Amman Abbasi's debut feature, despite a story that focuses on a troubled boy's induction into a street gang. The reason lies in the setting, which is not a teeming, crime-ridden city but rather the small Arkansas town where Dayveon (Devin Blackmon) lives. His parents are absent; his mother was driven mad by the apparent gang retribution death of Dayveon's idolized older brother. Although he is cared for by his sister (Chasity Moore) and her good-natured boyfriend Bryan (Dontrell Bright), Dayveon is simmering with anger, contemptuously dismissing everything as worthless in stream-of-consciousness monologues that he delivers as he rides his bike aimlessly through the dusty landscape. Dayveon proves to be an easy target for recruitment by the local Bloods, and after a nasty beating welcoming him into the group, he is tested by its leaders in a couple of robberies, even as he and his friend Brayden (Kordell Johnson) spend the long, hot afternoons in meandering walks and offhanded target practice. The overriding question is whether Dayveon will succumb to the lure of gang life, with its promise of money and pleasure at the roadhouse where the Bloods hang out, or heed Bryan's advice to not fall into the cycle of violence that has already claimed so many young black men. While Abbasi's film is notable for its naturalistic style, and the performances carry an air of unaffected authenticity, the story follows an overly familiar trajectory. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Dear Dictator ★★

Cinedigm, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$16.99, Blu-ray: \$19.99

Several years ago, screenwriting/directing partners Lisa Addario and Joe Syracuse came up with a crazy idea: What if a rebellious teenager became the pen-pal of a notorious, Castro-like tyrant of a small Caribbean island nation—and he suddenly arrived on her doorstep? That's what happens when sullen 16-year-old Tatiana (Odeya Rush) satisfies her social studies teacher's (Jason Biggs) assignment to "write to a famous person" by choosing Gen. Anton Vincent (Michael Caine), who responds, leading to a cordial correspondence. When Vincent is deposed



by U.S.-backed forces, he supposedly disappears, but in reality seeks refuge in Tatiana's garage in suburban Savannah, GA. Using her computer to communicate with loyalists, Vincent plots his return to power, while teaching Tatiana how to overthrow her own oppressors—the clique of mean girls who make her high school life miserable. "Take out the leaders," he tells her. "Foment unrest. Assume authority." Meanwhile, Tatiana's single mother (Katie Holmes)—a love-starved dental hygienist—is having an affair with her creepy boss (Seth Green), a married man with a foot fetish. And there's another weak subplot involving Tatiana's Christian fundamentalist boyfriend (Jackson Beard). Originally titled *Coup D'Etat*, the satire should have been sharper and more subversive. And while Caine tries hard, he's more convincing as Tatiana's avuncular advisor than as a ruthless despot. Optional. (S. Granger)

Death Wish ★

Fox, 107 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99

There is little to recommend director Eli Roth's tepid, trigger-happy reboot of Michael Winner's 1974 vigilante thriller in which a mild-mannered architect (Charles Bronson) used his military training to become a vengeful killer after thugs invaded his home, killed his wife, and assaulted his daughter. Moving the location from New York to Chicago, the story introduces Dr. Paul Kersey (Bruce Willis), who lives in posh suburbia, where his wife (Elisabeth Shue) is murdered and his college-age daughter (Camila Morrone) is left comatose in a bungled burglary. So, the trauma surgeon becomes a vigilante, donning a discarded hoodie and toting a Glock taken from a gang-banger. Armed and angry, Paul is determined to hunt down the three masked culprits and avenge his family. When Paul sees a nasty carjacking in process, he shoots the thieves in cold-blood, an act captured on video by a bystander's phone, after which sociopathic Paul becomes a celebrity, famous on social media as the "Grim Reaper." And the police? According to two detectives (Dean Norris, Kimberly Elise), there are just too many homicides—48 in just one weekend. Len Cariou appears briefly as Paul's rifle-toting father-in-law and Vincent D'Onofrio costars as Paul's troubled younger brother. Torture porn director Roth veers from Brian Garfield's 1972 anti-vigilantism novel, turning the story into the amoral transformation of a man who saved lives but now takes them in a film that also panders to the NRA. Not recommended. (S. Granger)



The Divine Order ★★★

Kino Lorber, 96 min., in Swiss German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99

With the American sexual revolution in

full swing in 1971, women in the Swiss mountain town of director Petra Volpe's film feel like they're missing out. In addition to the rigid societal expectations, they aren't even allowed to vote. Nora (Marie Leuenberger), a mother of two, is tired of looking after her cranky father-in-law, and she dreams of working as a travel agent, but her husband Hans (Max Simonischek), who recently received a raise, doesn't see the need and therefore doesn't give his permission. When a women's action committee hands Nora some literature, she devours it hungrily, and—encouraged by a newly arrived Italian café owner—she applies for the agent job, lets down her hair, and invests in a pair of jeans. While Hans is out of town, she also joins the committee, which leads to townspeople turning against her (even her youngest son thinks she's just trying to be a man). When a community meeting fails to bridge the divide between the genders, the women go on strike. While the women swap sex advice (Nora has never had an orgasm), Hans attempts to cook. Although undeniably frustrated, Hans is a mild case compared to his coworkers, who are an almost cartoonishly brutish bunch. In Volpe's microcosmic take on a larger process, some of the town's marriages, like Nora's, improve as a result of women's rights, while others fall apart. Change isn't easy, and the men are never as sympathetic as the women in *The Divine Order*, which nicely captures a difficult but necessary struggle. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

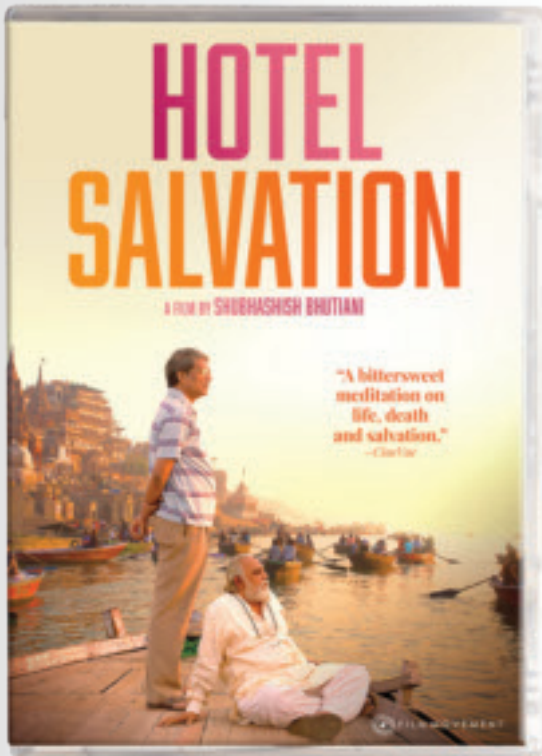


Every Day ★★

Warner, 97 min., PG-13, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray: \$35.99

Based on David Levithan's 2012 YA bestseller, this angst-filled, adolescent fantasy film revolves around someone who awakens every morning in a different body. While the novel took place through the eyes of "A," a sensitive soul who temporarily inhabits unsuspecting teenagers for a 24-hour period, this dramedy shares the focus with 16-year-old Rhiannon (Angourie Rice) who is taken for granted by her cocky, chain-smoking boyfriend Justin (Justice Smith). One day, A awakens in Justin's body. He immediately becomes the attentive beau who Rhiannon always wanted, urging her to spend a romantic afternoon with him, strolling on the beach, singing "This is the Day," and sharing thoughts, hopes, and dreams. But the following day, Nathan is back to his callous, egocentric self, as A's consciousness moves into another body. But guileless Rhiannon has fallen in love with A's shape-shifting spirit, which continues to relate to Rhiannon even though it presents in a different gender, skin color, etc., each time they hook up





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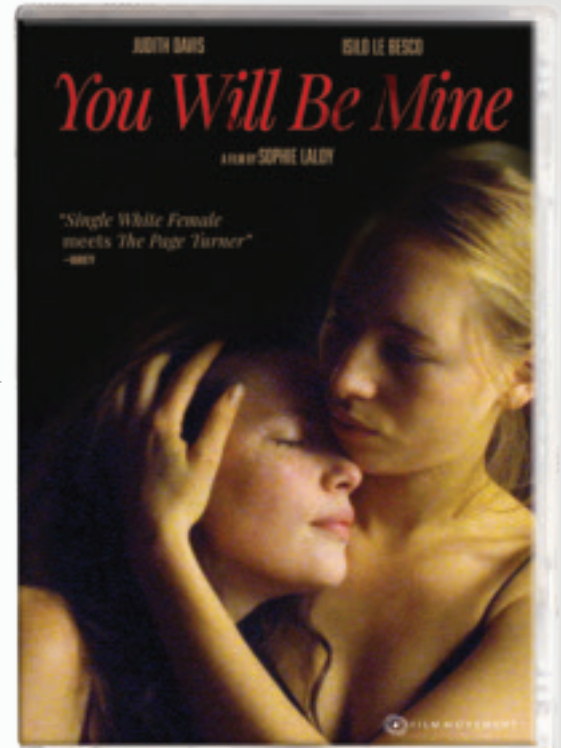
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YOU WILL BE MINE
(AVAILABLE 7/24)

When Marie (Judith Davis), a gifted pianist, is seduced by her roommate, Emma (Isild Le Besco), she struggles to reconcile her feelings of desire with the need to escape.

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("Would you love me if I looked like somebody else?"). Director Michael Sucsy unfortunately dilutes the relevant themes of sexual identity, ambiguous diversity, and conventional labeling, but the supernatural premise remains intriguing. Optional. (S. Granger)

The Fencer ★★★

Music Box, 99 min., in Estonian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99



Klaus Härö's Golden Globe-nominated *The Fencer*, based on the career of Estonian fencing master Endel Nelis, is a crowd-pleaser in the inspirational teacher genre. Nelis (Märt Avandi) arrives in Haapsalu, a small town on the western Estonian coast, in 1953, having fled Leningrad because of KGB suspicions that he served in the German army against the Soviets during World War II—which many Estonian men his age were forced to do by their Nazi occupiers. Nelis becomes the PE teacher in the local public school, where using his skill in the sport he starts a fencing club over the objections of the principal. It becomes wildly popular among the kids, many of whom are impoverished orphans like charming Marta (Liisa Koppel) and taciturn Jaan (Joonas Koff), who grow so proficient that they ask to participate in a competition back in Leningrad. Nelis, whose initial reserve is broken down by the students, decides to take them despite the danger to himself and the pleas of his fellow teacher Kadri (Ursula Ratasepp), who has grown sweet on him. What happens at the tournament follows a predictable *Karate Kid* formula, but the young actors are a likable bunch and Härö makes the familiar plot run like a well-oiled machine. Moreover, *The Fencer* offers compelling insight into Estonia's unhappy history during the war and under Stalin's rule. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

The Forgiven ★★

Lionsgate, 120 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$21.99

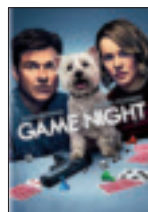


Based on Michael Ash-ton's 2011 play *The Archbishop and the Antichrist*, this intense docudrama examines the (fictionalized) relationship between the iconic South African cleric Desmond Tutu and a notorious, white-supremacist murderer who is seeking clemency. In the mid-1990s when the Archbishop (Forest Whitaker) was appointed by then-President Nelson Mandela to head the Truth and Reconciliation Committee to confront the atrocities of apartheid, one of the most notorious defendants was Afrikaner Piet Blomfeld (Eric Bana), an unrepentantly racist psychopath. Incarcerated in Cape Town's brutal maximum-security Pollsmoor Prison, Blomfeld's past is explored

in flashbacks, juxtaposed with a larger investigation of Operation Hacksaw—a police conspiracy that resulted in the disappearance of a black teenager whose grieving mother (Thandi Makhubele) pleads for justice in a climactic courtroom scene. Burdened by a distracting prosthetic nose, Whitaker nevertheless delivers a powerhouse performance that's been enthusiastically endorsed by Tutu himself, and he's matched by Bana's charismatic savagery. But director Roland Joffe's *The Forgiven* is unfortunately unfocused, slowly paced, and overly earnest. And its theatrical origins are obvious, resulting in stilted, talky confrontations. Optional. (S. Granger)

Game Night ★★

Warner, 100 min., R, DVD: \$28.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$38.99



In John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein's action comedy, Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams star as Max and Annie, a couple devoted to playing—and winning—competitive games. They host a weekly game night with friends: married couple Kevin (Lamorne Morris) and Michelle (Kylie Bunbury), and goofy single guy (and would-be stud) Ryan (Billy Magnussen), who brings a new date each week. Max and Annie are also trying to get pregnant, but their efforts are hampered by Max's stress, which is occasioned by the arrival of his older, cooler, fabulously successful brother Brooks (Kyle Chandler), who has always bested him and insists on taking over game night with a contest in which players will vie to solve a fake kidnapping. Naturally, things go awry as Brooks is snatched for real, and the players are forced into a search for a couple of nefarious international criminals. Many complications follow, not least the repeated intervention of a creepy neighbor cop (Jesse Plemons). Such an intricate caper needs to be constructed with consummate care in order to succeed, but the plot here is a ramshackle affair with many loose ends as it races towards a slam-bang finish. Optional. (F. Swietek)

Graduation ★★½

Criterion, 127 min., in Romanian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Graduation, from Romanian director Cristian Mungiu (4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days), could be the filmmaker's best effort yet. Romeo (Adrian Titieni) is an accomplished middle-aged doctor living with his family in a tumbledown housing project somewhere outside the bleak university town of Cluj-Napoca in the Transylvanian hills. His 18-year-old daughter has achieved the Romanian Dream: getting the hell out of Romania on a U.K.

student visa. But on the day of her final exams, she's attacked and badly injured, which jeopardizes her ability to complete her assessments, and thus endangers her future. Romeo knows that with his influence there are plenty of paths off the straight and narrow that he can take to save his daughter's dream, but will he risk his professional reputation to do this? As usual, Mungiu works wonders with his own brand of Eastern European kitchen sink drama, not so much passing judgment on Romeo's moral choices as providing just enough information to make the audience his characters' real judge and jury. His depiction of the Ceausescu generation's corruption being passed down like an unwanted heirloom to their children in a post-Communist amoral universe is tough but also compassionate. Highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Gringo ★★½

Universal, 111 min., R, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99



Nash Edgerton's dark action comedy is little more than a collage of feints and misdirection, but its anarchic spirit makes for a tolerably good time. The hero is the titular gringo, Harold Soyinka (David Oyelowo), a principled Nigerian immigrant who serves as operations director of a pharmaceutical company headed by his college pal Richard (Joel Edgerton) and cynical Elaine (Charlize Theron), with whom married Richard is sharing more than office space. Unbeknownst to Harold, Richard and Elaine are planning to sell the company—which is about to launch a prospectively game-changing marijuana pill—to a larger firm, dumping him in the process, but to smooth the way they need to sever ties with a Mexican drug lord they have been supplying with weed. When Harold learns of their scheme during a trip to Mexico, he decides to stage his own kidnapping and pocket the ransom money that Richard will have to pay. Of course, Howard's plan goes awry, and he finds himself pursued by the drug lord's thugs, Richard's crazy brother, and a variety of other oddball characters. Despite a few logical holes, the intricacies and reversals here tie together reasonably well, while the cast seems to enjoy the cartoonish antics of this comic pulp, a mixture of nasty farce and violent action. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Have a Nice Day ★★★

Strand, 75 min., in Chinese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99



Liu Jian's ironically titled animated film might best be described as a bleakly comic gangster tale, depicting a series of disasters that follow from the theft of a bundle of money belonging to a crime

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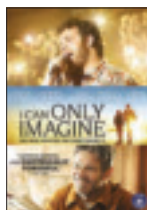
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boss—nicknamed Uncle Liu—by an underling who wants to pay for his girlfriend's cosmetic surgery. Uncle, who is introduced as he casually tortures an old friend, instructs his personal hitman to track down the traitor, but the thief has already been robbed by a mysterious fellow with x-ray glasses. And that man's girlfriend absconds with the bag after he accidentally gets electrocuted. Meanwhile, the original thief's relatives join in the search for the loot as well, and the bodies begin piling up in profusion. The animation—apart from some brightly-colored fantasy sequences—is deliberately flat, with a dark noir-ish look, and Jian's underlying critique of the obsession with money in the impoverished cities of today's China hardly goes very deep. Yet despite (or perhaps because of) the echoes here from films like *Reservoir Dogs* and *Fargo*—with their similarly bungling cast of characters—*Have a Nice Day* holds one's interest, especially being a relatively short film. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

I Can Only Imagine

★★★1/2

Lionsgate, 110 min., PG, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



Inspiration comes with a side helping of music in this biographical movie about Texas-born singer-songwriter Bart Millard and his composition of the title tune, which became the most-played Christian single in history and a staple in many church services. Millard, played as a young boy by Brody Rose and a young man by Broadway headliner J. Michael Finley, is abused by his angry, alcoholic father (Dennis Quaid). After a football injury in high school compels him to switch to choir, he takes the lead in the campus production of *Oklahoma!* and then runs off to seek a music career, leaving his hometown sweetheart behind. Millard joins a band, gains a manager (Trace Adkins), reconciles with his born-again, cancer-stricken dad and—after the latter's death—writes the song about what heaven must be like. With support from stars like Amy Grant, the song becomes a smash hit, and the rest is history in Christian music circles. Will Millard also win back his erstwhile girlfriend? This is obviously a faith-based movie, although less heavy-handed than many and it benefits from Finley's singing, while Quaid brings his typically broad emotional punch to the mix. So, even though this unquestionably preaches to the choir, it should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

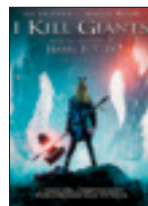
I Kill Giants

★★★1/2

RLJ, 106 min., not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$29.99

A young girl defends her coastal New Jersey town against imaginary monsters in filmmaker Anders Walter's adaptation of a 2009 graphic novel by Joe Kelly and Ken Niimura.

Barbara (Madison Wolfe) is an outcast at school (among other things, she insists on wearing goofy rabbit ears on her head), continuously bullied by the campus mean girl (Rory Jackson), and receiving special attention from the recently-arrived faculty counselor (Zoe Saldana). Her older sister Karen (Imogen Poots), struggling to take care of Barbara and her older brother, finds it difficult to contend with Barbara's determination to defend the beach beside their house against the destructive giants the latter expects to rise from the sea. Sophia (Sydney Wade), a new student from England, befriends Barbara, but in the end she also proves unreliable, and the troubled heroine must confront her demons on her own. Unfortunately, the cause behind Barbara's obsession is not just familiar, but also clumsily concealed until the final reel. Still, *I Kill Giants* boasts fine performances, surprisingly impressive special effects, and an affecting message, making it a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



In Between

★★★1/2

Film Movement, 103 min., in Arabic & Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



Three young Palestinian women share an apartment in modern Tel Aviv in this provocative drama from Maysaloun Hamoud, a filmmaker making her feature debut. Leila (Mouna Hawa) is a successful lawyer who enjoys the urban nightlife of the city. Salma (Sana Jammeli) is an aspiring DJ with a rebellious streak who is hiding the fact that she's a lesbian from her parents. Noor (Shaden Kanboura), a traditional young woman in the city to finish her studies before her marriage to a conservative Muslim fiancé, is the newcomer. Noor's pious fiancé thinks that her roommates are impure but when she refuses to move out, he rapes her, after which Leila and Salma step up to support her. *In Between* is a feminist portrait of women who defy tradition, making a statement about the hypocrisy of modern Islamic culture in urban Tel Aviv, where Arab men demand that women comport themselves in public according to conservative tradition while breaking the same traditions themselves. While the film touches on the trials and tribulations of Palestinians living in Israel, the focus is on the struggles of women challenging the expectations of traditional Islamic culture in the modern urban world. A superb drama, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

In Search of Fellini

★★★

Samuel Goldwyn, 103 min., R, DVD: \$14.99

Although structured and shot in a predictable mock-Fellini style (dreamlike, plotless),

to say that this is a cinematic love letter to the work of the titular Italian director would be an insult to the old maestro. The trouble with filmmaker Taron Lexton's *In Search of Fellini* is that its soppy sentimentality and persistent humorlessness overrides any sense of Fellini-esque playful wonderment. The story centers on 20-year-old, impossibly awkward Ohio native Lucy (Ksenia Solo), who fawns over Fellini and obsessively watches his films in her bedroom. When her doting mother (Maria Bello) is diagnosed with cancer she begs Lucy to finally get out of the house and see the world. Lucy decides she wants to meet Fellini, and since this is clearly a film in which cartoonish fantasia rules, Lucy is able to make an appointment to meet the director at his office in Rome. But since Lucy is such an inept doofus, she misses her plane and ends up in Verona. During her surreal misadventures in that city (and later in Venice) she's ushered into a Fellini-esque underworld of shady revelers who happen to resemble characters in Fellini films. Unfortunately, Lucy's doe-eyed vulnerability and social ineptness are only briefly endearing, after which she becomes a serious patience tester. Optional. (M. Sandlin)



Jane

★★★★★

Fox, 90 min., PG, DVD: \$24.99



National Geographic's enthralling and enlightening documentary tells the story of how the acclaimed naturalist Jane Goodall arrived in Gombe, Tanzania, in the 1960s and became fascinated with chimpanzees. What makes it extraordinary is director Brett Morgen's use of rare 16mm film shot by Jane's former husband, Hugo van Lawick. Previously thought to be lost, the footage was discovered in 2014 in a storage unit and has been cleverly intercut with recent interviews with the legendary primatologist. "From the age of 10, I dreamed of going to live with wild animals and write books about them," she notes. "Nobody knew anything about chimpanzees. There were no methods or field research. To learn about chimps meant being with them and gaining their trust. So that's what I did." Goodall met van Lawick when the Dutch photographer was dispatched by National Geographic. In van Lawick's footage, chimpanzees kiss, embrace, hold hands, groom one another, and beg for food, and while the animals can have a dark side to their nature, they also clearly experience compassion and love, and can feel angry or sad (and can die of grief), all of which finally forced scientists to admit that humans are not the only creatures on the planet with personalities, intelligence, and emotions. Goodall and van Lawick

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PRINCESS CYD follows 16-year-old athlete Cyd Loughlin (Jessie Pinnick) while visiting her novelist aunt (Rebecca Spence) in Chicago over the summer. Eager to escape life with her depressive single father, Cyd falls for a girl in the neighborhood, while she and her aunt gently challenge each other in the realms of sex and spirituality.



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Young soccer star Charlie has the world at his feet. With a top club desperate to sign him, his future is seemingly mapped out. But the teenager sees only a nightmare. Trapped in the body of a boy, Charlie is torn between wanting to live up to her father's expectations and shedding this ill-fitting skin. Charlie's next move will tear the family apart and threaten everything they hold dear.



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BFFs Kim, Momo and Bella are bullied by boys at school while their teachers do nothing. But when the trio finds a magical plant whose nectar temporarily turns them into boys (with working genitalia), it offers them the thrilling chance to experience freedoms they've never known. Then Kim becomes addicted to the plant and pursues a dangerous relationship with a local boy, putting everyone at risk.



106 MIN / COLOR / WOL5393D • SRP \$26.95 UPC 754703764447
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were married in 1964, and they had a son, nicknamed "Grub," who accompanied them everywhere, even when van Lawick was transferred to Africa's Serengeti. But Jane's heart remained with her work in Gombe and the couple eventually separated in 1974. Now 84, Goodall still travels around the world, advocating for conservancy. An excellent profile, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (S. Granger)

Like Me ★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 83 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99

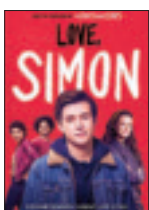
The destructive ways in which lonely, desperate people use the Internet to attract online "friends" are explored in flamboyant style here by first-time writer-director Robert Mockler. Gloomy Kiya (Addison Timlin) is determined to escape her dismal, drug-fueled existence by shooting videos designed to appeal to YouTube junkies, beginning with a convenience store robbery in which she forces the initially nonchalant clerk to beg for his life. That piece receives enthusiastic response from most viewers—who seem as troubled as Kiya—but there is one exception: Burt (Ian Nelson), who pedantically blasts its creator as an attention-seeking hack and points to her supporters as proof of cultural calamity. Kiya goes on to seduce a sleazy motel manager (Larry Fessenden) into letting her tie him up for sex and then films his humiliation, but afterward takes him with her as a hostage. As they travel, the pair develop an odd bond, suggesting that Kiya may be developing an ability to interact with real people. Still, she insists on tracking down and confronting Burt. Mockler indulges in all sorts of cinematic tricks—brightly-colored montages of random images, hyperkinetic editing, blaring music—that are more exhausting than exhilarating. But while often overwrought and confusing, *Like Me* marks Mockler as an inventive filmmaker with promise. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Love, Simon ★★★

Fox, 110 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99

This sensitive, sweetly sincere, upbeat romantic comedy is a coming-of-age story that also marks the first major studio PG-13 wide-release film to revolve around an openly homosexual adolescent. Based on Becky Albertalli's 2015 YA novel, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, the central character is popular 17-year-old high school senior Simon Spier (Nick Robinson), who ruefully notes that he's never "the leading guy." Instead, he's relegated to being "the best friend." So Simon decides: "I'm done living in a world where I don't get to be



who I am. I deserve a great love story." Affable Simon lives in an idyllic Atlanta suburb with empathetic parents (Jennifer Garner, Josh Duhamel) and a younger sister (Talitha Bateman), and he has a trio of supportive pals (Katherine Langford, Alexandra Shipp, Jorge Lendeborg Jr.). But Simon hasn't come out yet, and this reluctance leaves him open to blackmail by a drama club classmate (Logan Miller) when Simon's mysterious virtual love interest is revealed: Simon, utilizing the pseudonym "Jacques," has been corresponding on the school's chat board with another anonymous student, dubbed "Blue," who is also gay. As suspense builds, Blue's identity is kept secret until the sealed-with-a-kiss climax. Smartly directed by Greg Berlanti, this is recommended. (S. Granger)

Loveless ★★★★★

Sony, 127 min., in Russian w/ English subtitles, R, Blu-ray: \$30.99

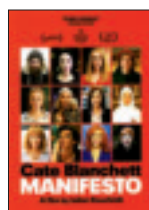
The spiritual and moral rot permeating modern Russian society lies at the heart of director Andrey Zvyagintsev's somber Oscar-nominated film. On the surface, *Loveless* is a procedural mystery about the disappearance of a child, but on a deeper level it reflects the narcissistic emptiness at the center of so many lives, including those of the missing boy's parents, Boris (Alexey Rozin) and Zhenya (Maryana Spivak). A middle-class Moscow couple, they are working out the details of their divorce in a far from amicable process: the pair no longer talk to one another so much as string together insults, and both have already found new lovers. Their discord devastates 12-year-old son Alyosha (Matvey Novikov), whom neither parent wants custody of. But when the boy disappears and the police shrug it off, the couple contact a volunteer agency for assistance. The remainder of *Loveless* follows the search through forests and abandoned buildings, as well as the distant, isolated home of Zhenya's widowed mother (Natalya Potapova), who proves to be venomously unconcerned about what might have happened to her grandson. A lacerating portrait of a country in decline, made with an uncompromising vision, this is a brilliant piece of filmmaking. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (F. Swietek)



Manifesto ★★★

FilmRise, 95 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95

Cate Blanchett plays 13 characters in German artist Julian Rosefeldt's feature-length film based on his earlier multi-screen gallery installation exhibited in Berlin and New York. In a series of scenes (sometimes intercut with one another), the actress portrays people declaiming a medley of



revolutionary manifestos, beginning with Karl Marx and followed by would-be artistic rebels, from Futurists, minimalists, and figures in the Fluxus movement, to surrealists, expressionists, and exponents of the Dogme 95 filmmaking school. At different times Blanchett adopts the guises of a homeless man, a news anchor, a wealthy capitalist, a puppeteer, a factory worker, and a scientist. Among the more amusing segments are ones in which she plays a Gloria Swanson-like choreographer rehearsing a bevy of dancers, a prim mother saying a prolonged grace at a meal as her husband and children fidget and giggle, a eulogist delivering a Dadaist diatribe at a funeral, and a teacher instructing her astonished young charges about filmmaking in the words of people like Stan Brakhage and Lars von Trier. *Manifesto* is an extended piece of recorded performance art, very well done from a technical perspective, with Blanchett clearly relishing the opportunity to take on so many rambunctious characters. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Maya the Bee 2: The Honey Games ★★

Shout! Factory, 85 min., not rated, DVD: \$14.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$22.99

This so-so follow-up to 2014's computer-animated *Maya the Bee* seems more like a platform for encouraging kids to buy video games than a story with whole-cloth integrity. Once again, eternally positive and hopeful bee girl Maya (voiced by Coco Jack Gillies) shakes up the insect world when she implores a bee empress (Marney McQueen)—the hardhearted sister of the queen (Justine Clarke) of Maya's hive—not to demand half of the winter food that is stored for the colony. The best the empress will do is pronounce the arrival of competitive games between insect colonies; if Maya's team wins, they can keep all their honey. Much of the film becomes a sequence of games, from dodgeball to a team climbing exercise. Maya's friend Willi (Benson Jack Anthony) offers comic relief as a swooning doofus infatuated with the mean-girl bee who is trying to sabotage Maya's plans. The animation here is quite pleasing—with colorful bugs and blooming spring flowers—but without a substantive story, this sequel is a disappointment. Optional. (T. Keogh)



A Midsummer Night's Dream ★★1/2

Passion River, 104 min., not rated, DVD: \$69.99

Shakespeare's play receives highly imaginative but overly busy treatment from filmmaker Casey Wilder Mott, who transfers the action to pres-





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ZAMA

From Lucrecia Martel, the director of
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- The Atlantic

- The Playlist

- ScreenDaily

"THRILLING!" "BREATHTAKING!" "DRAMATIC!"

- Variety

- Vogue

- The New Yorker

"SURREAL!"

- The Hollywood Reporter

"RAVISHING!"

- Paste Magazine

"MASTERPIECE!"

- Screen Anarchy

Zama, an officer of the Spanish Crown born in South America, waits for a letter from the King granting him a transfer from the town in which he is stagnating, to a better place. The years go by and the letter from the King never arrives. When Zama notices everything is lost, he joins a party of soldiers that go after a dangerous bandit.

Street Date: August 7, 2018 | DVD / Blu-ray SRP: \$27.99 / \$32.99

DVD # 3720-2 | UPC 7 12267 37202 7 Blu-ray # 3720-3 | UPC 7 12267 37203 4

115 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In Spanish with English subtitles



THE WORKSHOP

The new film from the Palme d'Or
winning director of *The Class*

Antoine attends a summer writing workshop
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conservative viewpoints clash with the writing
group and Olivia.

Street Date: Jun 19, 2018 | SRP: \$27.99

DVD # 3719-2 | UPC 7 12267 37192 1

105 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In French with English subtitles



O FANTASMA

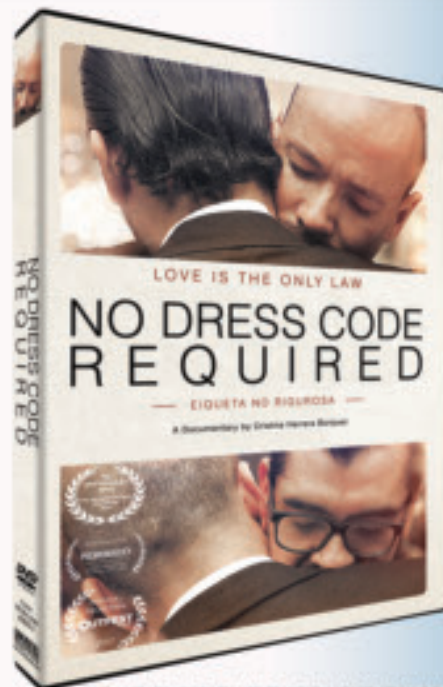
The debut film of João Pedro
Rodrigues is back in print!

An "audacious and compelling, dark and erotic
cautionary tale about a marginalized young man,
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From the director of *The Ornithologist*.

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DVD #: 3803-2 | UPC: 7 12267 38032 9

93 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In Portuguese with English subtitles



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A documentary about LGBTQ
marriage equality in California

Bórquez's memorable doc follows a same-sex
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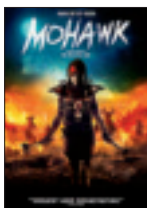
DVD #: 3805-2 | UPC: 7 12267 38052 7

92 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In Spanish with English subtitles

ent-day Los Angeles with only limited success. Duke Theseus (Ted Levine) is a powerful producer, while Hermia (Rachael Leigh Cook) is a movie star in love with celebrity photographer Lysander (Hamish Linklater). Her father Egeus (Alan Blumenfeld) wants Hermia to wed Demetrius (Finn Wittrock), a take-no-prisoners agent beloved of screenwriter Helena (Lily Rabe). Of course the four young lovers' affections are altered by the magic of Puck (Avan Jogia), the surfer-dude servant of fairy king Oberon (Saul Williams), whose wife is Titania (Mia Doi Todd). Meanwhile, a mediocre acting troupe headed by self-important Bottom (Fran Kranz) makes a movie about Pyramus and Thisbe under the direction of quirky director Quince (Charity Wakefield) that will ultimately be shown to the duke, his betrothed Hippolyta (Paz de la Huerta), and the partnered lovers in Theseus's screening room. While the modern transpositions work reasonably well, some—such as dressing up Pyramus and Thisbe to look like Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia—are juvenile, as is the decision to have Bottom's transformation into an ass (donkey) depicted by showing his head as a human derriere. Nonetheless, the vigor of Mott's approach (which extends to hyperkinetic editing and the periodic use of animation) coupled with the commitment of the actors make this an intriguing if not altogether successful take on the play. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Mohawk ★★1/2

MPI, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Writer-director Ted Geoghegan's *Mohawk* is set late in the War of 1812 in upstate New York, where Mohawk warrior Calvin (Justin Rain) and his female companion Oak (Kaniehtiio Horn) are partnered with Joshua (Eamon Farren), an Englishman who not only wants to encourage their tribe to take up arms against the Americans but seems to be romantically involved with both Calvin and Oak. After Calvin takes it upon himself to massacre an outpost of U.S. irregulars, the trio are pursued by a contingent of Americans led by bloodthirsty Col. Holt (Ezra Buzzington). Much mayhem ensues, and the film eventually takes a supernatural turn involving a reanimated corpse transformed into a vengeful spirit wearing a skull as a mask. Less a straightforward horror movie than an historically-based rumination on the nature of human savagery, *Mohawk* certainly has enough gore to satisfy genre fans, but it is hobbled by the pitfalls of making a period movie on a limited budget. While the locations are atmospheric, the costumes and makeup never look fully authentic, and the acting can be amateurish, although some will be willing to overlook these failings in view of Geoghegan's expert staging of

many violent sequences. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Nocturama ★★★

Grasshopper, 130 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99



French filmmaker Bertrand Bonello infuses a terrorist thriller with social commentary in *Nocturama*, which follows a group of millennials who stage an attack on the symbols of global capitalism in Paris. The first half of the film is a crisply executed caper following an elaborate, exacting terrorist action undertaken by young adults who seem to have no political ideology beyond a desire to tear it all down with a symbolic (yet destructive and splashy) assault on the pillars of modern life. The second half, set in the confines of a high-end department store where they hide out for the night to wait out the police dragnets and public panic, is more dreamy and unreal. Under the influence of pumping adrenaline, anxiety overdrive, and nervous energy with no outlet, these consumer culture rebels become seduced by the fashions and high-end furniture and electronics surrounding them. Viewers don't learn much about this rainbow coalition—a mix of affluent and working-class individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds—beyond their shared disillusionment with the status quo. As the authorities close in, the political rhetoric gives way to the reality of a bunch of young people who are not exactly sure just what they stand for or why, but are just determined to do something. The social satire here can be challenging and may alienate some viewers, but overall *Nocturama* is a thoughtful and beautifully made film that packs a dramatic punch. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Nostalgia ★★

Universal, 115 min., R, DVD: \$22.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Well-meaning but ponderous, Mark Pellington's film presents a quartet of interrelated stories about the aftermath of loss. It opens with insurance investigator Daniel (John Ortiz) visiting an elderly widower (Bruce Dern) at his cluttered home at the behest of the man's granddaughter, whose concern appears to be her potential inheritance. Daniel then moves on to the rubble of a house devastated by fire, where a widow (Ellen Burstyn) is despondent over losing mementos of the life she shared with her late husband, and annoyed by the suggestion of her son (Nick Offerman) that she consider moving into assisted living. She responds by taking the few valuables that survived the blaze to an appraiser named Will (Jon Hamm), who later proceeds to his

own childhood home, where he and his sister Donna (Catherine Keener) will decide what to keep, following their parents' exodus to a Florida condo. Memories intrude, but the most important intervention comes when Donna's daughter questions the importance of physical mementos in the digital age—a query that will be challenged when a sudden tragedy occurs. The accomplished cast brings what gravity they can to this orgy of gloom and sadness, but even the finest actors can only do so much with scenes that require little more than walking around glumly, looking longingly into the distance, and weeping prodigiously. Despite an occasional moving moment, this cinematic dirge is not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

November ★★★1/2

Oscilloscope, 115 min., in Estonian & German w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Few recent films have been as weirdly entrancing as Rainer Sarnet's dark, fractured fairy tale, based on a 2000 novel by Andrus Kivirähk and set in an impoverished Estonian village presided over by a cadaverous German baron. The locals are a lazy, greedy lot, who horde their meager treasures and dicker with the nearby forest-dwelling Devil to animate "kratts"—contraptions composed of twigs, bones, and bits of metal—to do their bidding (like stealing a neighbor's cow), in exchange for their own souls. The villagers also consort with witches, are sometimes visited by the spirits of the dead with whom they converse and share meals, and scramble to avoid being killed by the plague, which arrives in the form of a beautiful woman who can transform into animals such as goats and pigs. But the central narrative focuses on a romantic quadrangle: Liina (Rea Lest) pines over Hans (Jürgen Liik), although she is betrothed to a grungy old farmer. Hans, meanwhile, is enamored of the baroness, and constructs a snowman kratt to help him win her (to add to the confusion, both women are apparently also werewolves). Sarnet and his cast of actors with unforgettable faces play all of this out in quasi-surrealist style, the strangeness accentuated by luminous black-and-white camerawork. *November* is obviously not directed to a mainstream audience, but more adventurous viewers will appreciate its bold vision and grimly humorous approach. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

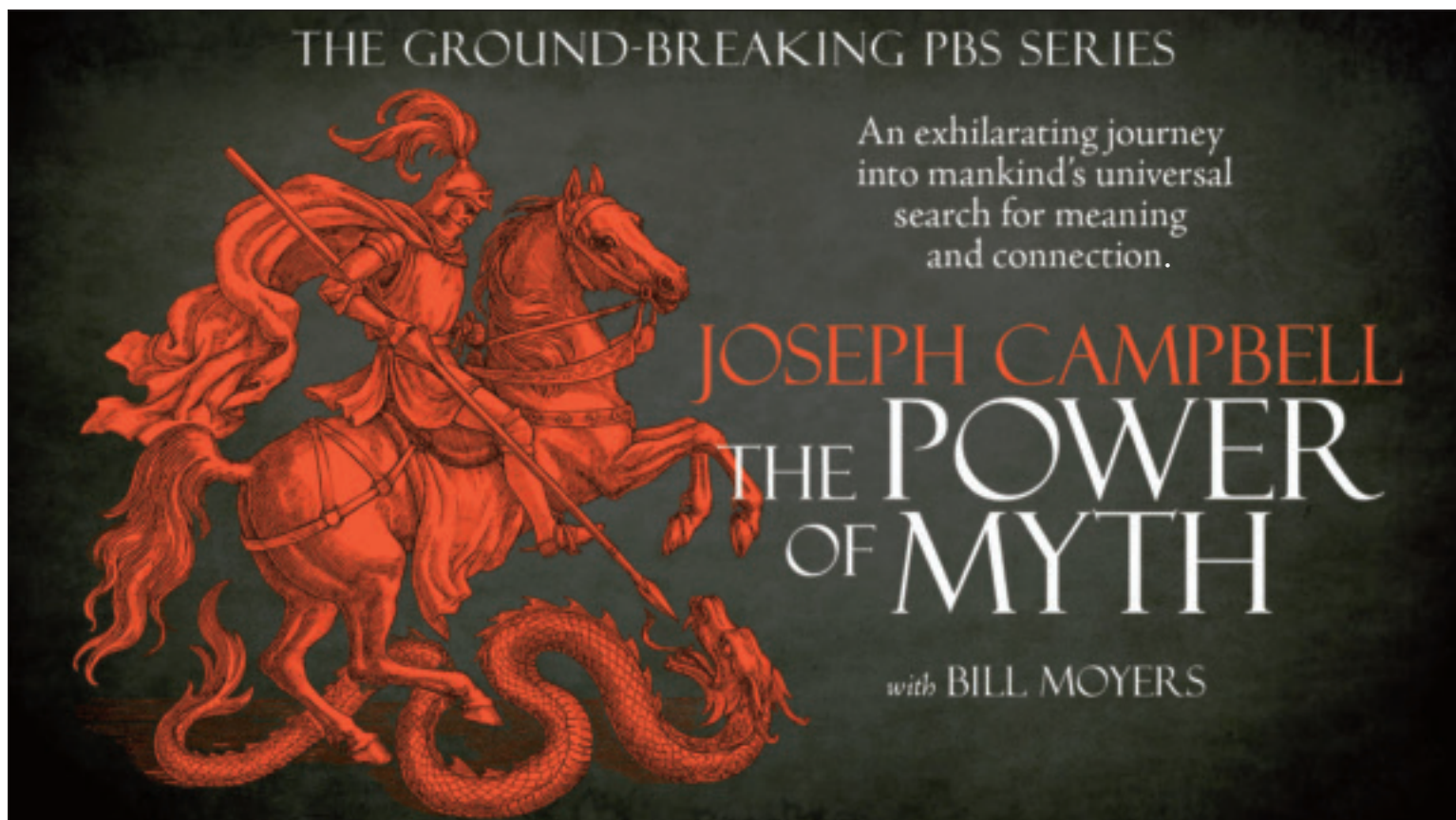
The Only Living Boy in New York ★★

Amazon, 88 min., R, DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.99

"Something's missing, and we all feel it..." are the words that cryptically introduce this shallow, wryly sordid, coming-of-age story about a wannabe fiction writer who becomes involved with his father's mistress. Lifting its

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Released shortly after Campbell’s death on October 30, 1987, *The Power of Myth* was one of the most popular TV series in the history of public television, and continues to inspire new audiences.



THE DIVINE ORDER

Winner of the Audience Award for Best Narrative Film at the Tribeca Film Festival, *The Divine Order* is set in Switzerland in 1971 where, despite the worldwide social upheavals of the previous decade, women were still denied the right to vote. When unassuming and dutiful housewife Nora is forbidden by her husband to take a part-time job, her frustration leads to her becoming the poster child of her town’s suffragette movement.

“Inspired and inspiring... A model for the kind of political struggle that’s now needed more than ever.”
—Film Comment

“A mainstream crowd-pleaser adept at inspiring and amusing in equal measure.”
—Variety



FILMWORKER

Leon Vitali was a rising British actor when Stanley Kubrick cast him in *Barry Lyndon*. That first encounter with the famed auteur proved decisive. He swiftly resolved to devote his life to working for the director, this time behind the scenes. He took on almost every job available: casting director, acting coach, sound engineer, color corrector, A.D., and eventually restorer of Kubrick’s films. The story profiles the devoted “filmworker” as he recounts his days with the notorious director. *Filmworker* celebrates the invisible hands that shape masterpieces, to show that behind every great director, there is a Leon Vitali.

“An arresting cinemaniac documentary. Pure candy for Kubrick buffs.” —Variety

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title from the famous 1970 Simon & Garfunkel song, the story revolves around Thomas Webb (Callum Turner), the privileged twentysomething son of artistic, emotionally fragile Judith (Cynthia Nixon) and arrogant, prominent publisher Ethan (Pierce Brosnan). While his erudite parents host frequent dinner parties for Manhattan's literati at their spacious Upper West Side brownstone, preppy Tom prefers to live in a Lower East Side walk-up, pining for artsy Mimi Pastori (Kiersey Clemons), who already has a boyfriend she's planning to join in Croatia. After some coaxing, lovesick Tom confides his heartache to inquisitive, garrulous neighbor, W.F. Gerald (Jeff Bridges), an alcoholic author who's more than willing to offer ambiguous philosophical advice, becoming Tom's coach/therapist. Tom's equilibrium is further challenged when he inadvertently discovers that his father is having an affair with a sexy British editor, Johanna (Kate Beckinsale). Curious Tom starts stalking mercurial Johanna and soon they're between the sheets. Directed by Marc Webb, the film is distinctly derivative (borrowing from *The Graduate*, among other films), while also delivering an implausible third-act twist. Although the glibly cosmopolitan characters are only superficially developed, Bridges, Brosnan, and Nixon are able to bring far more to the screen than is on the written page, and they are ably supported by Wallace Shawn, Debi Mazar, and Tate Donovan. Optional. (S. Granger)

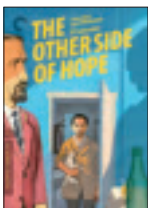


The Other Side of Hope

★★★1/2

Criterion, 100 min., in Finnish & Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Aki Kaurismäki, the Finnish filmmaker with deadpan wit and a minimalist style, continues his evolution from chronicling the bleak lives and soul-deadening jobs of the down and out to celebrating community and second chances in *The Other Side of Hope*, which he says is his last film. Syrian refugee Khaled (Sherwan Haji) arrives in Finland as a stowaway on a coal freighter (emerging black with dust) and requests asylum. Meanwhile, middle-aged salesman Wikström (Sakari Kuosmanen) leaves his hard-drinking wife, sells his business, and buys a failing restaurant, where he tries all sorts of cuisines and gimmicks to bring in customers. Although they cross paths briefly early on, their stories finally intersect when Khaled runs off after being denied asylum. Wikström gives Khaled a job and a place to stay and the offbeat restaurant family helps him find his sister, who was separated from Khaled during their journey. Like Kaurismäki's 2011 film *Le Havre*, this one also takes on



the subjects of immigration and racism (a gang of skinheads targets Khaled because of his ethnicity), but it is hopeful rather than despairing, celebrating individual compassion and a community of eccentrics that lend a hand. A funny, touching, and timely film, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Paradox ★★★

Well Go USA, 100 min., in Cantonese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99

A high-energy Hong Kong thriller set in Thailand, *Paradox* stars crime drama stalwart Louis Koo in his most action-oriented role to date as Lee Chung-chi, a Hong Kong cop who teams up with local police officer Chui Kit (Yue Wu) to find Lee's missing daughter but ends up in the middle of a much larger conspiracy. The two officers follow separate investigations that converge on a black market organ-trafficking ring tied to powerful people in the government and police department. Lee goes rogue and beats information out of thugs while Chui's involvement becomes personal when his pregnant wife is kidnapped. *Paradox* is directed by Wilson Yip (who made the hit *Ip Man* movies with Donnie Yen) as a pseudo-sequel in the popular *SPL* series, featuring the same star and a similar culture of corruption, but with new characters and story. The legendary Sammo Hung choreographs with his trademark style of incorporating locations and props into his fights and Thai action star Tony Jaa has a small role as a cop sidekick with a standout death scene involving amazing stuntwork. The buddy story between the two dedicated cops who share both a moral code and personal investment in the case anchors the narrative, but the flamboyant action choreography, impressive stunt work, and driving momentum are the real draw. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



The Party ★★★

Lionsgate, 71 min., R, DVD: \$19.99

Few social gatherings are quite as disastrous as the one in Sally Potter's *The Party*, which degenerates into acrimony as secrets emerge that put everyone at odds. Hostess Janet (Kristin Scott Thomas) is a British politician who has just been appointed Minister of Health, while her husband Bill (Timothy Spall) is suspiciously morose, and seems about to collapse. The first guests to arrive are April (Patricia Clarkson), Janet's cynical best friend, and her docile boyfriend Gottfried (Bruno Ganz), a life coach. Next are lesbian couple Martha (Cherry Jones), a professor of gender studies, and her younger partner Jinny (Emily Mortimer), who is pregnant.



Last to arrive is Tom (Cillian Murphy), a rich financier whose overwrought behavior is only heightened by a few snorts of cocaine. Tom explains that his actress wife has been delayed and after that the mood deteriorates quickly. The first revelation involves a bad medical diagnosis, which is followed shortly by multiple admissions of present infidelity and past indiscretions. And a gun is added to the mix, with all of its Chekhovian connotations. Potter's main targets here are smug bourgeois values, liberal platitudes, and sheer faddishness, and while none of the observations are truly penetrating, the witty verbal volleys carry plenty of comic punch, delivered by a cast that savors every syllable. So, while *The Party* boasts more bite than depth, there is still much to enjoy. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Paul, Apostle of Christ

★★★1/2

Sony, 107 min., PG-13, DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99

The eventful life of Saul of Tarsus—a persecutor of early Christians who was famously converted on the road to Damascus and became the apostle Paul (the real founder of the institutional church)—is treated in a curiously staid, talky fashion in Andrew Hyatt's film. The elderly Paul (James Faulkner) awaits execution in a Roman prison, where recently-arrived Greek physician Luke (Jim Caviezel), anxious to profit from Paul's wisdom, makes his way surreptitiously. The two talk about the apostle's life and teachings, and while there are a few simple flashbacks (most notably one depicting Paul's conversion), for the most part the sequences are purely verbal. In intervals between conversations, Luke returns to the Christian community in Rome, who debate amongst themselves whether to remain in the city as witnesses to their faith or try to escape the emperor's wrath. A subplot centers on a Roman commander at the prison (Olivier Martinez) who seeks the help of Paul and Luke to cure his sick daughter. While reverent and fairly accurate in terms of its historical details, the film is also wordy and somber rather than propulsive. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



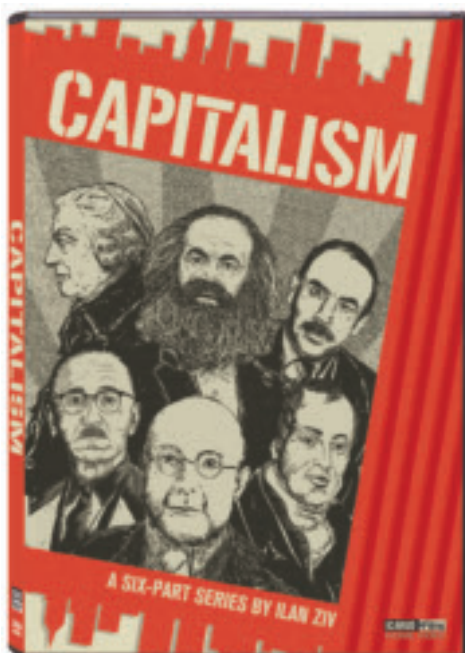
A Quiet Place ★★★

Paramount, 90 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, July 10

Emily Blunt and her husband John Krasinski (who also directs) star as Evelyn and Lee Abbott, a married couple living on a secluded farm in upstate New York. It's Day 89—after most of the world has been decimated by an alien invasion by hideously hungry creatures who detect their



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THE CHINESE LIVES OF ULI SIGG



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THE GREAT GAME



"MAGNETIC PERFORMANCES!"
—Films de France

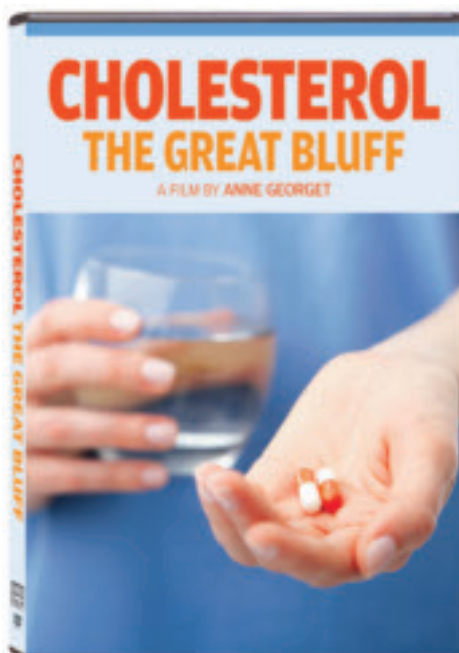
A novelist agrees to be an influential man's ghostwriter, with unforeseen consequences. An elegant political thriller that makes much use of its stellar cast.

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prey by super-sensitive sound. Knowing that silence is absolutely essential to survival, the Abbotts, always barefoot and alert, are determined to protect their three young children: Beau (Cade Woodward), Regan (Millicent Simmonds), and Marcus (Noah Jupe). Regan is deaf, so they communicate primarily through sign language with only occasional whispers. Amid the constant peril, Lee is desperately trying to locate other survivors and devise an effective hearing-aid for Regan. As time goes on, Evelyn must cope with the complications of pregnancy, including planning to make use of a soundproofed barn bunker for the birth and a tiny oxygen mask to stifle the newborn's cries. But things don't often go as planned in this nightmare scenario, where stepping on a rusty nail can prove as deadly as an explosive device. It's a tour de force for Krasinski, who cleverly employs the absence of sound to intensify relentless terror, resulting in an eerie, angst-ridden, and totally different kind of creature feature. Recommended. (S. Granger)

Ready Player One ★★

Warner, 140 min., PG-13,
DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray/DVD
Combo: \$35.99, 4K: \$44.95,
July 24

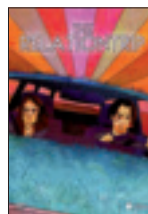


Sci-fi, virtual reality, and nostalgic pop culture collide in Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Ernest Cline's 2011 novel about a teenager's quest to win a game in order to gain control of a massive digital universe. In 2045 in dystopian Columbus, OH, Wade Watts (Tye Sheridan) is an orphaned nerd, living in "the stacks," a grimy, vertical trailer park. Wade spends most of his time immersed in a virtual game-room called the OASIS, where one can be whoever one wishes. Before he died, eccentric tech-genius James Halliday (Mark Rylance) left players one last contest. Whoever can solve three challenges will inherit not only his half-trillion-dollar fortune but also control over the OASIS, which he founded with Ogden Morrow (Simon Pegg). Wade has chosen Parzival as his OASIS avatar, playing alongside his best friend, Hulk-sized Aech (Lena Waithe), as well as Art3mis (Olivia Cooke), Daito (Win Morisaki), and Shoto (Philip Zhao). The bad guy is Nolan Sorrento (Ben Mendelsohn), ruthless CEO of Innovative Online Industries, who hires hardcore gamers, known as gunters, to follow obtuse clues drawn from memories of every movie, comic book, and video game the socially awkward programmer Halliday ever saw or played. That propels chaotic car/motorcycle/monster truck chases through a murky wonderworld to blaring rock music, along with battles featuring T-Rex, King Kong, Mechagodzilla, and the Iron Giant. This is an overstuffed escapist fantasy, brimming with flashy eye candy and fanboy ferocity, but Spielberg still manages to inject some sweetness, sentiment, and emotional involvement

into the story. Recommended. (S. Granger)

The Relationtrip ★★

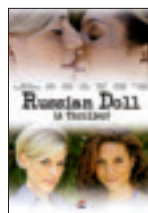
Passion River, 90 min., not
rated, DVD: \$19.99



What begins as a lovely little story about two quirky singles eschewing romance to run off for a weekend of madcap but chaste fun delicately segues into a gentle love story that is initially predictable and starry-eyed. This offbeat feature co-written and co-directed by C.A. Gabriel and Renée Felice Smith features sharp dialogue and winning performances that will have viewers cheering on the nascent lovers. Unfortunately, however, *The Relationtrip* proves to be a little too smart for its own good, slowly but radically shifting into fanciful psychodramas in which each character's emotional baggage takes concrete form. Thus Beck (Smith in a co-lead role) personifies her body image hang-ups and fear of being smothered through a mean-spirited puppet she calls Mr. Chippy, while Liam (Matt Bush), who is too coddled to face manhood, tries bringing an exaggerated version of his mother into his intimate space with Beck. Eventually, these unrelenting attempts at cleverness become overbearing. Optional. (T. Keogh)

Russian Doll ★

Wolfe, 82 min., not rated,
DVD: \$26.99



A preposterous crime thriller that becomes entangled in disparate elements, *Russian Doll* is a thoroughly confusing and silly film. Melanie Brockmann Gaffney is wasted as the lead in an unconvincing tale about a tough, self-destructive cop named Viola, who is grieving the two-year-old death of her wife while searching for an abducted woman. The latter crime is absurdly tied up with a community theater production of a play featuring a script that might have been purloined by its reputed author. The collision of a noir-ish kidnapping drama with a tea cozy mystery set amidst a hokey stage production is as bad an idea as it sounds. Writer-director Ed Gaffney (the star's father) is out of his depth here, trying to resurrect a Dashiell Hammett world in a contemporary context. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

Small Town Crime

★★1/2

Lionsgate, 92 min., R, DVD:
\$19.99, Blu-ray: \$21.99



John Hawkes stars as a down-and-out ex-cop playing private investigator in this modern film noir from writer-directors Ian and Eshom Nelms. After being bounced from the force because his

alcoholism contributed to the death of his partner, Mike Kendall (Hawkes) spends his days drinking and pretending to look for work in order to keep the unemployment checks rolling in. When he discovers a brutalized woman on the side of the road who later dies, however, Kendall is determined to find the person responsible—a quest that leads to the deceased's wealthy grandfather (Robert Forster) and a jive-talking pimp (Clifton Collins Jr.), while also earning him attention from a couple of vicious thugs working for a sinister cabal that would prefer the reason behind the woman's unhappy fate to remain an unsolved mystery. Kendall's investigations endanger his adoptive sister (Octavia Spencer) and her good-natured husband (Anthony Anderson), as well as a bar owner who knows more than he is willing to divulge. By the time the film works its way to a noisy shootout in which Kendall and some unlikely allies face off against murderous hitmen, the Nelms brothers have fashioned a reasonable facsimile of a tale that might have been told in a 1950s pulp paperback. *Small Town Crime* may not measure up to something like the Coen brothers' *Blood Simple*, but the fine cast makes this well worth a look. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Souvenir ★★1/2

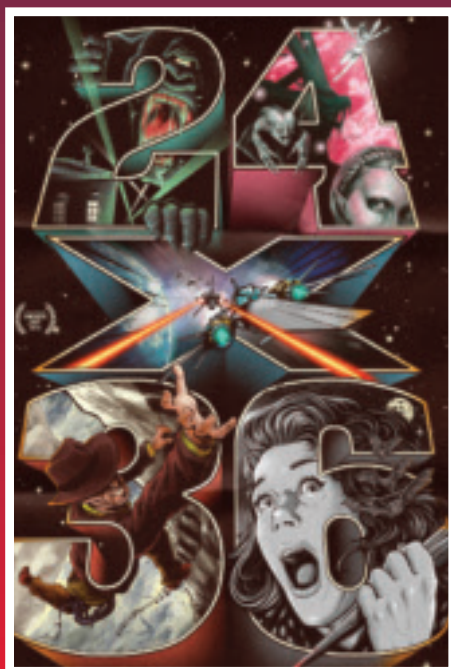
Strand, 90 min., in French w/
English subtitles, not rated,
DVD: \$27.99



This anemic French drama is lucky to have Isabelle Huppert as star; the seemingly ageless actress has spent decades masterfully portraying characters who live within a shell of mystery and inscrutability, yet who consistently invite an audience's empathy. And that's still the case with *Souvenir*, although the story falls short of its potential. Huppert plays Liliane, a seemingly marginal worker in a pâté factory, who lives a friendless, anonymous life, drinking at night in the company of TV game shows. Her existence hums along until a new co-worker—a young boxer named Jean (Kévin Azaïs)—recognizes her as a briefly famous singer named "Laura" who barely lost a Eurovision song contest to ABBA years before. Eager to rectify the downward spiral of Laura's career after that defeat, Jean becomes her lover and convinces her to let him manage her comeback. *Souvenir* is basically a variation on all those iterations of *A Star Is Born*, this one marked by pouty, boy-man Jean's distaste for show business machinations and relationships (notably, Jean still lives at home with his parents). Co-writer and director Bavo Defurne brings impressive visual acuity and wit to a story about a long-vanished entertainer resurfacing in the rarefied air of mass celebrity, although the odd-couple romance suffers from the glaring imbalance between the two leads. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)



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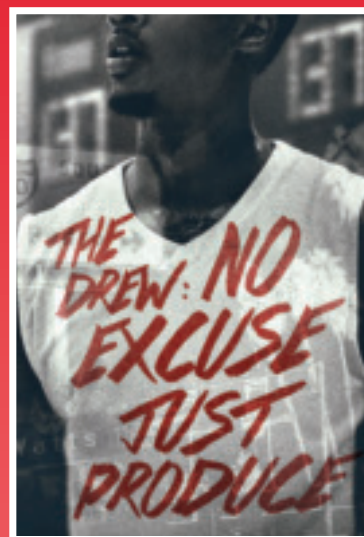
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The Strangers: Prey at Night ★

Universal, 86 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98

Johannes Roberts's sequel to Bryan Bertino's awful 2008 home-invasion thriller *The Strangers* is a throwback to the slasher movies of the 1980s, but much gorier and grosser, an exercise in pure sadism that is all the more sordid because it is quite efficiently made. The targets are a squabbling middle-class family—parents Mike (Martin Henderson) and Cindy (Christina Hendricks), and teen children Kinsey (Bailee Madison) and Luke (Lewis Pullman)—who are visiting a relative in a trailer park. It soon becomes clear that three masked maniacs have slaughtered everyone and are now intent on finishing off the new arrivals, using hatchets, knives, and an old pickup truck as their weapons of choice. The only question here is the order in which the four potential victims will be attacked and/or killed, resulting in an ugly and protracted game of cat and mouse in which one's concern for the mice—never very high to begin with—grows increasingly weak. The primary character here is Kinsey, who serves as the proverbial damsel in distress, repeatedly escaping in order to have a final series of confrontations with the leader of the murderous crew. Roberts manages some imaginative death scenes, but the film's nihilism—when one of the killers is asked why she's slaughtering people, her response is simply "Why not?"—is so pervasive that the only proper response is revulsion. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Sweet Escape ★★★

Icarus, 105 min., in French w/ English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99

It's a shame that one of the best working actresses in France, Sandrine Kiberlain (*Mademoiselle Chambon*), only has a minor role in this breezy male-centric midlife crisis comedy. The radiant Kiberlain plays the patient wife of Michel (writer-director-star Bruno Podalydès), a 50-year-old graphic designer who's sick of his workaday rat-race cubicle job. Through a tip from his boss, Michel becomes obsessed with the idea of a kayak trip and soon is paddling gently down a stream determined to find himself. Michel gets stranded a few miles into his journey and ends up on an extended stay at a woodsy café, flirting with a couple of waitresses (having a kinky fling with one and a platonic affair with the other). Podalydès's script is a plotless wonder, although it's easy to be charmed by the bumbling Michel. Still, achieving empathy with his character requires a very European sensibility, not to mention a tolerance for the



casual adultery that Michel engages in with no comeuppance whatsoever. A distinctly French comedy about one man's struggle with midlife bugbears, this is recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Sweet Virginia ★★

Shout! Factory, 93 min., R, DVD: \$16.99, Blu-ray: \$22.99

Although this incoherent, blood-soaked attempt at neo-noir does at times give off a menacing *No Country For Old Men* vibe, the character studies here are too ill-conceived to make it consistently watchable. *Walking Dead* star Jon Bernthal does a credible job of playing a mild-mannered former rodeo champion turned humble motel night manager who gets mixed up in random murder and mayhem. Bernthal's character Sam is a simple fellow who just wants to be left alone, but unbeknownst to Sam his friend Lila (Imogen Poots) has hired a psychopathic contract killer to murder her husband and then reneged, so the killer is now after her. And of course in this small Alaskan town it's only a matter of time before Sam has a perilous run-in with said psychopath. *Sweet Virginia* offers plenty in the way of explicit violence but very little credible motive to back it all up (in fact, the movie's carnage-filled set pieces feel like detached formal demonstrations of the newest techniques in cinematic bloodletting). And Christopher Abbott's portrayal of the psychotic antagonist here is a cringingly self-conscious exercise in insanity. *Sweet Virginia* is a visually slick production in which the sophistication is, sadly, all surface. Optional. (M. Sandlin)



Tad the Lost Explorer and the Secret of King Midas ★★★

Paramount, 85 min., PG, DVD: \$15.99

An improvement on its predecessor *Tad the Lost Explorer* (2012), this imaginative, animated sequel thankfully veers away from the Indiana Jones legacy that made the original film feel so derivative. The new story still finds ungainly hero Tad Jones (voiced by Trevor White in the English-language version of this Spanish production) ready to bolt from his job as a construction worker to head for Indy-like adventures. But this time he's a bit more chastened, having returned to boring old reality following his heroic debut, and depressingly separated from beautiful archaeologist Sara (Alex Kelly). That changes when Sara sends Tad an invitation to join her at the unveiling of a papyrus document concerning the whereabouts of King Midas's tomb. But when Tad arrives, a heist is underway, leading to the theft of the document and of Sara. Tad finds himself in a race to find Sara and stop



the bad guys from acquiring the power to turn everything into gold. For the most part, the action set pieces look and feel fresh, while the supporting characters offer comic relief without going overboard. A pleasant family film, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

A Taxi Driver ★★★

Well Go USA, 138 min., in Korean, English & German w/ English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.99

A winning mix of comedy and historical thriller, this South Korean feature resurrects distant memories of a perilous time when dictator Chun Doo-hwan imposed martial law and violently repressed pro-democracy students. Based on actual events but filling in some intriguing unknowns with creative speculation, the film revolves around a Seoul taxi driver named Kim (Song Kang-ho), a widower with an 11-year-old daughter and a reputation as a likable scamp and hustler. Months behind on his rent, Kim sees an opportunity to make a lot of money fast by driving a German TV journalist, Jurgen Hinzpeter (Thomas Kretschmann), from Seoul to the city of Gwangju. Unaware of the chaotic situation there—soldiers are mercilessly slaughtering student demonstrators—Kim finds himself in the thick of danger helping Hinzpeter capture the film footage he needs to get the story of this brutal crisis into international news. Director Jang Hun remarkably captures the bloody disarray of a city under siege, with scores of bodies littering streets along with scattered shoes and paper. The film's buoyant beginning and Song's almost Chaplinesque performance give no hint of the travails to come, which perfectly mirrors Kim's political awakening. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



Thoroughbreds ★★1/2

Universal, 92 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.98

You can almost hear the stage creaking beneath Cory Finley's screen adaptation of what he originally conceived as a two-character play. Still, there are pleasures to be found in this black comedy about two "bad seeds"—Lily (Anya Taylor-Joy), a rich, smart girl expelled from her posh prep school, and her childhood friend Amanda (Olivia Cooke), another outcast—who together plot the murder of Lily's hated stepfather. After an unsuccessful attempt to lure a small-time drug-dealer (the late Anton Yelchin, in his last performance) into doing the deed, the duo decide to undertake it themselves. Finley is adept at penning sharp, bitchy dialogue, and at constructing a sly tit-for-tat structure that mimics puzzle thrillers like *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*. His touch is not completely sure, however, and before *Thoroughbreds* closes,





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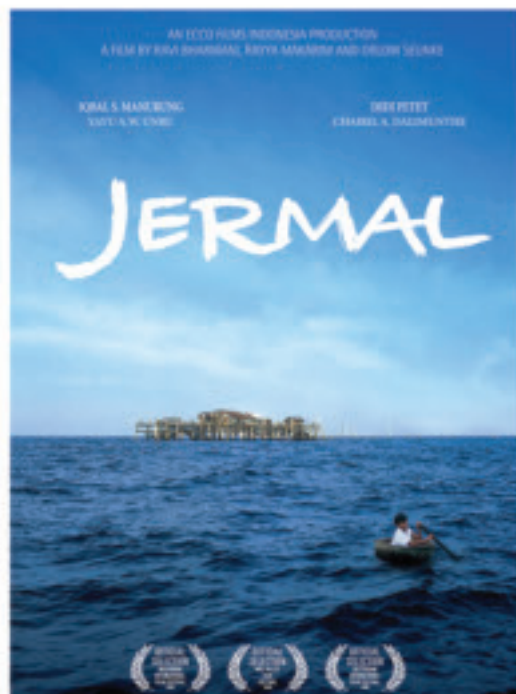
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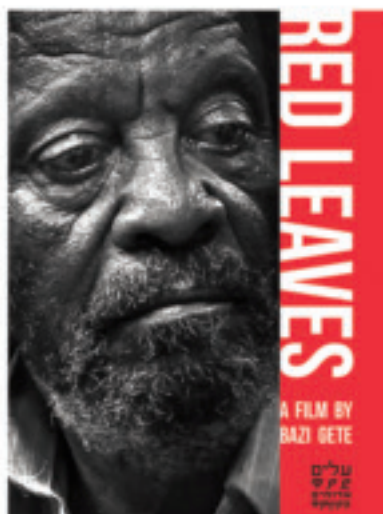
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the well of cleverness has begun to dry up, with a final act that feels flaccid despite its supposedly shocking revelations. But if one can accept its utterly synthetic quality and the affected turns by Taylor-Joy and Cooke, the film does provide an agreeably nasty time. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Tokyo Ghoul ★1/2

Funimation, 120 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.99



A tedious and silly horror flick, filmmaker Kentarô Hagiwara's *Tokyo Ghoul*—based on a popular Japanese manga series—is set in an alternate reality where “ghouls” live among humans. Since they are indistinguishable from people, it's hard to recognize a predatory ghoul who may look normal on the outside but is just waiting to catch and eat someone. Which is precisely what happens to college student Ken Kaneki (Masataka Kubota) while on a date with a seemingly demure girl (Hiyori Sakurada). Surviving the assault, Kaneki discovers that he has been turned into a half-ghoul (why only half?) during hospital treatment, a horrifying change that makes him a reluctant monster who can only tolerate humans as food. Falling in with a group of ghouls cared for by an older café owner, Kanecki finds a place where unwanted and criminalized ghouls help one another. Subtlety would have gone a long way here, but this is a movie in which monsters sprout vine-like tentacles from their backs to amputate and kill others with (which looks cheesy and laughable). Along the way, almost every conceivable bodily fluid is spilled by the bucketful. And lead actor Kubota's whining and shrieking only encourages viewers to side with ghouls who are looking to eviscerate him. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

Tomb Raider ★★

Warner, 118 min., PG-13, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$35.99



You can't blame Swedish actress Alicia Vikander for the inconsistencies of this sprawling, cinematic reboot of the popular video game series. As a petite Lara Croft, she's feisty and fit-as-a-fiddle. Enthusiastically proving her endurance in a grueling bike race through London, Lara won't concede that her globe-hopping industrialist/explorer father, Lord Richard Croft (Dominic West), is dead, although he disappeared seven years earlier. After unlocking a puzzle box and unearthing papers revealing her father's obsession with finding the tomb of Japan's evil Queen Himiko, Lara takes off for Hong Kong, where she commandeers a boat that belongs to Lu Ren (Daniel Wu), whose father sailed with Croft to the mysterious island of

Yamatai. Shipwrecked near their destination, Lara and Lu Ren are captured by mercenary Mathias Vogel (Walton Goggins), who is also searching for the tomb and tasked with excavating the site and disinterring the queen, despite repeated warnings from Richard and, later, Lara. As Lara's adventure continues, the rapid succession of melodramatic cliffhangers make it look more and more like *The Perils of Pauline*. Working from a nonsensical script, the film is formulaically helmed by Norwegian director Roar Uthaug, who mostly excels at the CGI action pieces. Optional. (S. Granger)

Trouble Is My Business ★★★

Random, 112 min., not rated, DVD: \$18.99



Actor Tom Konkle turns director for this tribute to the private detective mysteries and film noir classics of the 1940s. Konkle plays Roland Drake, a disgraced PI on the verge of being evicted from his crummy office when he's hired by a society beauty (Brittney Powell) to find her missing father. The twisty plot involves missing jewels, Russian mobsters, a corrupt cop (Vernon Wells), a successful former partner, a cross-dressing butler, a mansion filled with shady characters, and a sister (also played by Powell) who takes a shine to Drake. The title is borrowed from a Raymond Chandler story but the tale is an original scripted by Konkle and co-star Powell and the dialogue is filled with hard-boiled repartee. The movie serves up a film noir pastiche seeped in the slang, fashion, style, and cityscape of 1940s Los Angeles (recreated with CGI), all delivered with an exaggerated impression of old Hollywood sensibility. It's no masterpiece and is overlong at almost two hours, but fans of classic Hollywood pictures should enjoy this affectionate throwback that walks the line between tribute and parody. Presented in both color and black-and-white versions, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

A Violent Life ★★1/2

Icarus, 107 min., in French w/ English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99

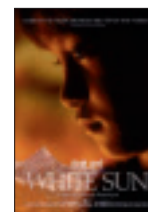


French filmmaker Thierry de Peretti draws from real events and his own past for this drama set in the culture of violence that plagued Corsica, a Mediterranean island under French rule, in the 1990s and early 2000s. Stéphane (Jean Michelangeli) is a serious, philosophically-minded young man hiding out in Paris who returns home to Corsica for the funeral of two friends (executed in the opening scene of the film), despite a threat to his life. The story of how he got there then unfolds in flashback. The backdrop is explained in a few opening notes: nationalists fighting to free

the island from French rule have split into rival factions and are battling the growing Mafia, the French police, and each other. Stéphane becomes radicalized after a short stint in prison for stashing weapons used in terrorist attacks. He recruits his friends, who are involved in smuggling and petty crimes, but their halfhearted commitment ends up putting the movement in danger and they become targets. The political stakes are confusing—the Corsican struggle is little known to American audiences and the screenplay never really explains the differences between rival factions—and with so many characters and conflicts to chart, it's a hard film to follow. Ultimately, *A Violent Life* works best as a drama about how a smart, apolitical student is turned into a political radical within a culture mired in violence. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

White Sun ★★★1/2

KimStim, 89 min., in Nepali w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99



This meditative and understated Nepali feature is set in the wake of two decades of political and religious division and brutal war. Showing the tensions that still persist long after the nation's 2006 Peace Accord, *White Sun* serves as a testimony to the frailty of such peace treaties and their inability to effectively address the socioeconomic inequalities among warring factions that lead to bloody conflict in the first place. Maoist soldier Chandra (Dayahang Rai), who was on the “winning” side, and his brother Suraj (Rabindra Singh Baniya), who was part of the opposing royalist army, serve as broadly symbolic figures of the macrocosmic divide tearing Nepal apart. Both Chandra and Suraj find themselves uncomfortably reunited when they become pallbearers for their recently deceased father. But the two cannot even work together on such a seemingly straightforward undertaking: for the brothers, the personal has irrevocably become the political, and vice versa. Serving as a visual backdrop for this intense sibling spat are beautiful panoramas of the Himalayan region, an environment seemingly undisturbed by years of strife. Director Deepak Rauniyar deftly lets the visuals drive the story in this powerful film. Highly recommended. (M. Sandlin)

The Workshop ★★★

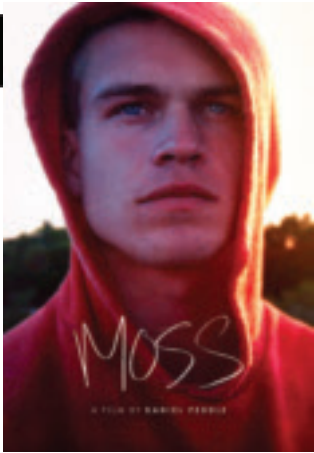
Strand, 113 min., in French w/ English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99



In this taut class (and classroom) thriller co-written and directed by Laurent Cantet, a batch of teenage students living in a port town in the south of France enter into a wary relationship

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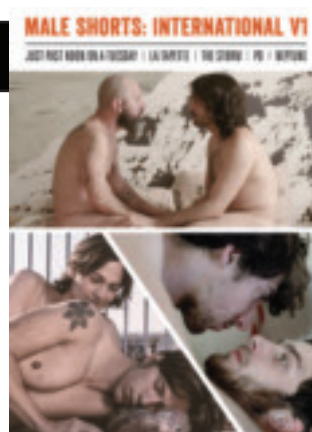
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with a well-meaning if naive visiting author-turned-instructor named Olivia (Marina Foïs). "South of France" in this case does not mean sun-dappled orchards or glamorous Riviera beaches; rather the setting is La Ciotat, once a thriving shipbuilding city now reduced to servicing yachts in the global economy. Meeting with the racially and culturally diverse kids during afternoons, Olivia takes a gimmicky approach to the writing workshop, prompting students to collaborate on a collectively-written murder mystery that draws upon their personal experiences. She's then surprised at the high degree of anger and conflict over class, race, and opportunities that the assignment evokes, particularly in Antoine (Matthieu Lucci), a disaffected loner given to watching right-wing videos and carrying a handgun. Antoine and Olivia develop a grudging curiosity about one another, each for their own complicated reasons. An often powerful film with an unexpected but appropriate end that is a beauty, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

A Wrinkle in Time

★★★1/2

Disney, 115 min., PG, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



For many years, Madeleine L'Engle's beloved 1962 sci-fi fantasy was considered un-filmable due to its complex story steeped in religion and spirituality. Nevertheless, Disney backed director Ava DuVernay on this \$100 million-plus project revolving around rebellious, biracial Meg Murry (Storm Reid), whose adolescent angst is increased by the disappearance of her physicist father, Dr. Alex Murry (Chris Pine). The underlying goal is for Meg to let go of her emotional baggage, grow more confident, and accept herself as she is, faults and all. So Meg embarks on a cosmic journey, ostensibly searching for her father who went missing after he discovered a breakthrough method of traveling great distances through space using a tesseract. Meg is accompanied on this quest by her precocious younger brother (Deric McCabe) and an admiring, supportive classmate (Levi Miller). They are led by three ethereal beings: capricious Mrs. Whatsit (Reese Witherspoon), quotation-spouting Mrs. Who (Mindy Kaling), and colossal, all-powerful Mrs. Which (Oprah Winfrey). When they visit verdant Uriel, populated by talking flowers, Mrs. Whatsit transforms into a green dragon, taking them on a galactic ride on her cabbage-leaf-like wings. Eventually, resilient Meg must match wits with The IT—a giant, disembodied brain (voiced by David Oyelowo). *A Wrinkle in Time* features bold feminism and progressive multiculturalism, but it is ultimately burdened by a diffuse and often confusing storyline, along

with too many garish, overbearing visuals bordering on the psychedelic. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Zombies

★★★
Disney, 94 min., not rated, DVD: \$26.99



At last, a Disney zombie movie! Filmmaker Paul Hoen's very cute, spirited made-for-TV production is a razzle-dazzle musical that also targets intolerance. Milo Manheim stars as Zed, a ceaseless optimist who is part of a zombie community that has overcome its brain-eating tendencies through technology. Finally allowed to attend a public high school with humans, Zed and his zombie friends bump up against rampant discrimination and fear, forced to take classes in a basement room, and causing panic when seen in hallways. Things change when Zed makes the school's football team and becomes a valuable player, but even more significant is his star-crossed romance with Addison (Meg Donnelly), a human girl whose sole goal has been to make the cheerleading squad captained by her anti-zombie cousin, Bucky (Trevor Tordjman). Manheim and Donnelly have great chemistry, and the film's high-octane music and dance numbers are thrilling. Delivering a strong but never strident message about seeing beyond superficial differences and accepting others, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

Classic Films

Black Eagle

★★★1/2
MVD Visual, 93 min., R, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



This 1987 B-movie international action flick stars Jean-Claude Van Damme at an early point in his career when he was sometimes cast as bad guys. Strikingly physical, Van Damme plays Andrei, a Cold War Russian enforcer for a Soviet military cabal, hunting missile-guidance technology off the island of Malta from a downed American F-111 (the plane appears to be sunk in about two fathoms of water). Coerced into thwarting the schemes of the nasty Reds is Hawaiian-born U.S. commando Ken (Japanese action star Shō Kosugi). Very colorful Mediterranean locations appear to good effect under director Eric Karson, and while the storyline tends to skew towards the choppy side, it gets things done. Presented in both the theatrical version and an extended cut, extras include deleted scenes, interviews, and behind-the-scenes featurettes (in one, Karson claims that Van Damme and Kosugi were especially competitive, and that their climactic onscreen

brawl truly threatened to get out of hand). A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

The Black Scorpion

★★★1/2

Warner, 88 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99



Produced on a low budget and set in the aftermath of a volcanic eruption, this 1957 giant insect movie follows the model of earlier (and better) films like 1954's *Them!*, here featuring an invasion of enormous prehistoric scorpions unleashed from an underground cavern. Stiff, stalwart Richard Denning stars as an American geologist who arrives with a Mexican colleague (Carlos Múzquiz) to study volcanic activity and winds up fighting the rampaging monsters. The dialogue is flat, lazy, and full of dry exposition and explanations, while the direction by Edward Ludwig is plodding, and Denning is more one-dimensional than usual as he goes about the obligatory romance with costar Mara Corday. What makes this film memorable is the special-effects work by stop-motion pioneer Willis O'Brien (creator of the original *King Kong*), who helped design and animate the creatures. Even on the film's low budget, the giant scorpion attacks are dynamic and dramatic, including an attack on a telephone lineman, a train wreck with a small army of scorpions swarming over the cars to hunt the survivors for food, and a final showdown between the Mexican army and the scorpion queen. A minor cult film that may appeal to fans of giant monster movies but will likely be a slog for everyone else, *The Black Scorpion* makes its Blu-ray debut with extras including an interview with special-effects-master Ray Harryhausen, a clip of Harryhausen's stop-motion dinosaurs from Irwin Allen's 1956 documentary *The Animal World*, and "Las Vegas Monster and Beetlemen" test footage found after *Black Scorpion* visual effects animator Pete Peterson's death. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

The Church

★★★1/2
Scorpion, 102 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, R, Blu-ray: \$24.95

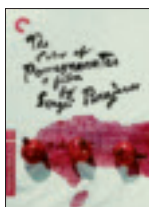


Produced and co-written by horror legend Dario Argento and directed by his talented protégé Michele Soavi, this 1989 Italian horror film was originally developed as a second sequel to 1985's Argento-scripted *Demons* before Soavi set it apart with a distinctive backstory. The premise is similar—a group of people trapped in an enclosed building are attacked by demons who possess the bodies of their victims—with the major difference being the setting: a medieval Gothic cathedral built on the site of a massacre carried out by the Knights Templar in the Middle Ages. *The Church* starts slow

and takes a while to unleash the demons for a furious third act. Much of the film was shot in a Gothic cathedral in Budapest, and Soavi brings Bosch-like frescoes on the walls to life in a living sculpture that rises out of the church altar. It's a minor but intriguing example of *giallo*, the stylistically flamboyant genre of Italian horror. Remastered for its Blu-ray debut, extras include new interviews with Soavi and costar Asia Argento. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

The Color of Pomegranates ★★★

Criterion, 78 min., in Armenian, Azerbaijani & Georgian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: 2, discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99



Sergei Parajanov's 1969 biographical portrait of 18th-century Armenian troubadour Sayat-Nova (Persian for "King of Songs") eschews a conventional look at the songwriter's life in favor of trying to capture the poetical inner workings of Sayat-Nova's mind. A mostly dialogue-free film, *The Color of Pomegranates* spares little attention on historical details specifically relating to Sayat-Nova (who is played by several actors), instead serving up an exercise in free association with recurring images and themes from the poet's compositions manifested onscreen, such as the profusion of blades and silky garments. As Sayat-Nova was an ordained priest in real life, the tableaux on screen are chock-a-block with religious iconography, including bewitching images that range from the Sabbath-esque sight of the titular fruit bleeding across a stretch of muslin to a pair of boy-angels hopping over gravestones in a cemetery. Even with its relatively short runtime, *The Color of Pomegranates* will likely test the patience of viewers expecting some kind of narrative to unfold, but some will be rewarded by simply letting the indelible, quietly hallucinogenic images wash over. Shot through with the wavering tones of solo singers and heavenly choruses bringing Sayat-Nova's words to auditory life, this is one of those rare profiles that is truly authentic to the artistic voice of its subject. Extras include audio commentary by filmmaker Tony Rayns, Mikhail Vartanov's 1969 documentary *The Color of Armenian Land* featuring footage of Parajanov at work, a new video essay on the film's symbols and references with scholar James Steffen (and an interview with Steffen), archival documentaries on Sayat-Nova and Parajanov, a 2015 experimental short documentary by Martiros M. Vartanov, and an essay by film scholar Ian Christie. Recommended. (J. Cruz)

Daughter of the Nile ★★★

Cohen, 93 min., in Mandarin w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray: \$30.99

Like so many of his early films, this 1987

feature from acclaimed Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien is about teenagers and young adults struggling to find their way in the alienated culture of Taiwan without the guidance of parents or strong adult role models. *Daughter of the Nile* is set in the busy, noisy, crowded urban culture and neon cityscape of Taipei, a city straddling Chinese traditions and American capitalism. The story focuses on 19-year-old Hsiao-Yang (Lin Yang) who works at KFC by day, goes to school at nights, and plays parent to her petty thief older brother (Jack Kao) and younger sister. She tries to keep the fractured family together as her brother's latest scheme comes back to haunt them. Hou's immersive, slow-moving style is elliptical and suggestive, focused less on narrative than on capturing the rhythm of life and the social atmosphere (it can also be hard to follow as the film sometimes slips into flashbacks without warning). Hou embraces the texture of Hsiao's world, at once harried and laconic, as she looks for her own place in an impersonal environment where everyone is struggling to get by. The title, incidentally, comes from a Japanese manga series that is read by Hsiao. Extras include audio commentary by film scholar Richard Suchenski and an interview with film critic and historian Tony Rayns. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



The Half-Breed ★★★

Kino Lorber, 72 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Douglas Fairbanks plays the title character in this 1916 Western, a story of intolerance and racism in Old California adapted from a Bret Harte story by Anita Loos. Fairbanks plays Lo Dorman, the orphan son of an Indian woman and the white man who abandoned both mother and son. Raised in the woods by a white naturalist, Lo is an oppressed outcast from white society due to his native blood. When he falls in love with a white woman (Jewel Carmen), he is targeted by the racist town sheriff (Sam De Grasse)—the man who is also Lo's heartless father. Fairbanks was a star of romantic comedies and action films when he took on this role to show his dramatic chops—playing a non-white hero in an interracial romantic triangle, certainly a rarity in 1916 (even if it can't quite follow through with a happy ending). Handsomely directed by longtime Fairbanks collaborator Allan Dwan, this is a minor historical cinematic landmark and an important film in Fairbanks's career before he became the star of grand, swashbuckling adventure spectacles. Long available in incomplete form, the film was restored in 2013 from three separate sources and is presented here with a piano score composed and performed



by Donald Sosin. Extras include another 1916 Fairbanks Western directed by Dwan, *The Good Bad Man*, with Fairbanks as a Robin Hood-like figure who commits nonviolent robberies and gives the money to fatherless children; audio commentary on both films by film scholars Tracey Goessel and Robert Byrne; a restoration featurette; and a photo gallery. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Harper ★★★

Warner, 121 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99



The classic Hollywood detective movie was updated to 1960s California culture in this 1966 adaptation of Ross MacDonald's 1949 novel *The Moving Target*, the first book in a series featuring Lew Archer. Renamed Lew Harper for the film, Paul Newman stars as the Los Angeles private detective hired by an heiress (Lauren Bacall) to find her errant oil tycoon husband. Harper goes digging through the missing man's messy private life of mistresses and shady characters, including a former starlet turned astrologer (Shelley Winters), a junkie jazz pianist (Julie Harris), and the guru (Strother Martin) of a New Age religious commune. Harper is a good detective and a lousy husband—his neglected wife (Janet Leigh) is trying to get a divorce—who has lost his idealism for the legal system but maintains a sense of honor during his tour through this soiled world of dive bars, hotel hideaways, shady cults, and privileged rich folks. Newman carries the film with his tossed-off charm and easy confidence, delivering sharp and clever lines by screenwriter William Goldman, while director Jack Smight and cinematographer Conrad L. Hall redefine the L.A. private eye genre in a milieu where crime doesn't hide in the shadows but instead plays out in the sun-bright light of day. Robert Wagner costars as a swinging private pilot. Bowing on Blu-ray, with extras including an audio commentary by Goldman, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Ingrid Bergman's Swedish Years ★★★

Criterion, 6 discs, 519 min., in Swedish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$69.99



Ingrid Bergman won the hearts of American moviegoers in David O. Selznick's 1939 romantic melodrama *Intermezzo*, which was actually a remake of a 1936 Swedish film she starred in. The latter is included in this Criterion Eclipse set along with five more of her Swedish movies, which serve as an introduction to Bergman's early career. *Intermezzo*, a tale of adultery as mawkish as its Hollywood cousin, was directed by Gustaf Molander, as were two other features from 1938: *Dollar*, a rather strained attempt at a screwball comedy



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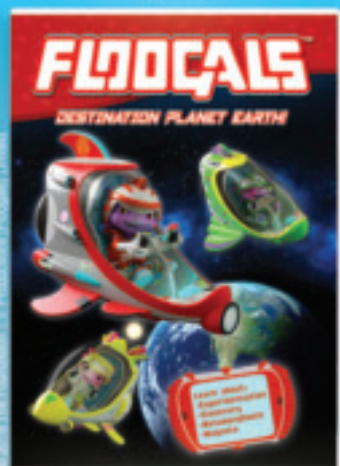
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in which Bergman plays a tart-tongued actress, and *A Woman's Face* (remade in English with Joan Crawford), a contrived melodrama in which Bergman's character morphs from a hardened blackmailer into a repentant and protective governess after her disfigurement is corrected by a kindly surgeon. The other films in the set are Edvin Adolphson's *The Count of Old Town* (1935), a charming comedy in which Bergman debuts as the most sensible member of an ensemble of neighborhood eccentrics who are bedeviled by a jewel thief sought by the bumbling police; Gustav Edgren's *Walpurgis Night* (1935), a curiously didactic drama with a strong anti-abortion stance, starring Bergman as a secretary in love with her married boss; and Per Lindberg's *June Night* (1940)—her final Swedish film before departing permanently for Hollywood—with Bergman as a young woman who survives after being shot by her boyfriend, and then goes to Stockholm, where she falls for the fiancé of the gentle nurse who befriends her. While hardly masterpieces, these well-made Swedish films underscore the fact that Bergman was a magnetic screen presence well before her appearance in such Hollywood classics as *Casablanca* and *Notorious*. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

It's the Old Army Game

★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 75 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

This 1926 silent movie comedy was the fourth feature film for vaudeville star W.C. Fields but first leading role and the first to develop the famous persona of his sound-era hits. Fields plays colorfully-named small-town Florida pharmacist Elmer Prettywillie, who—as the film opens—just wants to get some sleep while fire alarms, garbage collectors, sirens, hawkers, babies, and one demonically inconsiderate customer conspire to keep him awake. Silent movie icon Louise Brooks costars as his counter girl, whose flirtations with a handsome stranger gets Elmer involved in shady land sales. This is classic Fields: a harried, put-upon man henpecked by his wife and mother-in-law and bedeviled by children—one who also harbors a misanthropic, destructive streak, which he displays when he dangles a noisy child over a balcony and blithely invades a private home while on a family picnic. It's based on a stage revue that Fields wrote and starred in (he reused some gags in his 1934 hit *It's a Gift* and recycled a line from the intertitles—"Never give a sucker an even break"—into the title of a 1941 comedy). *It's the Old Army Game* is a minor but entertaining silent movie comedy that is still notable for its evolution of the familiar W.C. Fields character. Remastered in 2K and featuring a musical score composed and performed by Ben Model, extras include audio commentary by Fields historian James



L. Neibaur. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Joe

Olive, 107 min., R, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

John G. Avildsen's 1970 drama *Joe* anticipated the arrival of the TV hit comedy *All in the Family*, with the former's bigoted, working-class stiff Joe Curran (Peter Boyle) paving the way for Carroll O'Connor's iconic right-winger, Archie Bunker. Boyle's loudmouth barfly Joe is spilling over with petty grievances about African Americans, hippies, rock music, welfare, you name it. (The bartender gives him a quarter for the jukebox to shut him up.) Into the bar walks a distraught Bill Compton (Dennis Patrick), a well-to-do business executive who has just killed the drug-dealing boyfriend of his addicted daughter, Melissa (Susan Sarandon). Joe, who eventually links Bill to the murder, forges a wary friendship with the latter built on his respect for Bill's vigilante action. And much of the film is about the rabbit hole that Bill finds himself lost in because of Joe's continual outreach. Joe's anger at the world has as much to do with class victimhood—the feeling that those who are better off are laughing at him—as it does with the then-current political and racial climate. Featuring an Oscar-nominated screenplay by Norman Wexler, *Joe* was embraced by some filmgoers because they identified with the main character—a reaction that disturbed Boyle so much that he turned down the lead role in the violent classic *The French Connection*. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

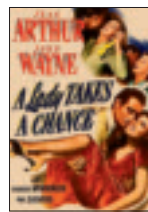


A Lady Takes a Chance

★★★

Kino Lorber, 86 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

Jean Arthur is Molly J. Truesdale, a single woman from New York City who takes a break from her three suitors for a bus tour of the American West. John Wayne is Duke Hudkins, a handsome cowboy on the rodeo circuit who literally lands in Molly's lap when he's thrown from a horse into the grandstand. Duke takes Molly to a rustic casino and a rough and ready saloon, whisking her out of a bar fight, which gives the city girl a real Western adventure. But when Molly misses her bus and Duke uses the opportunity to seduce her, the spark of attraction is doused... at least for now. Arthur's bright personality and confidence make her the star, while Wayne is quite charming as the womanizing cowboy bachelor who doesn't want to get tied down but meets his match in Molly. Their acting styles and screen presence—she's sunny and busy and always whirring, he's laidback calm and laconic—couldn't be more different but their chemistry



works in this simple romantic comedy. Phil Silvers costars as the glib tour guide, Charles Winninger is Duke's elderly partner, and Grant Withers and Hans Conried play two of Molly's New York City suitors. Sure to appeal to fans of old-fashioned Hollywood romantic comedies, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Les Girls

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

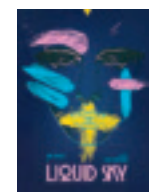
Gene Kelly's last musical for MGM—driven by Cole Porter's final film score—is a clever, fun, and stylish tale that explores the relativity of truth. Legendary film director George Cukor (*The Philadelphia Story*, *Born Yesterday*) brings a lightly elegant touch to the story of a lawsuit that is brought by Sybil (Kay Kendall) against fellow dancer Angele (Taina Elg). Sybil maintains that Angele had a romance with their former employer (Kelly), a reputedly philandering choreographer and namesake of the "Barry Nichols and Les Girls" dance troupe. As each takes the stand in a packed courtroom, Sybil and Angele both have a chance to spin their versions of the facts in the case. But then comes Barry's under-oath testimony, in which he describes his sometimes testy romantic pursuit of another dancer, Joy (Mitzi Gaynor), rather than the other two. Between big song-and-dance numbers, the three variations of the story allow for the film's best element: performances by the stars that present different shadings of their characters, especially Kelly's impressive fine-tuning of Barry within the multiple scenarios. Cukor masterfully keeps track of the details in the sundry tellings, while cinematographer Robert Surtees does splendid work on both the splashy, widescreen musical interludes and the backstage dramas. Extras include a 2003 "making-of" featurette and a classic Tex Avery cartoon. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)



Liquid Sky

Vinegar Syndrome, 112 min., not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$32.99

The 1982 cult film *Liquid Sky* brought the New York movie underground and bohemian New Wave culture into arthouse theaters and on to the college film circuit. Directed by Russian émigré filmmaker Slava Tsukerman, who wrote it with his wife and collaborator Nina V. Kerova and costar Anne Carlisle (who was part of the NYC club culture), this is a bizarre melodrama about young adults hungry for fame and addicted to a lifestyle of sex, drugs, and clubbing, as observed by sensation-seeking aliens in a UFO who feed off humans while they are high on heroin. When the aliens discover something better—human orgasms—they also start killing the people





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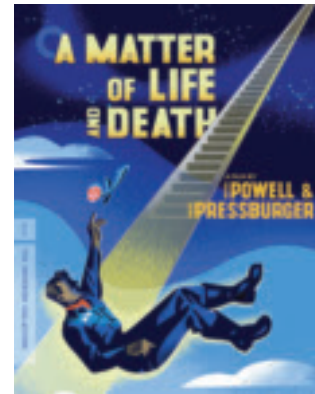
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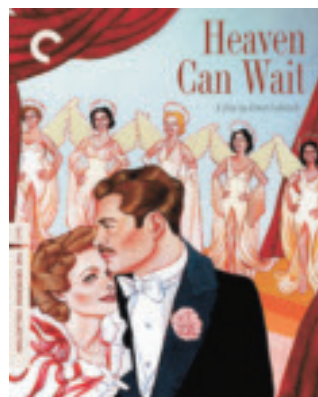
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they feed on. Carlisle plays two roles, a jaded bisexual female model named Margaret and sneering, drug-addicted androgynous male model Jimmy, who dresses like David Bowie. The story follows Margaret's strange odyssey as she sees all of her sexual partners die in front of her. A surreal sci-fi flick that straddles American underground rebellion and European art movie, the film's performances are highly stylized, and Tsukerman uses video thermal imagery and abstract computer video art for the alien POV. Both a fascinating artifact from a specific cultural moment and a unique piece of independent filmmaking, *Liquid Sky*—unavailable on home video for years—has been newly restored for this special edition that features extras including audio commentary by Tsukerman, interviews with the director and Carlisle, a new documentary by Tsukerman, a Q&A from a 2017 screening, behind-the-scenes rehearsal footage, outtakes, an isolated soundtrack, and a stills gallery. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Manhandled ★★★

Kino Lorber, 63 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

The third of eight films that Gloria Swanson made with favorite director Allan Dwan, *Manhandled* gave the Hollywood superstar a chance to break out of costume dramas and her image as a glamour queen. In this 1924 comedy she plays Tessie, a sweetly clumsy department store salesgirl who crashes high society. Swanson's working-class character in a flapper bob is adorably down to earth: she snaps gum, wears cheap frocks, and endures the indignities of urban life, from pushy customers at the bargain tables of her store to the crush of subway commuters who knock her around on the ride home. Tired of being neglected by her boyfriend, Tessie accepts an invitation to a high society party and parlays her comic impression of a Russian countess into a job at a tea room in a posh dress shop. But she also finds herself fighting off a succession of society "gentlemen" who treat this working girl like a sexual plaything. The mix of hardscrabble working-class life, high society satire, and slapstick humor is balanced beautifully by Dwan, and the society sequences give Swanson moments of high glamour (even while playing the scenes for humor). Featuring an original piano score composed and performed by Makia Matsu-mura, extras include an audio commentary by film scholar Gaylyn Studlar, and a booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

My Father the Hero ★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 90 min., PG, DVD: \$11.99, Blu-ray: \$19.99

International superstar Gerard Depardieu played the lead in this movie not once but twice: first in the original 1991 French

version, and then again in this 1994 American remake costarring a teenage Katherine Heigl. Depardieu plays Andre, an always-touring concert pianist who only occasionally sees his once worshipful, now resentful daughter, Nicole (Heigl). Hoping he can make up for lost time, Andre takes an unwilling Nicole to an upscale beach resort, where she feigns eye-rolling misery every moment that she has to spend with him. When a handsome local (and apparently rich) boy named Ben (Dalton James) takes some interest in Nicole, Andre puts up roadblocks to any developing relationship. But then Andre gets caught up in Nicole's various lies to Ben about her dad—especially that Andre is her lover—and madness ensues. Journeyman director Steve Miner's *My Father the Hero* is a reasonably entertaining bit of comic fluff that hits several very funny notes (a scene where Andre performs "Thank Heaven for Little Girls" is especially good) and boasts a number of sharp character actors (including Stephen Tobolowsky). Extras include audio commentary by Miner. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

No Orchids for Miss Blandish ★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 103 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

This 1948 adaptation of James Hadley Chase's 1939 novel offers a British take on a noir-tinged crime drama with lurid edges in an American setting that is never quite convincing. The film stars Jack La Rue—an American B-actor imported from Hollywood who looks like a poor man's Humphrey Bogart—as nightclub impresario and gangster Slim Grisson, who kidnaps the titular jaded heiress (Linden Travers) and, much to the frustration of his partners, falls in love with her. Hollywood wouldn't touch the book because it was so lascivious and the film was condemned by British politicians, not just because of the illicit affair between Grisson and Blandish. There's also a reporter (Hugh McDermott) who peeps on a showgirl getting undressed and gang members shacking up with their latest conquests. The leads have little chemistry and the odd accents of a predominantly British cast playing Americans against a backdrop of generic city streets, roadside gas stations, and country hideouts all created in the studio to mimic American culture give the film a slightly abstract and unreal quality. The direction by St. John Legh Clowes fails to bring much passion to the supposedly mad love or a savage edge to the mercenary twists, and his script dialogue is an awkward impression of American gangster talk. Still, this is a minor cult item, notable for

its sleazy milieu. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Sacha Guitry: Four Films 1936-1938 ★★1/2

Arrow, 4 discs, 381 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$69.99

Sacha Guitry was a prolific playwright and busy stage actor who brought his boulevardier persona to the cinema as star, writer, and director of sly drawing-room comedies and costume pictures. This four-film set makes a great companion piece to Criterion's Eclipse DVD set *Presenting Sacha Guitry* (VL Online-9/10), offering more films from the late 1930s—Guitry's most prolific period—all adapted from his own plays and costarring his then-wife, Jacqueline Delubac. *Indiscretions* (1936), his first solo directorial effort, is a comedy of manners between two society couples. Apart from a prologue in Paris traffic, Guitry makes no effort to break out of the drawing room set-up, but his direction is crisp and he moves the dialogue-driven film at a lively clip. *My Father Was Right* (1936) is a sour comedy about a father teaching his son to be wary of women, which features a misogynistic streak running through the witty dialogue. *Let's Make a Dream* (1936) centers on the seduction of a married woman and is largely stagebound, but Guitry plays with the limitations in a clever way. Finally, *Up the Champs-Élysées* (1938) breaks with the drawing-room comedies to tell of the famous titular Parisian street as a history lesson by way of a costume pageant. Delubac costars in each film, which are all entertaining but also lesser efforts than the ones in the Eclipse set. Presented in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo edition, extras include an introduction and select scene commentaries by French film historian Ginette Vincendeau, video essays, and interviews. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Shakespeare Wallah ★★1/2

Cohen, 122 min., in English & Hindi w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray: \$30.99

The second feature film collaboration between producer Ismail Merchant, director James Ivory, and screenwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965) is loosely based on the experiences of British actors Geoffrey Kendal and Laura Liddell, who ran a traveling theater company that staged Shakespearean works in rural India. The pair play versions of themselves here, along with their daughter Felicity Kendal, who makes her film debut at the age of 17 as Lizzie. The film is roughly divided between the travails of the company as it tries to eke out an existence in an environment



that displays minimal interest in Shakespeare, and impressionable young Lizzie's falling into a love triangle involving a somewhat immature Indian aristocrat (Shashi Kapoor) and his mercurial Bollywood starlet girlfriend (Madhur Jaffrey). The filmmakers were clearly influenced by Satyajit Ray's visual style in capturing the challenging Indian landscape, even bringing in the master Indian filmmaker to compose the fetching score. But whereas Ray created complex works that plumbed emotional experiences, *Shakespeare Wallah* often feels like an overextended travelogue with half-considered social commentary and a ho-hum love story tacked on. Still, fans of the Merchant-Ivory canon will appreciate this new 2K restoration in an edition with extras including cast and crew interviews. A strong optional purchase. (P. Hall)

Stage Struck ★★★

Kino Lorber, 84 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

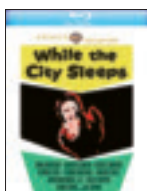
Gloria Swanson was a superstar of silent cinema—famed for her elegant outfits and dramatic portrayals of grand characters—when she took the lead in this playful 1925 comedy by her favorite director, Allan Dwan. Fans of her lavish costume pictures were treated to a glorious pageant of Swanson in a series of outlandishly ornate fashions (in early two-strip Technicolor, no less) in opening scenes that turn out to be the daydreams of Jennie Hagen. Jennie is a klutzy, overworked small-town waitress in a cheap diner, hopelessly in love with the handsome pancake cook (Lawrence Gray) who treats her as a kid sister and is enamored with glamorous movie actresses. To compete, Jennie takes a correspondence acting course (working with a stuffed animal as a scene partner) and—in comic contrast to the fashion show that opened the film—takes scissors to her simple working clothes to mimic the flamboyant outfits of a snooty actress (Gertrude Astor) in the theater company of a visiting show boat. Swanson shows terrific chops for slapstick comedy, a talent she rarely had the opportunity to exercise, and a sweet vulnerability as the lovesick Jennie, and Gray is charming as the brotherly cook who has a soft spot for her. Newly remastered and featuring a piano score by Andrew Simpson, extras include audio commentary by Dwan expert Frederic Lombardi, and a booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmayer)



While the City Sleeps ★★

Warner, 99 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99

Fritz Lang was one of the greatest and most influential directors in the world at the height of his success in Germany in the 1920s and early '30s (making *Metropolis*,



among other masterpieces), but after fleeing Nazi rule and arriving in Hollywood in 1934, he slipped down the ladder into smaller budgets and independent productions, ending his Hollywood career at RKO under the rocky leadership of Howard Hughes. Lang's 1956 *While the City Sleeps*—ostensibly a thriller about a serial killer on the loose in the generic big city, and the media circus surrounding the investigation—is really more of a media satire centered on a multimedia news company. Dana Andrews stars as a TV newscaster competing with the company's daily paper and a wire service, and Ida Lupino is the columnist whose nose for office politics is her greatest survival skill. Both are first among equals in a cast of one-time movie stars now doing duty as wily Hollywood pros: Rhonda Fleming, George Sanders, Howard Duff, Thomas Mitchell, and Vincent Price. The film doesn't feature much tension or crime movie thriller energy, but it does offer a thoroughly corrupt portrait: while a psychotic leatherboy kills girls and blames his mom, the staff of a news organization plays politics when a new owner pits his employees against one another to vie for promotion. Although the cast is great, this is a minor film and far from Lang's best work. Not a necessary purchase. (S. Axmayer)

Windjammer: The Voyage of the Christian Radich ★★★

Flicker Alley, 142 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$39.99

It is the presentation, more than the film itself, that is the selling point for Louis de Rochemont III's 1958 semi-documentary about the journey of a large Norwegian sailing ship—the titular windjammer—and its crew of student seamen from Oslo to America and back again, with stops in Madeira, Curacao, San Juan, and Port of Spain in Trinidad. *Windjammer* is a pleasant, colorful travelogue, complete with a kaleidoscope-inspired visit to New York City, as well as occasional dance sequences and songs. Along the way, there are also a few moderately exciting moments of bad weather and underwater diving, as well as exercises involving U.S. Navy ships and an encounter with another student sailing vessel—a German windjammer that later sank in a hurricane. *Windjammer* was the only film made in a three camera-and-projector process called Cinemiracle, the National Theatre chain's answer to the popular Cinerama format. This Blu-ray edition features a meticulous reconstruction and remastering by David Strohmaier and the Cinerama Restoration Team, recreating the in-theatre experience (insofar as possible) by employing the so-called SmileBox format, which approximates the curved-screen effect of both Cinerama and Cinemiracle. Extras include a "making-of" documentary by Strohmaier, featurettes on the remastering process and the



Christian Radich at a 2010 tall ships festival, slideshows, and an illustrated booklet. *Windjammer* is not a great film, but it is historically important as part of the industry's answer to the increasing penetration of TV in the 1950s and it is well worth seeing in this superb restoration. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Women in Love ★★★1/2

Criterion, 131 min., R, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99

British filmmaker Ken Russell embraced the new freedoms of 1960s filmmaking for his 1969 screen adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's classic 1920 novel exploring love, sex, class, and morality in the age of industrialization. The titular women are sisters: practical Gudrun (Oscar-winner Glenda Jackson) and romantic Ursula (Jennie Linden), both intelligent and observant schoolteachers living in a provincial British mining town that they find suffocating. Alan Bates plays Rupert, a bohemian school inspector who woos Ursula and pursues a friendship with mining scion Gerald Crich (Oliver Reed), who takes over the family business with modern ideas on capital and labor while also pursuing the enigmatic Gudrun. Scripted by playwright Larry Kramer, the story follows the two relationships as the characters debate the nature of desire, commitment, and sex between bouts of physical coupling, setting their odysseys against life in Britain after World War I, as traditional values meet modern ideas. The dialogue is adult, serious, and full of provocative ideas, while Russell presented sex as a primal, earthy activity, that was—if not revolutionary—refreshingly frank and erotic (and, in the film's infamous scene featuring Bates and Reed wrestling nude in front of a roaring fire, homoerotic). Daring in its day, *Women in Love* remains an intelligent, passionate film that is arguably Russell's best. Presented in a handsome Criterion Collection edition with a 4K transfer, extras include 2003 audio commentary tracks with Russell and Kramer, new and archival interviews with cast and crew, Russell's autobiographical 1989 documentary *A British Picture*, the 1972 short film *Second Best* (written by Bates), and a booklet. Highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)



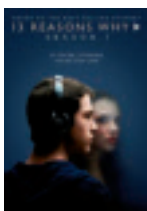
Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) during July and August for DVD/Blu-ray-specific comments added to the video movies reviewed here, as well as new reviews of current and classic films, including: *7 Days in Entebbe*, *Chappaquiddick*, *I Feel Pretty*, *Isle of Dogs*, *The Leisure Seeker*, *Rampage*, *Super Troopers 2*, *Tully*, *Wildling*, and much more!

13 Reasons Why: Season 1 ★★★

Paramount, 4 discs, 717 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99

Based on Jay Asher's 2007 YA novel, this provocative Netflix series plays as a mystery in which a teen girl's suicide is investigated by a high school classmate who was secretly in love with her. Clay (Dylan Minnette) receives a box of audio tapes recorded by Hannah (Katherine Langford) before her death that cite 13 reasons behind her decision to take her own life and names the people whose actions contributed to her choice. This sends Clay on a journey of dark discovery as, tape by tape, he learns that many of her peers abused Hannah either verbally, physically, or anonymously online, and that some of the adults who might have stepped in elected not to do so. Clay puts himself in danger as he confronts jocks, mean girls, false friends, overly ambitious students, drug-dealers, and school officials who betrayed the girl in numerous ways, but he also learns about the fears and insecurities behind their behavior. *13 Reasons Why* occasionally carries an afterschool-special vibe, and some of the performances have a slightly amateurish feel. But Minnette and Langford (who appears through voiceovers and flashbacks) are very good, and the series clearly is designed to make viewers aware of suicide warning signs. Presenting all 13 episodes from the 2017 debut season, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, character profiles, cast interviews, and a featurette on teen suicide. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Accident ★★

RLJ, 2 discs, 326 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.99

This French TV drama focuses on Gabriel (Bruno Soto), a construction boss in a Brittany village, who learns that his wife Rebecca was killed in an automobile crash that was caused by her driving while intoxicated. Gabriel immediately realizes something is wrong with this story: Rebecca did not drink liquor. Plus, it seems illogical that her car would be stopped in the middle of the road while facing the wrong way. Gabriel begins to piece together odd elements of Rebecca's behavior on the day of the crash, and he questions the strange actions by Rebecca's closest friends in the aftermath of her death. While Soto's performance is compelling and the series moves along at a brisk pace, the plotting strains credulity (the absurdly high level of homicidal mayhem and psychopathic hijinks in this village make the excessive small-town criminal shenanigans in *Murder, She Wrote* and *Midsomer Murders* seem like summertime in Mayberry by comparison). Compiling all



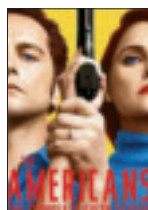
six episodes from 2016, this is an optional purchase. (P. Hall)

The Americans: The Complete Fifth Season

★★★★1/2

Fox, 4 discs, 585 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99

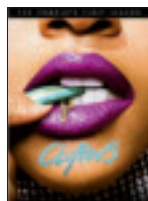
The penultimate season of the FX drama about deep cover KGB spies living as suburban parents in 1980s Washington D.C. charts the toll of a lifetime of espionage on the couple as they bring their teenage daughter into the family business. As Elizabeth (Keri Russell) becomes more ruthless in her devotion to the cause while on a mission to uncover a potential American plot to sabotage Soviet harvests, Philip (Matthew Rhys) has a harder time dealing with the lives he destroys, and daughter Paige (Holly Taylor) begins to question her religious faith and becomes more interested in learning from her mother. Mirroring Philip's journey is the story of their next door neighbor Stan (Noah Emmerich), a veteran FBI agent also burdened by the lives lost in his work. Margo Martindale returns as their handler and the show continues to follow the disillusionment of a former KGB agent back in Russia as he witnesses the corruption of his country—the bitter truth behind the idealistic illusion that Elizabeth still fervently believes. *The Americans* remains one of the best shows on TV, framing issues of parenthood, patriotism, and personal responsibility through the dramatic crucible of a spy drama. Compiling all 13 episodes from the 2017 fifth season, extras include a promo short, deleted scenes, and a gag reel. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Claws: The Complete First Season ★★1/2

Warner, 3 discs, 483 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

A nail salon in a run-down Florida strip mall is the setting for TNT's dark, violent dramedy, in which drugs and death are nearly as prevalent as manicures. The proprietor is sassy Desna Simms (Niecy Nash), who launders money for the pill-pushing Dixie Mafia headed by Clay Husser (Dean Norris), also known as Uncle Daddy. Desna needs the cash for a good reason—to take proper care of her autistic brother (Harold Perrineau)—and her staff is composed of other women who have had tough lives (an ex-con, a lesbian, a former prostitute). The plot begins with the apparent murder of Roller Husser (Jack Kesey), Desna's contact with the Husser family, as well as her occasional lover. His death sets off a series of crises within the Dixie Mafia and among the salon staff that culminate in the intervention of the Russian mob, who Roller owed much money. Desna will become key to



trying to arrange a truce between the warring families. Nash is magnetic (and appropriately catty) as Simms, and the supporting cast is strong, but in its bid to emulate hard-hitting premium-cable programming *Claws* comes on too strong—often feeling forced and frantic in its desire to shock. Still, this can be a very entertaining show. Presenting all 10 episodes from the 2017 debut season, this is a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Curb Your Enthusiasm: The Complete Ninth Season ★★★

HBO, 2 discs, 368 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$19.99

After a six-year hiatus, Larry David returned in his signature HBO series, once again playing the cantankerous version of himself that delighted viewers from 2000-11. This season's connecting narrative thread revolves around Larry's plan to mount a Broadway musical comedy called *Fatwa!* about the death sentence issued against author Salman Rushdie by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. But after appearing on Jimmy Kimmel's talk show to promote the project, Larry is named a target himself by the country's current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, and after donning a ridiculous disguise, he searches for a way to get the edict lifted. Rushdie appears in a cameo, as do *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda and F. Murray Abraham, who agree to play Rushdie and the Ayatollah in the show. Naturally, there are also a number of smaller crises invariably caused by the self-absorbed Larry's penchant for spontaneously speaking his mind in ways that antagonize other people—and then making things worse by trying to defuse the situation. With Jeff Garlin returning as Larry's goofy agent, as well as Cheryl Hines as his (now ex-) wife, J.B. Smoove as his (new) assistant, Bob Einstein as his friend Marty, and Susie Essman as Garlin's wife, this is essentially a reboot, one that features plenty of familiar guest stars, including Ted Danson, Richard Lewis, Mary Steenburgen, and Michael J. Fox. Although the humor seems somewhat broader than usual, *Curb* remains a very funny show. Compiling all 10 episodes from the 2017 ninth season, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Governor: The Complete Collection

★★★★1/2

RLJ, 5 discs, 662 min., not rated, DVD: \$59.99

Originally broadcast in Britain on ITV in 1995-96, *The Governor* stars two-time Oscar nominee Janet McTeer as Helen Hewitt, the deputy in charge of a London women's prison who is given a surprise appointment as warden—or, in British lingo, governor—of Barfield, a



notoriously violent men's prison. Barfield's staff are not entirely pleased to have a female outsider taking the helm, and the inmates tax her strength with their activities, which include murder, assault, and escape. Adding to the problems are racial tensions among the correctional officers. Crime writer Lynda La Plante, best known for the *Prime Suspect* series, delivers a brutally honest view of prison life that underscores the complexities of running this type of an institution. McTeer gives a raw and visceral performance, and she is backed by an excellent supporting cast that includes Idris Elba and Ron Donachie as officers, Sophie Okonedo as a prison staff member, and Eamonn Walker as one very unpleasant prisoner. Compiling all 12 episodes from the show's two-season run, this gripping edge-of-the-seat drama is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

The Handmaid's Tale: Season One ★★★★★

Fox, 3 discs, \$25 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

This Hulu original series adapted from the award-winning 1985 novel by Margaret Atwood tells a dystopian story of a future in which ecological disaster renders the majority of women infertile and a fundamentalist group imposes totalitarian rule in a section of the United States they rename Gilead. Women no longer have any rights and fertile women are made "Handmaids" of the ruling elite, forced to bear the children of their jailers. Elisabeth Moss stars as "Offred" (her slave name, you might say: she is "of Fred"), captured while attempting to flee with her husband and young daughter, and assigned to Fred Waterford (Joseph Fiennes), a commander in the ruthless Gilead government married to the powerful but barren Serena (Yvonne Stahovski). Flashbacks show life before the collapse and the rise of the fascist government that uses scripture to justify chauvinistic rule. Atwood's novel was adapted into a 1990 feature film but the Hulu series is a richer, more nuanced take that embraces the book's bitter social commentary and themes of resistance and defiance while also reflecting disturbing currents of religious fundamentalism and nationalism witnessed today. *The Handmaid's Tale* won eight Emmy Awards, including outstanding drama series and awards for directing, writing, and lead actress Moss. Presenting all 10 episodes from the 2017 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (S. Axmaker)

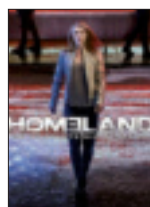
Homeland: The Complete Sixth Season

★★★★½

Fox, 604 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$39.99

The sixth season of Showtime's popular

spy series finds bipolar CIA operative Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) once again separated from the agency, now working in New York City for a non-profit that defends the rights of Muslim-Americans who have been subjected to discrimination. But an accusation of complicity in a terrorist plot against one of her clients draws her back into the espionage business, along with her old colleague Peter Quinn (Rupert Friend), whose apparent death last season turns out to have been a false alarm. Complications abound, especially since CIA Head Dar Adal (F. Murray Abraham) suspects that President-Elect Elizabeth Keane (Elizabeth Marvel) might be planning to undermine the agency's effectiveness and he is willing to go to extreme lengths to prevent her from doing so—something that Saul Berenson (Mandy Patinkin), Claire's old mentor at the agency, is concerned might do more harm than good. As in previous seasons, this one is full of unreliable ancillary characters (including Israeli and Iranian agents), twists, betrayals, and double-crosses. Presenting all 12 episodes from the 2017 sixth season, extras include a brief introduction, a behind-the-scenes featurette, and a Q&A with cast and crew at PaleyFest. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



Mystery Science Theater 3000: Season 11 ★★★★★

Shout! Factory, 8 discs, 1,260 min., not rated, DVD: \$69.99, Blu-ray: \$99.99

MST3K—as it is affectionately known—is the show that refuses to die. After beginning on a tiny Minneapolis station in 1988, Joel Hodgson's deliberately cheesy takedown of old bad movies—riffed on by one captive human and his snarky robot cohorts—migrated to the fledgling Comedy Central, where it flourished for seven years before being canceled in 1996. It was then picked up by the Sci-Fi Channel, where it survived until 1999. And then it never really disappeared: aside from reruns and an avalanche of home-video releases, it spawned *Cinematic Titanic* (VL Online-11/17), and now this full-fledged Netflix revival spurred by a Kickstarter campaign. The cast is new—Jonah Ray is now the "host," and Patton Oswalt one of his tormentors—and the humor is a bit more topical (though no less juvenile), but the format is identical. The movies, of course, vary widely, although there are the usual poverty-row sci-fi efforts (*The Time Travelers*, *Starcrash*), nutty fantasies (*Wizards of the Lost Kingdom I and II*, *The Loves of Hercules*), foreign monster flicks (*Reptilicus* from Denmark, *Yongary* from South Korea), risible American ones (*Cry Wilderness*, *The Beast of Hollow Mountain*) and *sui generis* turkeys (*Carnival Magic*, *The*



Christmas That Almost Wasn't) among the 14 "honorees" here, which also include a couple of decent Doug McClure actioners (*The Land That Time Forgot*, *At the Earth's Core*) and a big-budget disaster movie (*Avalanche*, with Rock Hudson and Mia Farrow). Guest stars include Hodgson, Jerry Seinfeld, Mark Hamill, and Neil Patrick Harris. Compiling all 14 episodes from the 2017 11th season, extras include a behind-the-scenes documentary about the revival. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Outlander: Season Three

★★★★½

Sony, 5 discs, 745 min., not rated, DVD: \$45.99, Blu-ray: \$55.99



The third season of the sexy historical drama based on the novels of Diana Gabaldon returns time-traveling heroine Claire (Caitriona Balfe) from 1746 Scotland back to 1948 and her 20th-century spouse Frank (Tobias Menzies) on the eve of the Battle of Culloden that is destined to kill her dashing 18th-century husband Jamie (Sam Heughan). The first half of the season charts the individual stories of Claire, who attends medical school and raises her daughter (by Jamie) with Frank even as their marriage falls apart, and Jamie, who survives the battle and endures years of imprisonment and servitude before earning his release and returning to the cause of Scottish freedom. Jamie leaves clues that Claire's grown daughter Brianna uncovers, which inspires Claire to return to him for hopes of a happy ending. But of course more complications await, including another time traveler with a plot of her own. The show is an inspired and addictive mix of historical drama spectacle and hot-blooded romance between a courageous and outspoken modern woman and a chivalrous and wholly supportive 18th-century man from the Scottish Highlands. A sexy, sophisticated drama, *Outlander* boasts a strong following. Compiling all 13 episodes from the 2017 third season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted and extended scenes (with introductions by showrunner Ronald D. Moore), and a gag reel (the Blu-ray edition features additional featurettes, another deleted scene, an original screen test, and *Outlander* podcasts). Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during July and August, including: *Ackley Bridge: Series 1*, *Archer—Dreamland: The Complete Season Eight*, *Knightfall: Season One*, *Legion: The Complete Season One*, *Unforgotten: The Complete First Season*, and much more!

Ordering information for the titles reviewed in this section can be found in the "Distributor Addresses" listings at the back of the magazine.

★★★★ = 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

Before She Was Harriet ★★½

(2018) 7 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1520099-088.

Mia Ellis narrates this iconographic-animated adaptation of the 2017 picture book written by Lesa Cline-Ransome and illustrated by her husband James E. Ransome on the life of Underground Railroad icon Harriet Tubman. Now in her craggy-faced "twilight" years, Harriet is glad to be old, stiff, tired, achy, wrinkled, worn, etc., after all that she has lived through. The program recalls her young days as a slave called "Minty" (Araminta), the daughter of Ben and Rit; work as a Union spy during the Civil War; and leadership on a boat raid on the Congaree River to free South Carolina slaves. Somewhat incongruously, this short program also mentions notable black women from various walks of life, including Fannie Lou Hamer, Toni Morrison, Michelle Obama, and Viola Davis. Also including a read-along option, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Hey Arnold! The Jungle Movie ★★★

(2017) 80 min. DVD: \$16.99. Paramount Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Disclaimer: I have never actually seen an episode of the original Nickelodeon animated series *Hey Arnold!*, which ran from 1996-2004 and followed the life of fourth grader Arnold,

his neighborhood pals, and the people living in his eccentric grandfolks' boarding house. This 2017 made-for-TV movie (following the 2002 film *Hey Arnold!*) kicks off with a wild Indiana Jones-esque scene following poor preoccupied Arnold as he searches for his missing explorer parents, but it ends up only being a dream. A school contest offers a class trip prize to the mysterious fictional South American country of San Lorenzo, which—hey Arnold, isn't that the last place your parents were seen? The gang helps secure a win, and everyone travels to the jungle locale, where Arnold meets with his parents' old friend Eduardo. The kids encounter machete-wielding pirates ("Who booked this?" screams one of his classmates), face off against evil rival Lasombra (voiced by Alfred Molina), and work together to solve a mystery that involves a special amulet, hidden paths behind waterfalls, and various obstacles along the way. Featuring the voices of animation icons Dan Castellaneta and Tress MacNeille of *The Simpsons*, this well-produced, comical, and ultimately sweet addition to the series is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Little Women ★★½

(2018) 11 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1520092-393.

The back cover text mistakenly promising the story of the five young March sisters will certainly confuse anyone familiar with Louisa May Alcott's 19th-century classic, which is retold here in an iconographic-animated adaptation of the 2016 picture book that is "retold" by Maggie Blossom and illustrated by Katarzyna Bukiert. Susie Berneis narrates this substantially abridged version that skims over the Civil War-era stories of headstrong Jo and her sisters and mother as they cherish their soldier father's letters and engage with the cute rich boy next door. The most major death in the family isn't included here, although some key marriages are, but this is mostly meant as a kid-friendly introduction

to Alcott's classic (with some innocuous touches, such as Beth continually putting on and taking off a hat on a snowman). Also featuring a read-along option, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Lots & Lots of Animal Stories for Kids!

Vol. 4: Froggies ★★★

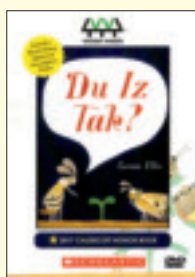
(2017) 23 min. DVD: \$12.95 (\$14.95 w/PPR). Marshall Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-936134-71-3.

On a hyper-primary-color classroom-style set, chipper costumed teacher/host Danni Donkey shares information about frogs with five youngsters in this fourth volume from the *Animal Stories* series from the extensive *Lots and Lots of* franchise. American toad Ferdie Frog serves as a guide as Miss Danni and the kids follow his visits to various amphibians, including a pickerel frog in Texas (who jumps on a lizard while singing and wearing a cowboy hat), a manatee—sadly noting the species' smaller population numbers due to careless boaters—in a saltwater lake where his stinky mink frog cousin Leonard lives, European pool frogs with ridged backs in Norway, and Western chorus frogs in Arizona (wearing tuxes). Interspersed between the jokes, songs, and choreography of the kids swaying to music and jumping on tree stumps are actual photos of the real-life creatures and tidbits about their distinctive characteristics. Silly, fun, and informative, this is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Lots & Lots of Really Big Trains ★★★

(2018) 75 min. DVD: \$12.95 (\$14.95 w/PPR). Marshall Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-936134-31-1.

In this edition of the long-running children's series, the biggest trains—both vintage steam locomotives and modern diesel-powered ones—are featured in all of their majestic glory. The fast-paced editing captures the trains rolling through beautiful vistas, including forest lands and areas covered in ice and



Du Iz Tak? ★★½

(2018) 11 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-338-24299-7.

This animated adaptation of author and illustrator Carson Ellis's 2017 Caldecott Honor Book—with an original language Ellis created herself—features nine narrators. A caterpillar-looking bug is the first to stumble over a green stubby plant, followed by damselflies, a ladybug, and various other anthropomorphic garden creatures wearing intricate clothes and sporting a wide range of expressions (including a studious pill bug with a ladder who lives in a nearby rustic cabin of sorts made out of a hollow log), all of whom are also interested in the exponentially growing plant, which they turn into a fun playhouse fort. Other visitors come out at night, including a slug and a cricket strumming a violin. A huge creepy spider with eight red eyes tries to spoil the fun, but suffers a twist of fate. Featuring a read-along option and descriptive video, this lovely and poignant short about nature, community, and regrowth is highly recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

snow (the smoke and vapor billowing from steam trains are especially fun to watch). As with other titles in the *Trains* series, this one features original catchy songs from singer/songwriter James Coffey. Have you ever wondered what it takes to get a steam locomotive up and running—from the slow chug to full-on track rattling? The answer is found in a segment that looks at details of running these gigantic beasts, including feeding wood and coal into the burners, reading dials and gauges, and adjusting controls (an animated sequence also shows the actual science and mechanics behind how steam and diesel locomotives work). Combining eye-catching visuals with interesting behind-the-scenes explanations, this is recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

The Loud House: It Gets Louder—Season 1, Volume 2 ★★½

(2016) 2 discs. 293 min. DVD: \$16.99. Paramount Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Compiling 13 two-part episodes, this second volume of the 2016 debut season of the Nickelodeon series following 'tween Lincoln Loud, the only boy in a house with 10 sisters, is sure to set fans giggling. In "Toads and Ti-aras," Lincoln helps Lola try to win the Little Miss Prim and Perfect contest but after an injury he is forced to go with her grody twin Lana (who he must remind not to scratch her butt) in order to gain amusement park passes. "Two Boys and a Baby" finds Lincoln skipping a family day with his gross aunt (she always wants him to rub her bunions, with special attention to her extra toe) in order to watch his smallest sister Lily with his best pal Clyde; "April Fools Rules" centers on pranking sister Luan's terrorization of the whole clan (even their parents want her crated up); and in "Cereal Offender" the girls ruin Lincoln's grocery store mission to complete his mom's list with their personality-driven antics. Also including the Halloween-ish "The Price of Admission" about sneaking into a scary movie, and "One Flu Over the Loud House," in which Super Soaker guns are filled with chicken soup, this highly-rated, smartly silly series—Nickelodeon and Paramount have announced an upcoming feature film—is highly recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: It's a Beautiful Day Collection ★★★

(2018) 4 discs. 870 min. DVD: \$19.99 (\$49.99 w/ PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0380-6.

2018 is proving to be a banner year for the legacy of Fred Rogers (1928-2003), whose series *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was a long-time staple of PBS children's programming. A documentary about Rogers is opening in theatres, and Tom Hanks is scheduled to play the beloved figure in an upcoming film. Meanwhile, PBS is celebrating the 50th



Much Ado About Nothing ★★★

(2018) 17 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1520092-485.

The Bard gets kid-friendly treatment in this iconographic-animated adaptation of the 2016 book retelling by Luke Daniel Paiva and illustrator Roberto Irace of Shakespeare's classic comic play. A brief segment introduces the cast of characters, with notes about their roles. Against a background of smoke filtering out of a nearby volcano in the Sicilian city of Messina, soldier Claudio returns from war to celebrate with his favorite lady Hero, while others help a romance to blossom between the stubborn Benedict and Beatrice. Don John—who has slicked-back hair and is always rudely eating dessert before anyone else can have some—is the bitter fellow who sets into motion a plan of mistaken identity (although there are certainly no age-inappropriate bedchamber scenes) that leaves everyone feuding until the wacky constable Dogberry gets on the case. While obviously a loose treatment, there is enough here to give young viewers the gist of the plot and maybe spur early interest in Shakespeare, whose life and career is outlined in a closing segment. Also featuring a read-along option, this is recommended. Aud: E, I, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

anniversary of his show's national premiere with this set compiling 29 episodes dating from 1979 to 2001, presented in chronological order. With his unassuming manner Rogers taught youngsters life lessons about how to play imaginatively, respect others, and appreciate the world around them, imparted gently and without condescension. In addition to Rogers's avuncular commentary, the show featured visits by regulars and guest stars, simple songs, occasional field trips, and segments set in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, where puppet characters interacted with human figures. This set will prove to be a delightful trip down memory lane for viewers who were brought up on the series, and a boon for today's preschoolers in a time when too little similarly kind and nurturing live-action programming is available. Recommended. Aud: K, P. (F. Swietek)

Nanette's Baguette ★★½

(2018) 9 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-338-24324-6.

Popular children's author Mo Willems is back with this family-backed adaptation of his 2016 picture book, featuring narration by his daughter Trixie (along with Willems himself and his wife Cher). Set in a French village populated by anthropomorphic amphibians (frog, tadpole, etc.), the story follows young Nanette, who is excited that it is her job today go to the baker and get the baguette. Distracted along the way by the name-rhyming characters Georgette, Suzette, Brett and his clarinet, and Mr. Barnett and his pet fly Antoinette, Nanette is proud to pick up the baguette and head for home, musing about how warm, wonderful-smelling, and good-tasting baguettes are...as she eats it. A slight tale—presented with extras including a read-along option and an interview with the author—this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Pinkalicious & Peterrific: Pinkamagine It! ★★

(2018) 75 min. DVD: \$14.99 (\$44.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0449-0.

Based on the books by Victoria Kann, this compilation from the 2018 first season of the PBS Kids animated series includes six stories starring the titular exuberant young girl and her younger brother Peter. "Pinkalicious" finds the heroine and her mom making rainy day pink cupcakes. In a bratty move, Pinkalicious scarfs down three cupcakes and whines to her parents about wanting more. Later, she eats more cakes for "dessert" and is practically bouncing off the bed when her spineless parents try to get her to sleep. The next day, she wakes up totally colored pink and when a bath doesn't change her back, a doctor is called to sort out a cause of her "pinkatitis," which Pink realizes isn't really much fun. In "Pinkabotta & Peterbotta" the siblings create a working robot who is overwhelmed when they use her to clean up after them. Other episodes include "Fairy House," "Invisible Band," "Dancing Shoes," and "Slumber Party," in which a fun princess sleepover turns a little sad when Pink pressures her two friends who want to go home. Not my favorite protagonist, although there are lessons about having too much of a good thing and completing your own work in there somewhere. Optional. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Puppy Dog Pals ★★★

(2018) 144 min. DVD: \$12.99. Buena Vista Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

Creator and comedian Harland Williams—who may be most recognized for his role in the stoner comedy *Half Baked*—turns out to have a real flair for kid-friendly entertainment in this compilation from the cool computer-animated Disney Junior series. Serving up six two-part episodes, *Puppy Dog Pals*

follows the escapades of absolutely adorable young puppy siblings Bingo and Rolly, who live with their inventor owner Bob and sassy purple cat sister Hissy. When Bob's away, the brothers play and sometimes go on song-filled missions that lead them from their super-deluxe backyard doghouse to places around the world. "Hawaii Pug-Oh" finds the duo heading to the Aloha State—they stowaway in a lady's bag—because they hear Bob mention in passing that he wants to put his toes in some Hawaiian sand; "A.R.F." involves a doggy robot invention of Bob's that cleans up a little too thoroughly after the pets. Rolly and Bingo sure do love their Bob, in fact they travel all the way to France for bread after he's out of ingredients in "The French Toast Connection"; and they go after a special sports memento from Bob's childhood in "Take Me Out to the Pug Game." Also featuring "Hissy's Big Day" in which the pair try to cheer up Big Sis, this series full of canine quips and close-ups of doggie noses and panting tongues is genuinely endearing. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Regal Academy: The Grand Ball ★1/2

(2018) 70 min. DVD: \$12.95. Public Media Distribution (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-5317-0408-7.

Adapted from an Italian animated series, this strange show is set at a magical fairy-tale school attended by ditzzy city-dwelling blonde Rose, who uses a special key to enter a realm where her grandmother is Headmistress Cinderella (markedly older than in her original story). "The Grand Ball" finds Rose's evil classmate, Vicky Broomstick, working in concert with a donkey boy to cause trouble at a big dance where the students are being graded on poise, while the girls search for dates, and Rose's BFF Joy (granddaughter of

the Frog Prince) doggedly pursues a cute (?) frog in order to test some curse-breaking lipstick. Bad Vicky also causes trouble in the other two included episodes: "Swan Dancing with the Stars," featuring characters from "The Swan Princess" and "The Three Little Pigs"; and "Song of the Sea Witch," which draws inspiration from "The Little Mermaid." To be honest, I could barely tell the other classmates apart in this unremarkable series built around hyperactive but also somewhat confusing stories. Extras include a karaoke version of the song "This is the Moment." Not a necessary purchase. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Sunny Day ★★1/2

(2017) 90 min. DVD: \$14.98. Paramount Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Cool-haired protagonist Sunny—who looks teenage-ish but apparently has hairdresser, business, and driver's licenses—works with her friends but often steps out of the hair salon to help others in this compilation of four episodes from the Nickelodeon-aided animated series. "Friendship Day" finds Sunny's dog Doodle feeling short-shrifted when he notices that her co-worker colorist Rox and organized receptionist Blair are getting presents for the titular holiday. Jealous, Doodle runs off to make his way in the world, and Sunny and the girls must hop in their "Glam Van" to look for him, having to prove their owner/pet bond to a dogcatcher through a special handshake and song. In "Sunny and the Princesses," the gang helps two royals get ready for a ball (although the younger of the pair has bigger ideas for fun), while "Stick with Me" includes foraging for ingredients to concoct a solution to separate Rox and Blair from a "super stick" hairspray

mishap. Also including "If Timmy Gives You Apples"—in which the girls help friend Timmy after he's trapped in an orchard—each episode features a brief segment with a real-life participant showing off a related hairstyle (think "Apple Updo") with instructions to do-it-yourself online. A frothy bit of fluff that doesn't pretend to be otherwise, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Wacky Races: Start Your Engines! ★★1/2

(2017) 113 discs. 223 min. DVD: \$14.99. Warner Bros. Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

While it's a bit hit-and-miss, the animated series *Wacky Races* (a reboot of the late 1960s Hanna-Barbera show) eventually picks up its pace and demonstrates a fair amount of wit. It's a violent program in the typical 'toon manner, with characters crashing, getting stomped, and falling off cliffs like the immortal Wile E. Coyote. The show's premise is simple and inexplicably winning: a diverse bunch of racecar drivers, who can't help but compete over everything, actually form a kind of community with an underlying bond. The fact that one is a villain—Dick Dastardly, with his infamous dog Muttley—at constant odds with the others (including original series faves Penelope Pitstop and Peter Perfect) doesn't matter, nor does the presence of a racing vampire and his Frankenstein's monster pal. In the end the *Wacky Racers* team are all for one and one for all, especially in the episode "Raceketeers," a late-Middle-Ages adventure that transposes the characters into a parody of Dumas's classic novel. Compiling 10 episodes from the 2017 debut season, this is a strong optional purchase Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

We Found a Hat ★★1/2

(2018) 9 min. DVD: \$59.95 (study guide included). Weston Woods Studios. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-133825-3-062.

Based on the 2016 picture book by Jon Klassen—part of a trilogy that includes *I Want My Hat Back* (VL-1/14) and the excellent *This Is Not My Hat* (VL-11/14)—this animated adaptation is narrated by Johnny Heller and Christopher Curry. Composers Jack Sundrud and Rusty Young provide a twangy "Home on the Range"-style soundtrack against a visual background of cacti as two tortoise pals notice a hat on the ground in their desert home on the rocks. "How does it look on me?" each draws as they take turns modeling the some-odd gallon hat. The duo decide that it's only fair to leave it since there's only one hat and they would need two, so they enjoy a pinky blue sunset, but one of them definitely seems to be giving the still-visible headgear side-eye glances and later wants to check if the other is really sleeping. Not as nuanced or colorful as previous entries, this would still likely appeal to fans of the earlier entries. Featuring a read-along option and an interview with Klassen,

The Railway Children ★★★

(2018) 108 min. DVD: \$24.95. Film Movement (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Edith Nesbit (who wrote books for children under the name E. Nesbit) is the author of the classic 1906 novel *The Railway Children*, which has been previously adapted for both the stage and screen. In this filmed play version of an Olivier Award-winning theater production, a live audience sits on bleacher seats with the first row right up against a lengthy stage resembling a stretch of railroad track. Although some parts of Nesbit's somewhat politicized writing are subbed or absent, the major structure of the story remains intact here. A well-to-do family in London is devastated when the father, who works for Britain's Foreign Office, is falsely imprisoned for spying. His wife and three children suddenly downsize from a mansion with servants to a small cottage near the railway station in Yorkshire. Fending for themselves for the first time, the kids—Roberta (Rozzo Nicholson-Lailey), Peter (Izaak Cainer), and Phyllis (Beth Lilly)—befriend various people who are connected with the trains that pass by. It's hard not to be impressed by a set that simulates train travel so believably, yet with the barest and simplest (but also ingenious) methods. Director Ross MacGibbon thankfully does nothing to visually "open up" the show (i.e., there are no inserts of images—grass, sky, etc.—from the real world). An engrossing performance that benefits from quick pacing and fine acting, this is recommended. Aud: E, I, P. (T. Keogh)



this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

We're Going On a Bear Hunt ★★★

(2016) 25 min. DVD: \$9.99 (\$39.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0343-1.

Based on the popular 1989 children's picture book written by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Helen Oxenbury, *We're Going On a Bear Hunt* tells a charming and slightly anxious animated tale about a large British family whose recreation time is interrupted by a distress call from a grandparent. Off go Mum and Dad, leaving big brother Max in charge of four siblings of varying ages, including a baby. The youngest of the girls, Rosie, wistfully suggests that they (and their dog) go looking for a bear, despite the fact that no bear has been seen in the neighborhood. The kids trudge through tall grass, a river, mud, a dark forest, and even a snowstorm before discovering a cave. What happens next involves a lot of running and hiding. Young children might find the climax suspenseful but not particularly scary and they will certainly laugh at the unexpected developments. The animation sparkles and captures thoughtful details, such as a kid brushing his face after the dog swishes its tail against the boy's nose. Directed by Joanna Harrison and Robin Shaw, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (T. Keogh)

PSYCHOLOGY & SELF-HELP

Reclaiming Life: Faith, Hope, and Suicide Loss ★★★

(2018) 90 min. DVD: \$69.95. Paraclete Press (avail. from most distributors). PPR. ISBN: 978-1-64060-063-8.

Intended for parents and loved ones who have lost a family member or close friend to suicide, this guidance program centers on the stories of two mothers, Kay Warren and Marjorie Antus, whose adult children took their own lives. Roman Catholic priest and author Ronald Rolheiser offers insights into the grieving process and reassurances for the Christian faithful who are trying to reconcile the Bible's teachings with the negative implications of suicide. Author, teacher, and co-founder of Saddleback Church, Warren describes her son Matthew's long battle with depression and other mental health issues before he finally ended his life at age 27. And Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites member and author Antus talks about her surprise when her daughter Mary—a young woman—took her own life. Both mothers look back on their anguish and struggles during the grieving process and explain how they came to terms with their children's deaths, how faith was a comfort, and how they now celebrate their children's lives, remembering the special people they were. While this

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film lacks diversity—only telling the stories of two individuals—Father Rolheiser adds breadth with discussions of his counseling experiences and his belief that suicide is an illness that removes people's ability to make a free choice. Compassionate, emotional, and hopeful, *Reclaiming Life* aims to remove the religious stigma associated with suicide while also providing healing for Christians coping with loss and bereavement. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Root)

We Breathe Again ★★★

(2017) 57 min. DVD: \$29.95 (\$168.75 w/PPR). Vision Maker Media. Closed captioned.

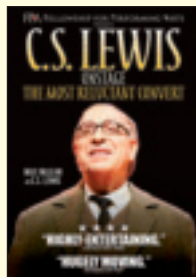
Suicide is 3.5 times higher among indigenous people in Alaska than in the U.S. as a whole. Filmmaker Marsh Chamberlain's moving and powerful documentary *We Breathe Again* explores the despair experienced by young people who feel disconnected from their eroding native culture. The film focuses on four individuals from different communities who have each been touched by suicide in some way. One is a charismatic elder and leader determined to help kids change their attitudes toward life into something positive and expansive by increasing awareness of ancestral ties and what has been bequeathed to them in terms of nature and identity. The others are a single mom police officer trying to make a difference, a young hip-hop artist expressing indigenous pride as well as the perils of his generation, and a fisherman who will experience a family suicide during the course of filming. Captured with a delicate humanity and compassion, the film never portrays its subjects as an exotic "other" culture; indeed, more than enough diversity exists between different towns—including geography, weather, and professions—that it serves as a reminder not to paint everyone with the same brush just because they share commonalities. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Fatima: The Ultimate Mystery ★★★

(2017) 80 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Those of a certain age who are alumni of Catholic elementary schools may well remember the "Three Secrets" associated with Our Lady of Fatima, referring to a famous story about a vision of Mary, mother of Jesus, who appeared to three young shepherds in Fatima, Portugal, in 1917. The child shepherds maintained that Mary appeared a half-dozen times, revealing apocalyptic events to come in our weary world. Filmmaker Andrés Garrigó's *Fatima: The Ultimate Mystery* is a quasi-documentary curiously couched in a half-baked story about a film editor whose perspective on Christianity turns more



C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert ★★★

(2018) 77 min. DVD: \$14.99. DRA. Vision Video (avail. from most distributors).

Actor Max McLean reprises his touring production of a hit one-man show about author C.S. Lewis's slow, reluctant conversion to belief in God. Drawing upon Lewis's biography and writings, McLean adapted this essential part of Lewis's life in a production that nicely balances gravity and humor. Recalling childhood losses and a distant father, Lewis explains why he felt that belief in God seemed absurd—a position that only seemed reinforced by his experiences growing up. And yet, part of Lewis sensed that there was a flaw in his argument that consciousness is strictly an evolutionary characteristic giving humans an edge for survival (how could consciousness strictly be something hereditary?). At last, Lewis's doubts were lifted, and he accepted God while (ahem) on a trip to the zoo. Not exactly the road to Damascus, but the anecdote is typical of Lewis's stories, which blend drama and self-effacing comedy. The production here is barebones, featuring McLean on stage with only a few props, but few are needed as the performance itself is compelling. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

positive after she is hired to construct a narrative about Fatima from raw footage. This film-within-a-film approach proves to be a major distraction from the powerful tale of the shepherds and the thousands who turned up hoping for a glimpse of Mary while she allegedly spoke to the children. A mix of archival materials, special effects, and staged re-enactments effectively convey the Marianist miracles, while some time is also spent on the lore surrounding Mary's trio of messages. The big question for the Church in the second half of the 20th century concerned the secret content of the third message (the first two are said to have predicted world wars and Russian threats). *Fatima* clarifies the final secret that was revealed by the Vatican in 2000, which is vague enough that one can attach anything dire to it. Optional. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

The Savior ★★★

(2018) 120 min. DVD: \$14.99. DRA. Vision Video (avail. from most distributors).

The Gospel of Luke is the primary source for director Robert Savo's comparatively modest biographical film on Jesus, with an actor playing the evangelist Luke introducing the narrative and reappearing periodically throughout, both onscreen and via voiceover narration. *The Savior* begins with the Archangel Gabriel's announcement to Mary, and the birth of John the Baptist, and proceeds up through Christ's Crucifixion, Resurrection, and final instruction to the apostles. There are some excisions from the Gospel narrative, of course, and times when writer Philip Dorr expands on it, occasionally adding dialogue (Jesus's second encounter with King Herod is a case in point) or emphasis (as in the priests' contemptuous treatment of Jesus after his arrest). The dubbing into English is occasionally distracting (the original 2014 version of the film was in Arabic), but Shredy Jabarin conveys a soothing presence as Jesus, calm

even during confrontations with opponents, and the supporting cast is fine. This cannot compare in sheer splendor with major Hollywood productions like *King of Kings* or *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, but in the final scenes it avoids the graphic nature of *The Passion of the Christ*, and for those more interested in meaning than spectacle, the economy of scale may seem a virtue. A sincere film meant to convey the Gospel message without unnecessary frills, this is recommended. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)

SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES

A Campaign of Their Own ★★★

(2017) 74 min. DVD: \$349. DRA. Juno Films. PPR.

The insurgent underpinnings of Senator Bernie Sanders's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016 are explored in this fly-on-the-wall documentary by Lionel Rupp and Michael Mitchell. The focus here is not on the candidate—who appears only tangentially in news footage—but rather his supporters, with special attention given to Jonathan Katz, a New Yorker who feels, along with many others, that Sanders represents a unique opportunity for the party to return to the populist roots that they believe it has abandoned. To them, Hillary Clinton is a creature of a party establishment that no longer fights for the working class and the marginalized. The film follows Katz and his fellow Sanders supporters from the New York primary (which they feel is stolen for Clinton by the party machine) up through the national convention, where they find their minority viewpoint squelched in the pursuit of a false appearance of party unity. A palpable sense of disillusionment pervades Katz's reaction as he watches his candidate issuing a mealy-mouthed acknowledgment

of defeat, which only deepens when he and others listen to Sanders issue a call from the convention floor that Clinton's nomination be made by acclamation. All feel betrayed, but are split between pragmatists who argue that Hillary represents the lesser of two evils in a battle against Donald Trump, and those who angrily announce that they will withhold their support from an unacceptable candidate, however bad the alternative might be. A sad portrait of the realities of American politics, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun?

★★★1/2

(2017) 90 min. DVD: \$375. Grasshopper Film. PPR.

Filmmaker Travis Wilkerson's arty and self-described "radical" documentary examines an obscure killing—possibly a hate crime—in yesteryear's Alabama. In 1946, Wilkerson's grandfather, a grocer named S.E. Branch, gunned down a black man named Bill Spann in the store, was charged with murder, but swaggered away sans repercussions. Now, the numerous deaths of unarmed blacks at the hands of police prompts Wilkerson to visit the forgotten crime scene, try to track down an aunt immersed in a white supremacy cult, and reopen old family wounds about what a monstrous patriarch Branch might have been. Wilkerson concludes that the compromised Atticus Finch who upholds a racist status quo in Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* was truer than her heroic Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Much of the film features b&w shots of Deep South environments, over which Wilkerson speaks in a theatrically

ominous tone (apparently the film evolved from an interactive live-narrated multimedia piece). Rare levity comes from interviewee Ed Vaughn, a black politician who remembers finally enjoying a whites-only meal once segregation ended—and wondering why he ever wanted such a lousy cheeseburger in the first place. A flawed but interesting and timely documentary, this is a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Following the Ninth: In the Footsteps of Beethoven's Final Symphony ★★★

(2013) 78 min. DVD: \$30 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films. Closed captioned.

The indisputable musical greatness of Beethoven's final symphony—featuring a finale that culminates in the famous choral setting of Schiller's "Ode to Joy"—is not ignored in Kerry Candaele's documentary. But while snippets are heard throughout, Candaele's emphasis is on its legacy as an anthem to freedom and human brotherhood. Divided into chapters reflecting the work's four movements, the film focuses on locales where the "Ode" was explicitly used to express aspirations for liberation from repression and recognition of human dignity in the face of turmoil. In China, it was broadcast over loudspeakers during the protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989; in Chile, it was played by protesters as a sign of their opposition to the brutality of the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1970s; in Germany, it became the theme that celebrated the collapse of Communism in 1990; and in Japan, annual performances by local groups took on special meaning in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami

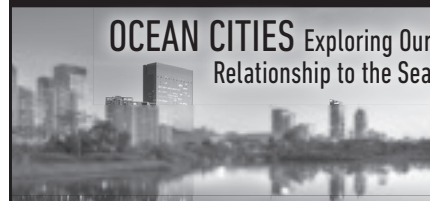
A Better Man ★★★

(2017) 79 min. DVD: \$89; public libraries; \$395: colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

In light of the "Times Up" and "Me Too" movements, this documentary produced by actress-turned-director Sarah Polley and co-directed by Attiya Khan and Lawrence Jackman couldn't be more timely. The film begins in the corner of a Toronto coffee shop as Khan calmly interrogates a man named Steve who physically abused her 20 years before. When they met, she was 16 and he was 18. Steve admits that what he did "wasn't good," but his memories are seemingly comparatively fuzzy. "I remember choking you," he admits, but doesn't recall other incidents. In her voiceover, Khan expresses surprise that he agreed to participate, but Steve said he was hoping to help prevent other men from choosing violence. After their conversation, Steve meets with Tod Augusta-Scott, a domestic violence therapist and restorative justice advocate, telling the latter about hitting Khan and calling her derogatory names, including "Paki." Khan then joins Steve for a joint session in which she tells Augusta-Scott about the lowest points in their two-year relationship, such as the times that Steve put the "sleeper" on her—i.e., strangled her until she passed out. Afterward, the pair visit their high school and the apartments they shared. Since this is a film about healing, the filmmakers intercut scenes of Khan in acupuncture sessions, socializing with friends, and at home with her partner and son. The point is clear: she's moving on. It's an open question whether Steve will be able to do the same, but he's clearly made a start. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)



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The Freedom to Marry ★★½

(2016) 86 min. DVD: \$95; high schools & public libraries; \$350 w/PPR: colleges & universities (discussion guide included). DRA. Ro*co Films Educational. Closed captioned.

The title of Eddie Rosenstein's documentary refers to both the political advocacy nonprofit group Freedom to Marry founded by Evan Wolfson and to its mission to ensure that gay and lesbian couples were able to receive marriage equality under U.S. law. Wolfson began pushing for same-sex marriage back in 1983 in his Harvard Law School thesis, and a 1991 Hawaiian court ruling enabling a lesbian couple to marry seemed to turn the tide in favor of this movement. However, the Hawaiian legislature quickly squashed the court's ruling and the Defense of Marriage Act—which was unapologetically signed into law by President Bill Clinton—made same-sex marriages seem permanently elusive. Still, Wolfson, dubbed "The Marriage Guy" by his admirers, would not quit, and this film offers tribute to his tireless work in rallying like-minded individuals to fight for marriage equality at every level, gaining legal victories in 37 states before the Supreme Court ruled in 2015's *Obergefell v. Hodges* that marriage was a constitutional right—ending the prohibition on same-sex marriages. Presented in a full-length version and a 54-minute abridged edition, *The Freedom to Marry* captures one man's indefatigable spirit and skill in using the law to benefit a community that had been disenfranchised for too long. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)



the days when everyone ate together in the dining hall. They also express concern that the community will die out if it fails to attract younger members. And when Seckinger catches up with Dulcie eight years later, she's become a little cynical, as well, to the extent that she and her husband are planning to leave. While their values remain the same, job prospects in the area have them feeling hemmed-in both financially and creatively. As the film draws to a close, the future of the ranch is uncertain, but the impact it has made on its members and their extended families is immeasurable. An interesting exploration of an alternative social group, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

The Last Refugees ★★★

(2018) 40 min. In Arabic w/English subtitles. DVD: \$349. DRA. Juno Films. PPR.

The journey of the Kalaji family from Aleppo, Syria, to the United States is chronicled in Tanaz Eshaghian's documentary, which takes its title from the fact that they may be the final refugees from the Syrian Civil War to be admitted to America, since they reach their destination in January 2017—just as the newly-elected administration of Donald Trump is devising methods to clamp down on immigration (even in cases of those fleeing persecution) and trying to institute a complete ban on refugees from certain predominantly Muslim countries. The Kalajis' success, moreover, turns out to be only partial, since they are forced to leave behind their oldest daughter—who is pregnant—and are told that she might never be able to secure permission to emigrate to the U.S., or even get a visa to visit. Eshaghian's camera follows the family from their long stay in a Jordanian refugee camp through their efforts to make a new life in Philadelphia, where their housing subsidy runs out after only a few months and the family must find ways to make ends meet, taking menial jobs to survive yet thankful for the opportunity they have been given. *The Last Refugees* joins many other documentaries about the intractable Syrian conflict, but it stands apart from most in its powerful focus on a single family, as well as in its observations on U.S. policies that add to the suffering these people have already endured. A timely film, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Mayors of Shiprock ★★★

(2017) 52 min. DVD: \$29.95 (\$168.75 w/PPR). Vision Maker Media. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Ramona Emerson's uplifting documentary *The Mayors of Shiprock* fits nicely within the current moment in the U.S. as young people seize the mantle of activism on issues where adults have ceded control. Chronicling developments in the Navajo Nation territory in New Mexico, the film traces the rise of determined teens who reject the complacency of tribal leaders when it comes to ending the downward

of 2011. Candaele juxtaposes archival footage of these events with interviews of individuals who experienced them, and the result is emotionally compelling, both in cases when the outcome is triumphant (as when Leonard Bernstein famously conducted the symphony in Berlin after the fall of the wall) and those in which it is not. The organization here is somewhat haphazard, and the editing hectic, but the overall impact of the film is undeniable. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Geek Girls ★★★

(2017) 83 min. DVD: \$89; public libraries; \$395: colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

Hungarian-born filmmaker Gina Hara travels across the U.S., Canada, and Japan to interview women who self-identify as geeks. Like Hara (a computer game enthusiast), the women she profiles are also heavily invested in pop culture. Jamie Broadnax, founder of Black Girl Nerds, used to resist the label before making peace with it. Now she encourages other women of color to claim their space in realms traditionally associated with white men. Stephanie Harvey, a pro gamer, and Mariko McDonald, a blogger and *Star Wars* obsessive, talk about online harassment, an unfortunate constant for women gamers. Other gamers include Rebecca Cohen Palacios, a developer and co-founder of a non-profit for women in gaming, and Rachel Weil, a historian who has amassed hundreds of video games intended for female users. Dr. Anita Sengupta, an aerospace engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, credits her interest in science fiction for leading her to science reality. As a kid, she bonded with her mechanical engineer father over the original *Star Trek*, and she dresses up as Dr. Who at conventions. Mia Moore creates her

own costumes for conventions, while Élisabeth Fallen, a data analyst by day, dresses up as a "Lolita"—a sort of punk Victorian—in her off-hours. These women use their real names, although the otaku Hara meets in Japan use pseudonyms due to the social stigma attached to extreme fandom. Broadnax sums things up best when she addresses male nerds, "We're not going to infringe on your space, we're just going to add more to it." Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Hippie Family Values ★★★

(2017) 64 min. DVD: \$75; high schools & public libraries; \$299: colleges & universities. DRA. New Day Films. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-57448-449-6.

Filmmaker Beverly Seckinger, who spent 10 years documenting a back-to-the-land movement in New Mexico, lets members speak for themselves in her respectful, judgment-free documentary. The idealists who founded the "ranch" in the 1970s aimed to create a society built around consensus decision-making and stewardship of the land. They also sought enlightenment through LSD and other drugs (marijuana still appears to be in use). When Seckinger started filming, around 20 people lived there year-round. Kate, a potter, saw the ranch as a refuge from the nuclear family. With the help of other members, she built the house she lives in today. Now, she's a mother and grandmother who raised her kids as part of a village. Her daughter, Dulcie, loved being in that world. When Dulcie's divorced father—who was never part of the community—sued for custody, Kate found a way to defy the order. Although Dulcie did leave for college, she returned to build a home of her own. Other members, like Don and Bjorn, are more cynical, because they miss

spiral afflicting their community. Refusing to take no for an answer, the kids—led by optimistic, visionary siblings Graham and Virginia Beyale—begin doing simple clean-up tasks and painting over graffiti. Building on these results, their loose organization joins the larger Northern Diné Youth Committee at the state level, taking on larger projects to improve Shiprock's quality-of-life. These various successes are achieved with some thought to readying Shiprock for development from industry groups and support businesses. The film doesn't spend any time investigating conflict within Shiprock over these changes (perhaps there wasn't any). Nor does it deal with systemic social ills (although Graham alludes to three of his grandparents dying of alcoholism-related disease); instead, this is strictly about getting things done with people power. An inspirational film, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

The Politics of Hate ★★

(2018) 68 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$350 w/PPR from *edu.passionriver.com*). *Passion River* (avail. from most distributors).

Especially timely in the age of Trump, Michael Perlman's documentary outlines the development of extremist right-wing movements in Europe and America from the early 20th century to the present, with an emphasis on recent years. The broad historical background—beginning with the origins of fascism and modern anti-Semitism and continuing up through the resurgence of rabid nationalism and anti-immigrant prejudice in Europe and the rise of the alt-right in the United States—is delivered through collages of archival footage and talking-head commentary by Mark Potok, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, and Professor Mehnaz Afridi, a Muslim who specializes in Holocaust and interfaith studies. Both are articulate and eloquent, skillfully connecting the dots to show that what is happening socially and politically in the contemporary world is not a frightening new phenomenon, but rather has roots in the not-so-distant past. Adding a personal dimension to the argument is Christian Picciolini, who describes how he was indoctrinated into the American neo-Nazi movement as an impressionable young man and later came to detest white supremacist ideology and now speaks out against it. Perlman's attempt to cover such an enormous amount of material in a short time often feels rushed, but *The Politics of Hate* offers a salutary warning that our present political climate could lead to disastrous consequences. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Polluting Paradise ★★

(2012) 96 min. In German & Turkish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$19.99. Strand Releasing (avail. from most distributors).

Shot from 2007-12, this documentary by acclaimed Turkish-German director Fatih

Akin looks at the environmental and social impact of a Turkish government project to create a huge landfill for garbage from the entire province of Trabzon in an abandoned copper mine outside the village of Çamburnu, which is on the southern coast of the Black Sea. Despite objections from the mayor and several legal actions, the plan still went forward, with disastrous results: the smell from the dump was noxious, the effect on the traditional fishing trade was devastating, and leakage of wastewater from the site proved significant, especially during periods of heavy rainfall. Working in tandem with Çamburnu's historian, Akin—whose family traces its roots back to the village—follows the project from its inception, interviewing longtime residents who complain about the impact on farming and business, and young people who now plan to leave for the city. *Polluting Paradise* also shows provincial administrators arriving in government cars to offer empty assurances that problems will be promptly addressed, and records embarrassed excuses from project engineers who opine that the negative impact has been grossly exaggerated. Unlike many of Akin's fiction films, this one is stylistically conventional, but its depressing tale of ecological damage caused by misguided governmental policy hardly requires cinematic pizzazz to make a strong impression. Extras include an interview with the director. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Show Me Democracy ★★

(2017) 84 min. DVD: \$89: public libraries & high schools; \$295: colleges & universities. DRA. *The Video Project*. PPR. Closed captioned.

Dan Parris's documentary looks at a pro-

gram by the Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis to offer seven area college students a crash course in political advocacy and activism in the aftermath of the 2014 uprising in Ferguson, MO. One of the students becomes involved in the Black Lives Matter movement and organizes civil disobedience protests, while the other six place their primary focus on education policy reform, specifically by trying to lobby for more state scholarship funds for low-income students and college-age immigrants enrolled in the DACA program. While the foundation deserves commendation for offering young people insight into how the political process works and the tactics needed to attract the attention of legislators (one elected official is invited via Twitter to meet with the students), the film clearly adopts a one-sided political agenda, reaching a low point when it belittles the notion of merit-based scholarship with flippant commentary inaccurately suggesting that parents of academically gifted students can easily afford to pay for college. Optional. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

The Staging Post ★★

(2017) 61 min. DVD: \$30: individuals; \$100: institutions. *Light Sound Art Film*. PPR.

According to the U.K. newspaper *The Independent*, if you count up all the refugees in the world who are seeking asylum from their native countries, they would amount to the 21st largest nation on Earth. Except, of course, there is no such nation, and the millions around the planet trapped for years inside often squalid camps hosted by the United Nations' refugee agency have little



A Suitable Girl ★★

(2017) 94 min. DVD: \$30 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. *Collective Eye Films*. Closed captioned.

The mechanics of arranged marriages in India are explored by filmmakers Sarita Khurana and Smriti Mundhra in this documentary that focuses on three single women facing societal pressure to wed. Ritu is sophisticated and well-educated, with a successful career in Mumbai, but she agrees to marry under pressure from her mother Seema. Amrita enjoys a freewheeling lifestyle in Delhi but consents to wed—in spite of the fact that the match will force her to move to a remote area—because her intended will allow her to continue to work outside the home. Thirty-year-old Dipti, on the other hand, is desperate to find a husband, working with her parents to locate a plausible candidate through all available means—scouring newspaper advertisements and attending events where men present themselves for interviews. After numerous failed attempts leave her in a state of virtual depression, she does succeed. *A Suitable Girl* details the peculiarities involved in selecting a mate—including the comparison of horoscopes to assess compatibility—and emphasizes the fact that financial considerations factor heavily in negotiations (all three women come from reasonably well-to-do families). But the overall emphasis here is on the human costs that traditional marriages continue to have on Indian women, since most will assume a subservient place in the husband's family, losing whatever freedom they had previously enjoyed. So despite the festive appearance of the wedding scenes at the close, all carry a somber undertone. An insightful portrait of a persistent custom in Indian culture, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

control over their destinies. *The Staging Post* is a different kind of documentary about refugees, one suggesting that sooner or later visionary leaders must inevitably arise from such de-humanizing conditions. Filmmaker Jolyon Hoff wanted to know more about the tide of refugees seeking passage to Australia—people barred from entering the country since former prime minister Tony Abbott promised several years ago to “stop the boats.” Hoff visited one of the sites where Australia-bound people in flight have been stalled: Indonesia, where refugees wait an average of 18 months for an asylum interview Down Under. Hoff meets teenager Khadim Dai, an Afghan Hazara refugee with easygoing charisma and a natural leadership ability, who inspires his community to do something for themselves—educating Afghan children, which technically involves flouting U.N. rules. Despite that, Dai pushes forward, organizing and rallying others, while also drawing attention and supplies from donors abroad. *The Staging Post* quietly tracks these successes and Dai’s growth into deservedly becoming a powerful voice. A modest production that, hearteningly, did very well with Australian audiences, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Welcome to Refugeestan ★★

(2016) 72 min. DVD: \$390. Icarus Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are 65 million refugees in the world displaced from their countries due to genocide, government oppression, war, and other factors. Filmmaker Anne Poiret’s documentary examines the plight of refugees, who become what one

interviewee calls “surplus” people, logistically invisible because they are trapped for years in camps outside of actual communities, with no money, no opportunity to work, and held back by a complex tangle of rules imposed by competing non-government organizations. Poiret casts her net wide to cover different aspects of the humanitarian crisis tucked away in numerous countries, tracking the movements of one refugee family whose optimism ebbs in a dreadful, unsanitary camp. There are also scenes of camp residents trying to build a necessary latrine and being denied because the space is needed for more incoming refugees. Poiret makes it clear here that there can be no lasting solutions until there is greater cooperation between the international powers involved. Issuing a powerful wake-up call about a global crisis situation, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

EDUCATION

In the Name of Confucius ★★★

(2018) 52 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Ever hear of the Confucius Institute? Most people likely have not. But according to this disquieting documentary, the deep-pocketed Chinese-language school curriculum is a front for the Chinese government’s long-range plans to develop human assets in other nations. It’s easy to dismiss such charges as a reboot of Cold War fears that a massive Communist plot to achieve world conquest is underway. Yet the film’s focus on a recent battle in a Toronto school district over renewing its

contract with the Chinese government-funded Confucius Institute certainly makes one think. Citing references in the Institute’s textbooks about Tibetans being a menace (or not wanting to be free), and Falun Gong (a yoga-like practice horribly oppressed in China) being antithetical to Chinese interests, a group comprised of school board members, parents, and numerous protesters from the city’s large Chinese-Canadian community are alarmed that propaganda inculcation is underway. Filmmaker Doris Liu has amazing access to many sides involved in this fight, including various representatives from the Confucius Institute, some of whom refuse to answer her questions. Liu also investigates other school districts and universities that are happy to have taken up to \$100,000 for partnering with the Institute, as well as those who booted the program out when they realized what students were being taught. Hints of corruption abound, including allegations of business ties between the Institute and the Toronto school superintendent. In a film about propaganda, it’s important that the investigative approach be measured, but here Liu fails a bit, spending too much time recreating emotional scenes from a young woman’s dramatic story of feeling forced to be an Institute teacher. Still, that’s not enough to discredit the rest of the film. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Most Likely to Succeed ★★★

(2015) 60 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$75: public libraries & high schools; \$350: colleges & universities. DRA. Tugg. PPR.

What institutional model represents the best hope for American students in the 21st century? That is the question posed in filmmaker Greg Whiteley’s documentary, which begins with the boredom felt by his own daughter in the fourth grade and expands into a full-scale examination of an alternative mode of learning represented by High Tech High, a public charter school in San Diego. Founded in 2000, the school rejects the traditional curricular design formulated, as Whiteley explains, by a committee of experts in 1892, which was based on a German model emphasizing breadth of knowledge through a mandated sequence of courses in specific subjects. Instead, High Tech aims to nurture independent thought, creativity, and cooperation among students through what one instructor calls a Socratic seminar method that culminates in the creation of collaborative projects that cross disciplinary lines. The goal is to foster an atmosphere in which students develop a capacity for innovation and teamwork that will serve them well as the development of artificial intelligence renders many white-collar jobs obsolete just as robotics have taken over blue-collar ones. Combining fly-on-the-wall footage, graphics, and interviews, Whiteley follows the progress of two ninth-grade classes, illustrating

Miss Kiet’s Children ★★½

(2016) 113 min. In Dutch w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.98 (\$348 w/PPR from www.icarusfilms.com). Icarus Films Home Video (available from most distributors).

This documentary by Petra Lataster-Czisch and Peter Lataster might be considered a Dutch counterpart to Julie Bertuccelli’s *School of Babel* (VL-1/18), which followed immigrant students in an immersive “reception” class at a Paris secondary school over the course of a year. *Miss Kiet’s Children* observes youngsters in a classroom presided over by Kiet Engels, an almost preternaturally compassionate teacher in the small town of Hapert, whose kindly concern for her charges does not preclude stern intervention when behavioral problems arise. The class is a mix of local kids and new arrivals, but the film focuses on a quartet of refugees: Haya, an ebullient but sometimes overly aggressive Syrian girl who tends to dominate Leanne, a petite newcomer from her homeland; and Jorj and Maksim, brothers whose memories of violence lead to sleeping problems that cause poor concentration in class. Without narration, the film observes Engels as she oversees the students doing their lessons—they often help one another—and tends to individual kids in distress. She also polices their play during recess, ending disputes before they can escalate, and leads them in dance exercises that will culminate in a performance in a school show. Shot in simple fly-on-the-wall style, this is a touching tribute to the efforts of one dedicated teacher who recognizes the positive impact a wonderful educator can have on students from varied backgrounds with diverse needs. Extras include an interview with the directors, and deleted scenes. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



how individual students benefit from the program, including one girl who begins the year lacking self-confidence and ends it by leading an imaginative updating of a Greek tragedy, and a boy whose elaborate project is incomplete at the close of the year but, together with his team, finishes it anyway. A thoughtful and provocative contribution to the debate about how educational policy must evolve to meet the changing needs of students, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

LAW & CRIME

Killing for Love ★★★

(2016) 124 min. DVD: \$24.98. MPI Home Video (avail. from most distributors).

True-crime aficionados will likely be drawn to this German documentary that revisits the case of Elizabeth Haysom and Jens Soering, University of Virginia students who were accused of the 1985 grisly murders of Haysom's parents. In this bizarre story of two lovers (who are also suspects) in flight, youthful passions, and a staggering twist suggesting a pre-planned betrayal, filmmakers Karin Steinberger and Marcus Vetter serve up a thicket of he-said-she-said-they-said contradictory details (actors Daniel Brühl and Imogen Poots provide voiceover for the couple). At issue is whether Soering, a German citizen who is now middle-aged, gave a false confession to police (which he later recanted) in order to shield Haysom, and if a calculating Haysom used him to cover for her actual accomplices in the killings. The sensational aspects of this case are compelling enough, but what really makes the film fascinating are the strange, once-youthful personalities of Soering, who comes across as adroit under courtroom pressure, and Haysom, who seems like a monster behind a Blanche DuBois impersonation. Drawing upon extensive trial videos, multiple interviews with eyewitnesses and investigators, and a recent jailhouse interview with Soering, *Killing for Love* makes a strong case for a man's innocence. Extras include additional interviews. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Out of State ★★★

(2017) 79 min. DVD: \$129; high schools & public libraries; \$349: colleges & universities. DRA. Good Docs (avail. from www.gooddocs.net). PPR.

Hawaii's prisons are so overflowing that a for-profit penitentiary was built in the Arizona desert specifically to house more convicted men from the 50th state. Many of the incarcerated are native Hawaiians, and this touching documentary focuses on the ethnic and cultural bonds among many of the prisoners. Filmmaker Ciara Lacy captures extraordinary footage of the men—many of whom never felt a personal bond with

Hawaiian traditions—as they dance, play instruments, and appear to be proud warriors during exercise times. She also follows the stories of two paroled men who return to Hawaii to start life over again. David reconnects with his aging father in an emotional scene, as well as with his grown daughter and grandchildren. Taking a job at a community center for Hawaiians, things go well for David until he gets into an altercation, which threatens to revoke his freedom. Hale gets a job shuttling tourists in a van, but has to spend his nights in an Oahu prison, typically reporting in at 1:30 a.m. Hale is cautious and circumspect, while David is eager to help others. Lacy's access to so many personal moments behind bars and in the lives of her two subjects is remarkable. A powerful documentary, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Rule of Law ★★★

(2016) 47 min. DVD: \$250. Bullfrog Films. PPR. SDH captioned. ISBN: 1-941545-70-X.

The 2004 Supreme Court ruling *Tennessee v. Lane* was a landmark victory for Americans with disabilities. The main plaintiff in the case was George Lane, who was arrested in 1996 for failure to appear in a court building in Polk County, TN, that had no elevator to bring him to the second floor where his hearing was scheduled. Lane's attorney Bill Brown, a self-described country lawyer, quickly conducted research and determined that 25 percent of Tennessee's courthouses were inaccessible under the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Dan Iacovella's documentary details how Lane

and Brown were able to take on the state of Tennessee and ultimately bring their case to the highest court in the nation, which ruled in their favor in a tight 5-4 decision. While the filmmaking itself is unexceptional, this is a valuable recounting of an important case, presented with excellent extras that include additional interviews, MP3 audio files of the Supreme Court's hearing and opinion in *Tennessee v. Lane*, and PDF legal documents related to the case. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Arctic Wolf Pack ★★★

(2018) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0421-6.

The desolate landscape of the high Arctic is no place for a lone wolf. To survive, wolves must form packs to hunt. Narrated by Campbell Scott, this PBS-aided *Nature* documentary directed by Oliver Goetzl examines the lives of arctic wolves, who spend much of their time in winter darkness. In this harsh climate where prey is scarce, less than half of the wolf pups survive. Wolves are nomadic, except during the denning season. And they share their space with musk ox, foxes, lemmings, and other small mammals, with the latter comprising their major food source. A nursing mother wolf needs to consume 100 lemmings per day to thrive. Adult wolves from rival packs are known to attack pups, both for food and to eliminate competition.



Blue Planet II ★★★1/2

(2018) 3 discs. 350 min. DVD: \$38.99; Blu-ray: \$45.99. BBC Worldwide Ltd. (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

In 2001, the BBC aired the landmark nature series *The Blue Planet* (VL Online-5/02), a five-years-in-the-making project hosted by David Attenborough that combined fascinating facts with beautiful footage of aquatic life. Sir David returns for this amazing sequel filmed over a four-year period in eye-popping high definition. *Blue Planet II* is divided into seven geographically-themed episodes: "One Ocean," "The Deep," "Coral Reefs," "Big Blue," "Green Seas," "Coasts," and "Our Blue Planet." As in other BBC nature documentaries, the series features numerous predator/prey sequences (Attenborough's voice drops a tell-tale register to suggest ominous doings ahead), but it is also chockful of Ripley's Believe It or Not factoids (Kobudai fish are sex-changing, orcas can use their tails to stun schools of herring, etc.). And there are the jaw-dropping images: trevally fish leaping out of the water to bring down birds, bobbit worms emerging from the sand to pull unsuspecting fish underground, a tuskfish repeatedly bashing a clam against a rock until the former breaks, and much more. Although dire observations are sprinkled throughout the episodes, the finale is particularly focused on the serious problems facing Earth's oceans, including plastic (eight million tons dumped annually), rising sea levels, shrinking habitat, and dying coral reefs. But the last episode also shines a hopeful spotlight on a number of dedicated individuals who are doing what they can to save the world's oceans. Each episode concludes with an "Into the Blue" featurette taking viewers behind-the-scenes of one or more of the filmed sequences. Another incredible BBC series with state-of-the-art nature cinematography, this is highly recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (R. Pitman)

Wolf packs are cemented by bonds of loyalty, although one unusual case is shown here in which a female lone wolf joins a pack and helps to nurse pups, before unfortunately succumbing to starvation. In the Arctic, the summer is short, and the documentary notes that there are no “easy” seasons. Conflict between wolves is the leading cause of wolf deaths, although their behavior is neither cruel nor kind; rather, they are victims to an unforgiving environment. Serving up rare scenes of wolf pack behavior, this interesting nature documentary is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Biology: The Science of Seeds ★★★

(2016) 11 min. DVD: \$44.95. DRA. TMW Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned.

Part of the *Show Me Science: Advanced* series, this film introduces high school students to plant science, looking at the nature of seeds, while also outlining career possibilities. Starting with a description of the basic types of plant seeds worldwide, the program notes that 7,000 species are used and that the amount of land devoted to agriculture is now the size of South America. Since the ancient beginnings of agriculture, humankind has preserved seeds for future use; today, over 1,000 seed banks collect seeds, where they are cleaned, dried, and frozen to preserve for future decades. Seed banks are a necessary hedge against changing weather conditions, pests, fire, flood, and other natural disasters. Scientists are also finding ways to grow more food in the same amount of space using composting, mulch, and other processes. And while the concept is controversial, genetically modified organisms (GMOs)—in which DNA is modified in plants—offers another avenue being explored by researchers who are trying to increase production with drought- and insect-resistant plants. With GMOs, it's even possible that vaccines and increased nutritional value may be introduced into plants. With new science occurring on several fronts, the field offers numerous career choices, including agronomist, botanist, naturalist, as well as work in ecology, environmental sciences, forestry, and teaching. Recommended. Aud: J, H, P. (T. Root)

The Day the Dinosaurs Died ★★★

(2017) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0357-8.

Few days can be said to radically change history, but one of them was certainly the extinction event 66 million years ago, when an asteroid hit the Gulf of Mexico, wiping out the dinosaurs and 75 percent of all life on earth. Filmmaker Sarah Holt's PBS-aired NOVA documentary describes the day when the seven-and-a-half mile wide asteroid traveling at 40,000 miles per hour hit the Earth with the force of 10 billion Hiroshima bombs. The space rock bored some 20 miles into the Earth's crust, causing shock waves, hurricane

force winds, tremendous heat, and wildfires. Anything within roughly 600 miles of the impact zone was vaporized, and huge amounts of rock and water were displaced into the atmosphere. No remnants of the asteroid survived, but scientists have found evidence of the impact from something known as the “K-T boundary” in the Earth's crust, above which no fossils of dinosaurs are found. Dinosaurs had ruled the Earth for millions of years, reaching the far corners of the planet, and growing to incredible sizes (as much as the length of three city buses). But they were no match for the heat, dust, soot, and toxic fumes that blanketed Earth, which darkened the world and caused mass plant extinctions and starvation. Here, viewers see scientists investigating the impact site—known as the “Chicxulub crater”—where they obtain core samples from the crater's peak ring that was formed when rock and debris rained back down to the ground. The extinction of dinosaurs cleared the way for the evolution of small mammals and, ultimately, humans. However, reflecting the widespread belief that birds descended from dinosaurs, a scientist here notes that perhaps the days of the dinosaurs never really ended. Full of eye-opening research, this documentary will appeal to both students and dinosaur buffs. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

The Watershed Guardians of the Fraser River ★★★1/2

(2017) 68 min. DVD: \$39: public libraries; \$89: high schools; \$225: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. SDH captioned.

Competition for land and water use by industry, agriculture, and real estate makes sustaining beautiful natural areas such as the Fraser River near Vancouver challenging. Fortunately, the Fraser River has “guardians,” i.e., individuals and groups dedicated to studying, protecting, advocating for, and promoting a

healthy river and its surrounding watershed. This long river starts in the mountains of British Columbia and flows through scenic canyons and lowlands to the delta at the mouth of the Strait of Georgia. Scientists point out that its water is no longer pristine since the river has been altered by dikes cutting off sloughs and tributaries (thereby limiting water flow and increasing chances for flooding). Meanwhile, salmon numbers have declined with the loss of calm spaces for spawning and rearing; waterfowl habitats have decreased; space for recreation competes with industrial and housing growth; and the overall health of river life has been impaired due to plastic pollution. Informed individuals—scientific researchers, salmon advocates, a river clean-up group, slough restoration activists, organic farmers, concerned citizens, preservationists, and even an artist—provide insights and solutions here for a sustainable future in filmmaker Jocelyn Demers's provocative documentary. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Root)

HEALTH & FITNESS

High Anxiety: Causes, Symptoms, Help ★★★

(2018) 19 min. DVD: \$149.95 (study guide included). Human Relations Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62706-099-8.

With expert commentary by clinical psychologists Robin F. Goodman and L. Kevin Chapman, this guidance program featuring teen interviewees notes that anxiety is a natural, useful, and sometimes necessary response to stress, but if it is too intense or lasts too long, that indicates a problem. Side effects such as getting sick, irritability, and sweating, as well as avoidance behavior, are discussed here while various types of high anxiety are



Qi Gong for Strong Bones ★★★1/2

(2017) 33 min. DVD: \$29.95. YMAA Publication Center.

Qi Gong—more commonly spelled “qigong”—is an ancient set of movements aimed at strengthening and energizing the body while also calming the mind. “Qi” (pronounced “chi”) is a term for the energy that flows throughout the body, and “gong” is the skill involved in working with this energy. Together qigong represents the art of effortless power. Here, Lee Holden, a qigong master, licensed acupuncturist, and teacher performs qigong exercises focusing on strengthening the bones. Standing barefoot in nature against a beautiful mountain range backdrop,

Holden effortlessly demonstrates how to perform simple exercises that feature standing postures, tightening and relaxing of the arms and legs, and flowing movements, all meant to send strength, power, and energy to the bones. Backed by gentle music and offering overlaid verbal instructions, Holden engages in upper body movements targeting bones in the spine, sternum, arms, and legs, as well as heel-bouncing exercises to promote bone density throughout the body. Featuring an introduction, as well as long (25 min.) and short (15 min.) routines, this exercise program is highly recommended. Aud: P. (T. Root)

explored, including generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and panic disorder and attacks. "There's never a quiet moment in my head..." says one teen, while others candidly talk about the effects of anxiety on their lives. Also touching on coping skills such as exercise, music, meditation, art, and—most importantly—reaching out for professional help, this is recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

OCD and Me ★★1/2

(2016) 53 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199.99 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

OCD—Obsessive Compulsive Disorder—is often referenced as a joke when people describe neatnik friends or their own habits of perfection. But for those suffering from the mental disorder, it is no laughing matter. Filmmaker Adrian McCarthy's *OCD and Me* features several OCD sufferers—who candidly describe how the disorder has severely affected their lives—and the therapists and counselors who are working to help them. Although OCD manifests in various ways, it is here described as intrusive thoughts or mental images that affect a person's behavior. For instance, a person with OCD might believe that if she doesn't wash her hands in a precise manner (including an almost ritualistic approach to pumping soap from a container and counting during the process) then something bad will happen to someone she cares about. This can be further fueled by images of the different forms that the vague "bad" might take, creating a loop of mental anguish. These compulsive physical habits—which, in addition to hand washing, may include checking lights, stoves, and locks, as well as other behaviors—can help alleviate the disturbing thoughts of individuals with OCD. Cognitive behavior therapy is the treatment method most often used (training the brain to differentiate between real and perceived danger), but it's a long road for OCD sufferers, with no fast or easy resolution. Offering a compelling look at an oft-misunderstood ailment, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Block)

Qigong for Women: Lotus Rises Through the Water Medical Qigong Form

★★★1/2

(2017) 40 min. DVD: \$29.95. YMAA Publication Center. ISBN: 978-1-59439-561-1.

Director and instructor Daisy Lee hosts this beginner level qigong program against the striking backdrop of the Museum of Science and Technology in Valencia, Spain. Excellently organized, *Lotus Rises Through the Water* lists different movements by style and form, which is very handy for viewers looking to focus on specific benefits. Each segment features an intro or description, while Lee's overlaid narration complements the calming visual touches, including celestial

background clips, animated lotus blossoms appearing in the water, and circular swirls to mimic movements of the "wuji ball." Definitely geared towards women, with benefits such as strengthening the uterus and pelvic floor, "nourishing the breasts," and a qi facial to "beautify," Lee also offers precautions on certain moves for women in situations such as being pregnant or fighting cancer. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Tai Chi Fit in Paradise ★★1/2

(2017) 60 min. DVD: \$29.95. YMAA Publication Center. ISBN: 987-1-59439-562-8.

Instructor David-Dorian Ross humbly brags about his awesome life in Hawaii while partner CJ McPhee looks on in the intro, but the duo effectively perform two complete workouts along with warm-up and cool down segments based on the 24-movement form of tai chi. From "catch the moon," to "taming the wild horse's mane," "pushing through the waterfall," and other moves, *Tai Chi Fit in Paradise* has Ross talking directly to the camera (which sometimes cuts off the instructors' heads) and distractingly giggling at his own jokes, but overall competently demonstrating moves while taking pressure off viewers to not memorize the form but just go with the flow. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY

Ask the Sexpert ★★★

(2017) 83 min. In English & Hindi w/English subtitles. DVD: \$129: high schools & public libraries; \$349: colleges & universities. DRA. Good Docs (avail. from www.gooddocs.net). PPR.

With a mixture of wit and respect, director Vaishali Sinha profiles Dr. Mahinder Watsa, "India's foremost sexologist," as he is described by a BBC host. For nine years, the retired gynecologist has been writing a popular sex advice column in the *Mumbai Mirror* called "Ask the Sexpert." As a sex therapist, Watsa also meets with patients in his home office, and while some drop by completely unexpectedly, he doesn't seem to mind—although family members are concerned about the stream of strangers. As the then-91-year-old states in a radio interview, sex education is banned in parts of India, so he wants to do what he can to fill in the blanks. "As far as my field goes," he explains, "I think there's a great need." Wherever he goes, people treat him like a celebrity, which he finds amusing. When a 27-year-old fan describes him as a legend, he is quick to demur. Nonetheless, some conservative observers believe that he is promoting promiscuity, including Dr. Praitibha Naithani, who files an obscenity lawsuit—which Watsa handles with the same unflappable good humor with which he answers questions about sex. Meenal

Baghel, editor-in-chief of the *Mirror*, dismisses the lawsuit against Watsa as frivolous, and believes that high-profile critics like Naithani are just seeking attention. Sinha also looks at Watsa's family life, which suffered at times due to his dedication to his work but didn't destroy his marriage, which lasted until his wife's death in 2006. An engaging portrait, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Femmessy)

FOOD & SPIRITS

Christopher Kimball's Milk Street: Season 1 ★★★

(2017) 2 discs. 390 min. DVD: \$34.99. PBS Distribution (avail. from most distributors). ISBN: 978-1-5317-0311-0.

The whole contretemps involving Christopher Kimball's abrupt departure from *America's Test Kitchen* and question of whether or not he took material from their database to create this new venture seems to be water under the legal bridge at this point. Using a very similar format to *ATK*, this 13-episode 2017 first season of the culinary series finds Kimball and *Milk Street* magazine and cooking school chefs testing out recipes while also visiting other chefs and experts around the globe. Episodes include "Home

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Cooking, Chinese Style" which features a ginger "jacuzzi-style" simmered chicken dish and a visit with James Beard award-winner Fuchsia Dunlop; "The New Baking," with tangzhong method pie pastry, as well as tips from London's bespoke Violet Bakery owner Claire Ptak (who was in charge of Prince Harry's wedding cake); "Milk Street Suppers" with steps for seasoning carbon steel pans, and making carrot rosewater Persian jam by author Yasmin Khan; and "Milk Street Holidays" with a toffee pudding and a roast beef eye of round that marinates for two days. Unfortunately, recipes were not listed anywhere on the discs' menus, but this will still be fun watching for foodies. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Neat: The Story of Bourbon ★★★

(2018) 76 min. DVD: \$24.95 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Director David M. Altrogge's documentary about bourbon is both witty and to-the-point, explaining how bourbon is a uniquely American product made primarily from cultivated corn and aged in scorched-wood barrels for years. Taking viewers step-by-step through the bourbon-making process, the film introduces a number of people in the industry who explain why some corn is better than others, why there are no additives to the liquor, and how torching the inside of a barrel is a malleable art that results in different flavors. Even a non-drinker can enjoy this entertaining guide, which features a lot of interesting interviewees, including a master bartender who can tell the minor differences between

multiple brands of bourbon. Recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

BEAUTY & FASHION

Take My Nose... Please! ★★★

(2017) 100 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

A lively documentary about female comedians, plastic surgery, and the demands on women in show business to fit a certain ideal of beauty, filmmaker Joan Kron's *Take My Nose... Please!* addresses the subject of how women in entertainment have to reckon with artificial standards concerning their appearances, like it or not. Comedians and comic actors Emily Askin, Jackie Hoffman, Lisa Lampanelli, and Judy Gold discuss, with wit and honesty, the trap of feeling that a bit of a bump on one's nose is too Semitic, or that one isn't attractive enough unless you can stoke fantasies. While it's easy to watch the on-camera interviews and want to shout "there's nothing wrong with you, don't change a thing," the film makes evident that women performers can feel equal internal pressure not to deny themselves something they want, regardless of their reasons. Toward that end, funny ladies of the past such as Fanny Brice, Phyllis Diller, and Joan Rivers—who all had facework despite having capitalized on their original faces—are recalled through archival materials. *Take My Nose... Please!* runs a little too long and becomes repetitive, but it is still often both entertaining and illuminating.

Scotch ★★★

(2016) 153 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199.99 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

This three-episode BBC-aired series offers a vivid look at Scotland's whiskey industry, tracing its traditions, spotlighting early whiskey entrepreneurs, and exploring current overseas competition. The series showcases Scottish language, culture, landscapes, and famous whiskey establishments while detailing the story of the industry that produced Scotch malt, blended, and craft whiskeys. Whiskey is made from barley, yeast, and water through a process of fermentation, distillation, and maturation (with, some would argue, a little magic thrown in). There are over 100 distilleries found in five regions of Scotland, although most are owned by multinational companies. At Diageo, a large manufacturing company, coppersmiths illustrate how stills are made, while coopers demonstrate the craft of creating oak barrels. In Campbeltown, once the center of whiskey distilleries, Springbank Distillery still uses traditional methods to produce single malt whiskeys; here, the barley is soaked with water, dried, ground, peat-fire smoked, turned into a wash by adding yeast, distilled to a clear liquid, and stored in barrels to mature. For blended whiskeys, a "noser" uses scent to combine a core whiskey with other spirits to produce a quality blend. Other Scottish distilleries such as Macallan at Speyside feature whisky-making on a smaller scale. Distilleries in England, northern Japan, the island of Tasmania, and Sweden have learned from the Scottish industry and now market their own special brands to compete in the global marketplace. The upbeat music soundtrack sometimes competes with the narration, making the subtitles helpful. Sure to appeal to whiskey connoisseurs, this is recommended. Aud: P. (T. Root)



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

SPORTS, GAMES & RECREATION

Boston: The Documentary ★★★

(2017) 114 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

The terrorist bombings at the 2013 Boston Marathon, which cost limbs and lives among runners and spectators alike, are the centerpiece of filmmaker Jon Dunham's rousing documentary, narrated by Matt Damon. But those bloody, brutal acts are not the whole story of *Boston*, which offers a broader perspective on a durable and proud tradition that began in 1897. Skipping swiftly through the race's origins as a response to the first international Olympic Games in modern history (held the year before in Athens), the tale of the Boston Marathon is full of lore and legends. There are the great champions of yesteryear, men (for a long time, just men) who raced annually, sometimes for decades. There are tales about coaxing the marathon toward greater inclusiveness, including surreptitious efforts by some women to sneak into the male-only race (the powers-that-were had decreed women were not up to running 26 miles). The decision to invite Japanese nationals to race after World War II reveals interesting details (the men were accustomed to running in wooden clogs, not American shoes). And the overall shift towards becoming a global event opened the gates to runners from all over the world. After detailing the 2013 tragedy, *Boston* illustrates how much the city did to prepare for security in 2014, without making the race look like an armed camp. The resilience and perseverance of runners and supporters alike is truly heartening to see after the nightmare—and remains so to this day. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

THE ARTS

25 in 24 ★★★

(2018) 65 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

John Foreman of the Christian alternative band Switchfoot is an indefatigable performer (his bandmates say he often continues writing after concerts wrap up, and he is known to entertain waiting fans before and after shows with just his voice and acoustic guitar). Filmmaker Melody League's documentary *25 in 24* follows Foreman's "crazy dream" ("What if I could make an entire day of song?"), as he stages 25 performances in 24 hours (working out to about 75 different songs). Naturally, the logistics (targeting locations in and around San Diego) are enormous, and viewers witness some of the behind-the-scenes work in that

process, as Foreman draws on a revolving set of bandmates for certain gigs, and sit-ins with others (including his mom on a rarely-played humongous classic organ, high school orchestra musicians, and others). In addition to traditional venues such as clubs and churches, the band also plays at the famous breezy cliffs outside of town, in a Mexican restaurant, on a rooftop (with legs dangling over the side), and elsewhere. Although each performance receives some screen time, the songs are often given short shrift in favor of cutaway interviews with friends, family, fans, and other performers, who often comment on the project being awesome or crazy—an approach that ultimately wears a little thin. Still, this documentary effectively captures a passionate musical adventure that clearly engaged the community. Recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

44 Pages ★★

(2017) 91 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$325 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

The 70th anniversary of the revered magazine *Highlights for Children* would seem to be fertile subject matter for a documentary to celebrate a publication that has appealed to several generations of young readers. Surely there would be good stories worth telling,

78/52: Hitchcock's Shower Scene ★★★

(2017) 92 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99. Shout! Factory (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

The legendary shower murder scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* shocked audiences (although little was actually shown on screen) and influenced filmmaking for decades to come. The title of this documentary refers to the 78 camera set-ups and 52 cuts during the three-minute sequence, which reveal an astounding attention to detail. Director Alexandre O. Philippe digs deep into every aspect of the famous scene, from the storyboards and filming (which took seven days), to the powerful use of sound and music, to its reverberations through other American movies, along the way calling upon a vast gallery of commentators. In addition to filmmakers Martin Scorsese and Peter Bogdanovich, other interviewees include horror movie champion (and newly-minted Oscar winner) Guillermo del Toro, film editor Walter Murch, and Marli Renfro, the model and one-time *Playboy* bunny who served as the body double for Janet Leigh. More than just an analysis of a scene, this documentary offers an appreciation of the film as a whole as well as a history lesson that makes the case for *Psycho* being the first modern horror movie, upending expectations of moviegoers by defying conventions and crossing boundaries that were previously respected in mainstream movies. Extras include extended interviews with del Toro and Murch, and a "Stabbing Melons" featurette on how Hitchcock used melons for sound. An entertaining and obsessive documentary for fans of the film, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Axmaker)



sandwiched between layers of interesting exposition about the founding mission of *Highlights* and how it has constantly adjusted to the changing habits of kids, editorial turnover, and the vision of the publication's

all-important artists. That's not what happens in filmmaker Tony Shaff's *44 Pages* (the title refers to the length of each issue), which instead takes viewers inside the process of introducing an updated look for *Highlights*



GOETHE'S FAUST A TRAGEDY THEN. A TRAGEDY NOW.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote over the course of a lifetime and re-crafted a 200-year-old play along the way.

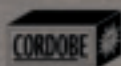
What is its relevance today?

Joseph McGarry's film *GOETHE'S FAUST* is a hugely detailed dissertation on the life and work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe with a focus on his historically acclaimed re-penning and rendering of Faust; a tragedy in two parts.

As writer, director, and host, McGarry has created an extensive study that will serve as a literary and philosophical reference for students of literature forever. More importantly, the film brings the historical writings into a contemporary framework and ties into the history of the Holy Roman Empire and the German language.

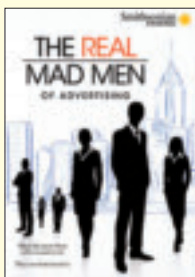
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The Real Mad Men of Advertising ★★★★★

(2016) 164 min. DVD: \$19.99. Smithsonian Channel (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0266-3.

When WWII ended, a pent-up demand for consumer goods sparked a revolution in the evolving medium of advertising. Narrated by *Mad Men* actor John Slattery, this four-part Smithsonian Channel series uses Don Draper and other fictional “mad men” on the hit TV show to review trends in TV advertising from the buttoned up 1950s through the freewheeling 1980s. At first, TV employed the hard sell, invoking the patriotic need to consume to spark the economy and avoid another Depression. Television

used repetition, promoting the feminine idea of women as homemakers, while also pitching ads to the children of the Baby Boom—notably that “salesman on strings,” Howdy Doody. In the ‘60s, candor replaced outlandish claims, even as creative ad men coined memorable phrases like the “Pepsi generation,” some of which entered the mainstream, such as “always a bridesmaid,” originally featured in a Listerine ad. In the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, blacks and other minorities demanded representation, and regulations curtailed depictions of smoking and miracle drug claims. *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner and real-life ad execs talk about life in ad agencies, which was often characterized by heavy smoking, on the job drinking, and sexual harassment. The late ‘70s and ‘80s ushered in advocacy advertising and slick appeals to boosting social status, along with niche advertising, cable TV, MTV, and that bane of late night, infomercials. Drawing on hundreds of examples, this fast-paced, informative, and entertaining series is highly recommended. **Editor’s Choice.** Aud H, C, P. (S. Rees)

in its anniversary issue. This is essentially a film about meetings, phone calls, reporting to higher-ups, and following an art director who tweaks the lively graphics that fill every page. The gentle souls who comprise the staff of *Highlights* fret over what kind of content does or does not fit into the magazine (politics are out, though it seems some progressive messages can be smuggled into the long-running *Goofus and Gallant* page). And there is some internal debate when an artist commissioned to draw a cover image for the 70th anniversary issue presents something that doesn’t quite capture what the *Highlights* crew wants to say going forward. A trip to a Silicon Valley app developer addresses how *Highlights* is trying to keep up with children and technology, although an editor maintains that kids still need quiet time with a physical publication in hand—and something to look forward to in the mailbox every month. These tidbits amount to fairly thin narrative soup, leaving viewers with the overall impression of having accidentally wandered into a suite of offices. A disappointing documentary, this is an optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Antony and Cleopatra ★★

(2017) 184 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

Directed by Iqbal Khan, the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 2017 revival of the Bard’s late drama about the demise of the Roman Republic—part history, part tragedy, part romance—proves a mixed bag in which the approaches taken by the leads seem at war with one another. On the one hand, Ben Allen draws a sharp, subtle portrait of the cunning Octavius Caesar, whose machinations

against his Roman rival Mark Antony—a man besotted by Egyptian queen Cleopatra—result in the former’s assumption of absolute power. By contrast, Antony Byrne’s turn as Antony is blunt, unvarying, and a trifle dull. The joker in the deck is Cleopatra, described in the play itself as a woman of “infinite variety,” a description that Josette Simon embodies by playing her as a preening, mercurial diva whose emotions and vocal inflections shift depending on her momentary moods. The three performances fail to mesh very comfortably, but their awkward combination still makes for an intriguing (if not entirely convincing) interpretation of a work whose disparate parts themselves never fully gel. The visual approach is fairly traditional, with togas, legionary uniforms, and cat statues predominating, and except for a misguided accent or two the supporting cast is strong. *Antony and Cleopatra* may not be one of Shakespeare’s greatest plays, but if one is looking for a filmed version, this is far preferable to the plodding 1972 vanity project for Charlton Heston. Extras include an audio commentary by the director, cast interviews, a behind-the-scenes featurette on the music score, and a cast gallery. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

Forever, Chinatown ★★

(2016) 32 min. DVD: \$85: high schools & public libraries; \$150: colleges & universities. New Day Films. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-57448-425-0.

James Q. Chan’s short documentary presents a succinct portrait of San Francisco’s Chinatown by looking at one man’s connection to the historic district. Frank Wong, an 81-year-old Chinese-American artist,

constructs painstakingly realistic miniature dioramas of various locations, including apartments, shoe shine stands, and fabric stores. Wong says he does this because the area is changing so rapidly and he wants to preserve the way it looked in the past, particularly in the 1940s and ‘50s when he was growing up. “It really was a city within a city,” he recalls. As he puts together tiny takeout food containers and metal woks filled with vegetables and spices, the camera moves in close to capture all of the exquisite detail. Wong learned his craft while serving as a prop master in Hollywood before going on to work on productions in Hawaii, where he remained for several decades. In Hollywood, people sometimes assumed that Wong was a houseboy or some other kind of domestic help—ignorant assumptions that stung, but Wong doesn’t dwell on it. Although Wong expresses some regret about leaving Hawaii, the director provides no details about his subject’s private life (though Wong appears to be single). *Forever, Chinatown* successfully underscores the value of Chinatown through this profile of one individual who emerged from the district, took inspiration from it, and pays it tribute in his own unique way. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Henry Miller: Asleep & Awake ★★★

(2007) 35 min. DVD: \$19.95. IndiePix (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Tom Schiller’s 1972 short documentary finds the 81-year-old Henry Miller (1891-1980), author of the notorious 1934 novel *Tropic of Cancer*, discoursing on a wide variety of topics, almost entirely from the confines of his Pacific Palisades apartment. The film begins with Miller waking up and heading to the bathroom, where carefully placed pictures on the wall prompt a series of recollections. Miller muses about hearing “celestial music” when he travels on airplanes and about the connection between Zen and sex; enthuses over authors and artists he admires, including Blaise Cendrars, Hermann Hesse, Hieronymus Bosch, and Paul Gauguin; opines about Mad King Louis II of Bavaria; discusses the principles of Buddhism and the mystic George Gurdjieff; and wonders at an obscure stone carving by Carl Jung and Japanese pictographs. He also describes his recurrent nightmares—especially those challenging his own identity—and talks about women he has known, revealing several semi-pornographic items hidden behind the window shutters. The film closes outside—on the set of old New York created for the film of *Hello, Dolly!*—where Miller recalls his miserable childhood and voices his continued loathing for the city. Miller’s wide-ranging observations provide an amusing glimpse into the mental world of this articulate, controversial writer. Extras include an interview with the director. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

I Am Somebody: Three Films by Madeline Anderson ★★½

(2018) 65 min. DVD: \$29.98 (\$248 w/PPR from www.icarusfilms.com). Icarus Films Home Video (available from most distributors). Closed captioned.

During the 1960s and '70s, Madeline Anderson broke racial and gender barriers in nonfiction filmmaking through her work as a director, producer, and editor. This compilation of three of her short documentaries offers a fascinating look at how Anderson used her medium to spotlight the tumultuous fights for both civil rights and women's rights. *Integration Report 1* (1960) examines the challenges that faced African Americans in both the Jim Crow South (particularly with the lunch counter sit-ins) and in supposedly liberal New York City (where white parents pulled their children from a Queens school that was integrated with black children from neighboring Brooklyn). *A Tribute to Malcolm X* (1967) offers a cogent (if too brief) overview of the provocative civil rights leader's views on race relations, including his explanation of controversial remarks made after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, along with an interview with his widow Betty Shabazz. The titular *I Am Somebody* (1970) is Anderson's finest work, an invigorating study of African American women hospital workers in Charleston, SC, who went on strike for wages above the \$1.30 per hour they were earning. The film offers remarkable insights into how the strike was organized, capturing the uncomfortable reactions from white politicians as the walkout became a national issue. Extras include an interview with Anderson, a featurette on the union leader who commissioned Anderson to make *I Am Somebody*, and a booklet. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

The Road Movie ★★★

(2017) 67 min. In Russian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Oscilloscope (avail. from most distributors).

Alternately funny and frightening, Dmitrii Kalashnikov's documentary features a compilation of dashboard videos posted online by Russian drivers showing collisions, near-misses, chases, and encounters with police, thugs, and apparent lunatics, the latter including one man who lies down in the middle of a road and another who hops on the hood of a moving car and simply refuses to budge. Some sequences stand out: the opening, in which two men see a meteor or plane streaking across the sky and try to follow it to its crash point; a harrowing journey through a forest fire raging on both sides of the road; police chasing a speeding red car that seems to be headed for the Kremlin; an explosion when a woman at a gas station uses a cigarette lighter to illuminate the pump (leading the camera car to speed away posthaste); and the stupefied reaction of a driver when he

careens into a river and is carried off by the current. Even with the short running time, a sense of repetitiveness does set in, and many of these mini-stories end inconclusively—we never learn what the object falling from the sky was, and the red car simply disappears without explanation. But the action—usually on icy, snow-swept highways—carries a visceral thrill. Judging by the number of views for the video clips featured here, this should definitely appeal to fans of oddball YouTube entries. Extras include two short documentaries by Kalashnikov, as well as an interview with the director. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Spirits of Rebellion: Black Independent Cinema from Los Angeles ★★★

(2017) 101 min. DVD: \$99.95: public libraries; \$395: colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-7815-1571-8.

Filmmaker Zeinabu Davis's documentary feature explores the cinematic movement dubbed the "LA Rebellion" (although some of the members disdain that label): some 50 African American and other minority student filmmakers who were enrolled in UCLA's MFA program during the 1970s and '80s. Filmmakers such as Julie Dash, Jamaa Fanaka, Charles Burnett, and Barbara McCullough gave voices and perspectives to ignored segments of society (the "blaxploitation" wave of early-'70s Hollywood is acknowledged as a passing fancy). LA Rebellion productions included films such as Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1978) and Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), along with numerous thesis films, TV projects, and avant-garde shorts rarely seen by the general public (with some explicit

visuals). Numerous filmmakers—many now in academia—describe their passion for the medium and their opportunity to tell highly personal/politicized stories in a climate of mutual support. Still, the message being delivered here is that people of color are badly underrepresented today in mainstream moviemaking (Don Amis states that the outright racism he might face is minor compared to backstabbing among "liberals"), and many films still rely on DIY and word-of-mouth promotions for screenings. While there is a scrapbook-ish feel to the overall narrative, *Spirits of Rebellion* still illustrates the importance of media-arts education and grassroots efforts in making and showing works by contemporary black filmmakers. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassady)

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY

Discoveries...America National Parks: Acadia National Park & Historic New England ★★★

(2018) 56 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.95. DRA. Bennett-Watt HD Productions. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-60490-214-3 (dvd), 978-1-60490-237-2 (blu-ray).

The latest addition to the high-def filmed multi-volume *Discoveries...America National Parks* series from Jim and Kelly Watt covers 13 national parks in five Northeastern states, sites rich with history and regional culture. A popular scenic coastal destination, Acadia National Park wraps around Bar Harbor, ME, and was the first national park established east of Mississippi (it was originally named Lafayette Park in 1919). The park's near-50,000 acres

Saving Brinton ★★½

(2018) 87 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$250 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

There have been other documentaries about caches of "lost" celluloid and cinematic rediscoveries—most recently *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (VL-1/18)—but in *Saving Brinton*, filmmakers Tommy Haines and Andrew Sherburne pay equal tribute to the hardy soul who became the accidental guardian of just such a long-lost treasure-trove. Upbeat and homespun-gentlemanly Michael Zahs is a jack-of-all-trades in Washington, Iowa—a farmer, teacher, home-builder, groundskeeper, and involved citizen. As a young newlywed in the 1980s he stored on his homestead three truckloads of relics from the obscure William Franklin Brinton, a showman who prior to his death in 1919 enthralled rural turn-of-the-century audiences with magic-lantern slides, hand-colored early films, and even prototype flying machines. After decades of neglect, archivists in the U.S. and France finally start to pay attention to Zahs's horde of immaculate playbills, intact projectors, and a much-sought-after Georges Méliès "trick film" that has not been seen for a century. In between his regular routines (and philosophical weathering of the death of his elderly mother) Zahs emcees new public screenings using the Brinton material, which here seems just as magical as it must have been to the wonderstruck original moviegoers. Besides being a charming love-letter to moving images, *Saving Brinton* is also a sweet-spirited evocation of small-town Americana, as represented by a man who would not let a vibrant piece of the past fade away. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassady)



of protected land were carved during an ice age and millions of visitors come annually to enjoy the museums and Bar Harbor's lobsters. In New Jersey, the Thomas Edison National Historical Park preserves Edison's chemical laboratory and many of his inventions (and co-inventions): phonographs, typewriters, cameras, and more. Movie fans will enjoy the reconstruction of Edison's Black Maria, arguably the first studio, and the opportunity to see some of the earliest, 19th-century short works ("The Kiss," "Enchanted Drawing"). People who like to explore old, hollowed-out, sprawling seaside forts can visit Sandy Hook Gateway National Park on the New Jersey shore. Woodstock, VT, a picturesque, historic village in the Green Mountains, is home to the Marsh Billings Rockefeller Historical Park—the only national park in the state. Here one can find a tribute to an American more of us should know about: George Perkins Marsh, who changed the very concept of land use and forestry conservation. Also of major interest is the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, NY, where in 1848 the women's rights movement officially began. A visitors center features fantastic sculptures on display, and major historical properties on the park's seven acres include a house occupied for years by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the noted 19th-century feminist leader. Sure to appeal to armchair travelers and history buffs, this is recommended. Aud: P. (T. Keogh)

Travel Safe Not Sorry: Discover Rugged Canada ★★★1/2

(2016) 45 min. DVD: \$44.95. DRA. TMW Media Group. PPR. Closed captioned.

City boy Tobias Scott—star of this series chronicling his journey to cross off extreme sports and experiences from his bucket list (without actually kicking the bucket)—comes home in this edition to his native Canada. In this land of many waterways, it's not too surprising that Scott engages in water sports, starting with rafting on the Ottawa River while running the rapids. The "white water newbies" are led by an experienced river rat who teaches the team the basics of paddling, and then coordinates their shared power through the pulse-pounding ride, with the paddlers' combined, synchronized efforts being the key to a successful ride. And Scott learns the right way to stay safe in the actually somewhat likely event of the raft flipping and ejecting its occupants into the swift current. Next up is canoeing. Not all rivers have handy drive-up locations, so Scott's expedition begins with the art of "portage" or carrying the canoe on one's back (along with other supplies) to the waterway. The other two segments include an eye-opening primer on foraging for edible plants (and a truly scary look at near-identical mushrooms—one safe to eat, the other potentially lethal), and safely riding four-wheel all-terrain vehicles (as well

as an all-terrain Segway!). Sure to appeal to more adventurous travelers, this is recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

HISTORY & CURRENT EVENTS

Acorn and the Firestorm ★★★

(2017) 84 min. DVD: \$19.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Two conservative activists plotted and succeeded in bringing down a well-established, volunteer-based organization committed to helping the poor and marginalized. That is the gist of Reuben Atlas and Sam Pollard's intense documentary, which focuses on the sting operation undertaken by a pair of right-wing provocateurs, James O'Keefe and Hannah Giles, against ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) in 2009. While acknowledging the inappropriateness of some of the advice given by low-level volunteers to O'Keefe and Giles, who were posing as a pimp and prostitute, respectively, the film is decidedly sympathetic to ACORN, sketching its history of grassroots achievements from its founding in 1970 by Wade Rathke in Arkansas as a group demanding change for citizens forgotten by both political parties. Questions about ACORN's voter registration drives occasioned criticism of then-candidate Barack Obama for his connections to the group during the presidential campaign of 2008, and allegations of financial irregularities by its governing board soon followed,

but it was the release of the O'Keefe-Giles tapes that ultimately led to ACORN's federal defunding and bankruptcy. Using excerpts from depositions, the film questions the accuracy of the heavily-edited O'Keefe-Giles videos and emphasizes that investigations cleared the organization of legal wrongdoing, although the damage had already been done. Interviews with Giles and Bertha Lewis, a committed volunteer who rose to become ACORN's CEO, crystallize the fundamental differences in attitude between the right and the left, which are unlikely to be overcome in today's poisonous political climate. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

America's Untold Story ★★★

(2017) 2 discs. 240 min. DVD: \$29.99 (\$59.99 w/ PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0437-7.

In the 16th century, most of America's eastern coast was simply known as "La Florida," reflecting the region's Spanish heritage. In 1565, the outpost at what is now St. Augustine, FL, was founded to protect Spanish treasure fleets, establish a Spanish presence against claims of other nations, create a self-sustaining colony, and build missions with the aim of converting the natives (Spain's pious king felt that the Second Coming couldn't take place until all populations were Christian). Narrated by Jimmy Smits, this four-part PBS-aired documentary—from the *Secrets of the Dead* series—details nearly three centuries of Spanish life and rule in northern Florida, dating long before Jamestown and Plymouth Rock. The original Spanish expedition featured eight ships



The Final Year ★★★1/2

(2018) 90 min. DVD: \$26.98. Magnolia Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

Filmmaker Greg Barker looks at the last 12 months of Barack Obama's administration, treating viewers to remarkable portraits of three unique patriots just as they are slowly heading toward the exit, fixing what they can in America and the world before 2017. Barker's access to meetings, private conversations, Obama's inspirational talks with youth in Greece and Japan—even grabbing a few minutes here and there with the charismatic commander-in-chief himself—is often thrilling. Although Barker is sometimes in the vicinity of press secretary Josh Earnest and National Security Advisor Susan Rice (getting a couple of wary statements from the latter), he largely focuses on Deputy National Security Advisor and all-around aide-de-camp to Obama, Ben Rhodes; U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power; and Secretary of State John Kerry. Racing against the clock, the trio deal with a wide range of issues: negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program; the maddening tragedy of Syria and Russia's disingenuousness regarding atrocities; Boko Haram's reign of terror in Nigeria; and much more. Kerry talks about how his Vietnam experience in the late 1960s informed his worldview today about war and its victims. Meanwhile, Ireland-born Power expresses personal empathy with immigrants and asylum-seekers, and Rhodes (who can't help but remind one of Rob Lowe's loyal character on *The West Wing*) provides running commentary about everything. The film leads, of course, to Donald Trump's unexpected win in November 2016, prompting fear among Obama's team that number 44's legacy will be undone by the next guy. And we all know what happened next. Extras include additional scenes and a photo gallery. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

and 1,500 people, although many perished during the passage, after which weather, disease, hunger, and conflicts with natives took further tolls. Over time, intermarriage with native women and the arrival of blacks created "America's first melting pot." All was not peace and harmony, however, and as English settlements expanded, so did the number of clashes, which climaxed when privateer Sir Francis Drake (nicknamed "the dragon" for his ferocity) sacked the Spanish city. The burgeoning slave trade in the southern colonies actually created a north to south "underground railroad," as slaves fled southward to relative freedom in St. Augustine, establishing the first free black settlement outside the city for a time. The documentary describes the shifting alliances, greed, religious zeal, and unspeakable cruelty (bordering on ethnic cleansing) against runaway slaves and Native Americans. But this is also a story of pride and persistence, culminating in 1821 with the Spanish government quitting its claims in Florida. Combining scholarly commentary, dramatic re-creations, and new information gleaned from archaeological digs and shipwreck explorations off modern day Cape Canaveral, this documentary illuminates an overlooked chapter in American history. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

The Bombing of Wall Street ★★★

(2018) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-62789-782-2.

On September 16, 1920, a horse-drawn cart packed with hundreds of pounds of dynamite exploded in the heart of the Wall Street financial district, killing 38 people, wounding many others, damaging property, and sending a shudder of fear through a nation that was still recovering from the trauma of the "war to end all wars." Narrated by Oliver Platt, this PBS-aided *American Experience* documentary directed by Susan Bellows resurrects this half-forgotten moment in American history. Resentment lingered along with a feeling that the Great War was a rich man's war, sacrificing millions of lives while accumulating huge fortunes for Wall Street financiers and investors. It was a time of revolution in Russia, widespread labor strikes, and the birth of the phrase "bread or revolution," leading many to fear that America could be the next country to fall to radical violence. Ironically, many of those killed in the Wall Street blast were lowly clerks and messengers, not tycoons. Searching for an enemy, people blamed foreigners. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer mobilized a campaign of roundups, warrantless searches, deportation attempts, and strengthening of anti-immigration laws. This politically ambitious man, known as the "fighting Quak-

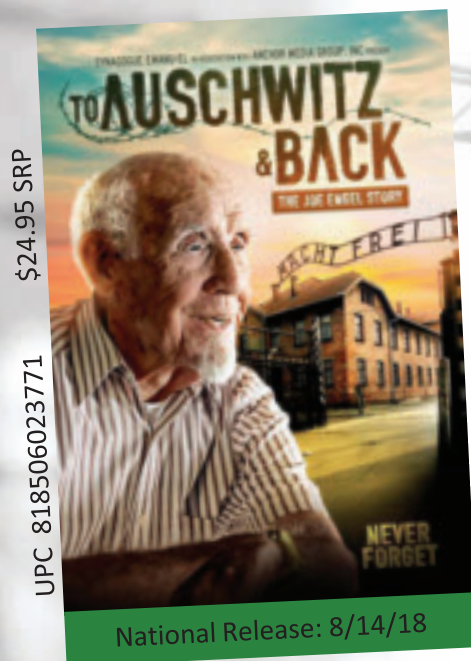
er" for his pacifist principles, was assisted by his young deputy, J. Edgar Hoover, who used his experience with classifying documents at the Library of Congress to pioneer information-gathering techniques. Overnight, "Palmer raids" and the "Red Scare" became national catchphrases. Eventually, the excesses of the hysteria sparked a backlash, and cooler heads prevailed, but not before serious damage was done to constitutional rights. Although the evidence pointed to an Italian anarchist group, the crime was never solved, and no one was charged. Combining archival film footage with scholarly interviews, this documentary offers a revealing look at an historical event that carries current relevance. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Canine Soldiers ★★★

(2016) 55 min. DVD: \$149 (\$349 w/PPR). DRA. Juno Films.

No matter what a viewer's stance is on the ethics of placing a dog in harm's way, the fact is that canines are used as military assets in war zones. Dogs sniff out explosives before soldiers step on or drive over them, and they detect survivors (or corpses) following the destruction of a building. Dogs are a fact of life in America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their extensive military training is roughly estimated to cost \$50,000 (expen-

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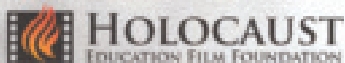
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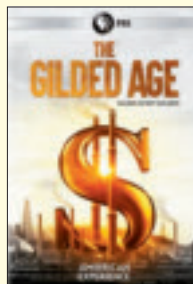
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The Gilded Age ★★½

(2018) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0395-0.

In the decades after America's Civil War, the railroads, telegraphs, and increasingly crowded urban centers were changing America's long status as an agrarian nation. The Industrial Revolution also ushered in conspicuous consumption, rampant inequality, and corruption, leading many to wonder what had happened to the nation's democratic ideals and promise. Narrated by Oliver Platt, this PBS-aided *American Experience* documentary directed by Sarah Colt examines America's Gilded Age, a time when there was no tax (income, inheritance, or corporate), and a mansion in Newport, RI, could be called a "cottage," while many endured lives of crowded, sooty poverty, marked by child labor, few regulations, and unsafe workplace conditions. The documentary covers such memorable figures as financier J. Pierpont Morgan, who was known to freeze onlookers with his bulbous nose and piercing glare, and self-made industrialist Andrew Carnegie who, despite his benign appearance, believed in the "survival of the fittest," suppressing wages by violently breaking a strike at his steel plant in Homestead, PA. The film also covers such diverse figures as reformer Henry George, who helped invent populism; William Jennings Bryan, known for his winding speeches; and the titular leader of "Coxey's Army," a crusade marking the first march on Washington that ended when Coxey was arrested for trespassing. Along the way, *The Gilded Age* touches on a wide range of topics, including the status of immigrants, African Americans, and women. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



sive equipment is extra). Filmmaker Nancy Schiesari's documentary *Canine Soldiers* serves up an emotionally complex overview of dogs being integrated into dangerous field operations, where their motivation for risking their own lives lies in their deep bonds with people. The film illustrates the rigorous training the animals receive, and how they are rewarded with positive attention from designated handlers. These relationships are a double-edged sword: necessary to help keep troops alive, but very difficult on long-term handlers who can't suppress their feelings about their four-legged charges. We meet several veterans coping with the fallout of having been assigned U.S. Army dogs, including a young woman whose rocky return to the U.S. has been softened by adopting four or five dogs. The sight of full military honors being paid to a deceased Army dog is a little surreal, but not to handlers from various wars who turn up for the tearful ceremony. Not controversial at all are the pooches themselves, regal-looking German Shepherds, mostly; magnificent animals who naturally seem more cut out for action than sleeping on an owner's bed. A thought-provoking film, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

The Destruction of Memory ★★½

(2016) 85 min. DVD: \$390. Icarus Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Tim Slade's adaptation of Robert Bevan's acclaimed 2006 nonfiction book details the intentional destruction of architecturally significant sites by forces seeking to obliterate traces of cultural heritage. The practice was used with brutal effectiveness in 20th-century crimes, including the 1938 Kristallnacht in Nazi Germany and the 1990s

Balkan War (particularly the destruction of the iconic Mostar bridge). In the current century, radical terrorist groups occupying war-torn Iraq and Syria and sections of Mali have gone out of their way to demolish ancient structures and artifacts from the pre-Islamic era as part of their reigns of terror. Architect Daniel Libeskind points out that these actions have a cruel logic: "One of the ways to remove history is to get rid of all physical traces of history and make believe nothing ever happened—nothing was ever there." *The Destruction of Memory* also looks at the California company CyArk, which uses 3D scanning technology to create digital records of at-risk ancient sites. Unfortunately, solutions do not exist; international law cannot be easily enforced and few individuals have ever been brought to justice for this type of extreme vandalism. A complex and often heartbreaking documentary showing humankind at some of its worst, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Titanic's Tragic Twin: The Britannic Disaster ★★½

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

Thanks to James Cameron, even many young people are familiar with the story of the *Titanic* and how the "unsinkable" ship met its end (along with many of its passengers) about three hours after hitting an iceberg. But fewer know the story of her sister ship, the *Britannic*, which despite being re-engineered to be a safer vessel, also suffered a tragic fate and sunk in less than an hour in 1916. The *Britannic* was a hospital ship working during World War I, ferrying injured British soldiers from the battle-

front to medical facilities in England. When the ship went down, it was on its way to pick up the infirm in Mediterranean waters, which are much shallower and warmer than the icy mid-Atlantic where the *Titanic* sank. Even so, 30 people perished along with the *Britannic* itself. Combining interviews with relatives of survivors, diary and letter entries, and dramatic re-enactments, the film also follows a diving exploration (using a submersible, as the wreck is too dangerous for free-diving). What sunk this mighty ship? Why did it go down so fast? And why did the extra safety features fail? The answers are found in this interesting documentary by filmmaker Renny Bartlett, which explores a fascinating tangent to the *Titanic* story. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

VA: The Human Cost of War ★★★

(2017) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0371-4.

This PBS-aided documentary from Emmy Award-winner Ric Burns details the history and ongoing challenges facing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the second largest agency in the federal government. Founded in 1930 as the Veterans Administration—through the consolidation of overlapping agencies—and elevated to a Cabinet-level Executive Branch department in 1989, the VA has been burdened over the years by inadequate budgeting, political agendas, and a chronic inability to properly address the physical and mental health needs of the nation's wounded warriors. Wait lists for veterans seeking medical aid is touched upon through first-person accounts that present the VA as incompetent in addressing sensitive issues, and the film also briefly examines the tragically high rates of veteran suicide (concentrating on one particularly horrific example), although there is no mention here of the current debate about enabling privatized health care as an alternative for veterans who are unhappy with the VA's operations. Interviewees include Dr. David J. Shulkin, the Obama-era Secretary of Veterans Affairs official who stayed on with the Trump administration but was fired in 2018. Although too short to effectively explore the many questions it raises, this documentary would serve as a starting point for viewers to delve further into the subject. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

BIOGRAPHY

Augie ★★½

(2017) 84 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

James Keach's documentary focuses on Augie Nieto, a fitness industry executive best known for building the Lifecycle and Life Fitness brands during the 1980s and

'90s. The athletic Nieto was the perfect ambassador for his product line, recognized as one of the most innovative and charismatic executives in corporate America. In 2005, while vacationing in Vietnam, Nieto began experiencing mobility problems and upon returning to the U.S. was diagnosed with ALS. Although he initially reacted to the news with a suicide attempt, he regained composure and launched a foundation to encourage further research into ALS and potential treatments. Unfortunately, Nieto's physical condition deteriorated rapidly and he is now dependent on round-the-clock caregivers and communications via computer technology. Keach crisscrosses between the daily routines experienced by Nieto and his wife Lynne, conversations involving Nieto's siblings and children, and news coverage of Nieto in his physical prime. While Nieto is an inspiring personality—he maintains a salty sense of humor, with mildly off-color jokes relayed through his computer communications system—the film's pacing is surprisingly sluggish. Still, this should be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Beuys ★★½

(2017) 111 min. In English & German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95 (\$349 w/PPR from www.kinolorbereedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Joseph Beuys (1921-86), the German artist who was a major force in the Fluxus movement and rivaled Andy Warhol in provocation and public recognition in his day is profiled in Andres Veiel's energetic but rather muddled documentary. The film is composed largely of archival material, much of it taken from John Halpern's earlier *Joseph Beuys: Transformer*, made in conjunction with Beuys's exhibition at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 1979. *Beuys* sketches its subject's life, although it is circumspect about wartime details (apart from the plane crash he suffered while serving as a Luftwaffe gunner, which Beuys apparently mythologized in later years and, some suggest, led to severe psychological problems). Veiel also covers Beuys's involvement in left-wing German politics (he was a founder of the Green Party, although it ultimately turned on him). While excerpts from interviews with friends, associates, and critics are included, the majority of the footage shows Beuys creating, often very publicly, some of his more notable projects, or discoursing at length on his ideas about art and society. Unfortunately, Veiel's scattershot approach, which seems meant to convey Beuys's mercurial nature, comes at the expense of clarity. Extras include an excerpt from *Transformer*, an interview with Veiel conducted by John Halpern, and introductions to a screening of *Beuys* by Halpern and New York gallery owner Ronald Feldman. Art history collections will definitely want to consider, but this is optional otherwise. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Big Sonia ★★★

(2018) 93 min. DVD: \$69.95 (\$350 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Co-directed by Leah Warshawski and her husband, Todd Soliday, *Big Sonia* centers on Warshawski's grandmother, Holocaust survivor Sonia Warshawski, who has built a good life for herself in Kansas. Every day, she goes to work at the alterations shop that she and her late husband, a fellow survivor, established in a suburban shopping mall, where she is one of the few tenants left. Sonia is friendly, fashionable (with a fondness for leopard prints), and enjoys doting on customers who've been frequenting the shop for decades. When business is slow, she doodles in a distinctive folk-art style, which triggers animated sequences depicting what Sonia terms her "dark spot." During her off-hours, Sonia speaks to middle school students and inmates about her life in Poland under Nazi occupation (she is often introduced by her daughter). In an NPR interview, Sonia recalls that she was 13 years old when the Nazis took away her father and brother (she never saw them again). Sonia and her mother were sent to a series of concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, while her younger sister escaped to live with the partisans. By keeping busy, she explains, she's able to avoid dwelling on the past, although she tells a student group, "I don't carry hate, but I will not forgive." Sonia's sons and daughters talk about the difficulties of growing up with Holocaust survivor parents, but family has helped Sonia to move forward—and keep working even after the mall closes. As Sonia's son, Morrie, puts it, "We were the rebirth of everything they lost." Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Bill Nye: Science Guy ★★½

(2017) 100 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR), Blu-ray: \$29.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-5317-0406-3 (dvd), 978-1-5317-0407-0 (blu-ray).

Filmmakers David Alvarado and Jason Sussberg's PBS-aided POV documentary examines the ongoing and increasingly relevant mission of a man who initially appeared on TV as a clever entertainer. Cornell-educated Bill Nye actually possesses a degree in engineering, but taking classes under iconic astronomer-author-educator Carl Sagan inspired him in his post-grad career to be a mass-media advocate for science and science teaching, becoming a children's-TV personality as the host of the long-running *Bill Nye the Science Guy* series. Recently, Nye fought publicly against creationism and the deniers of human-caused climate change (challenging larger-than-life foes like Sarah Palin, evangelist Ken Ham, and weightlifting meteorologist Joe Bastardi). Detractors say that Nye is more celebrity than accredited scientist, and the film does concede he has long sought showbiz fame (leading to bad career choices and estrangement from his original production team). Nye has even submitted to psychological studies of celebrity on the brain. Meanwhile, he has become CEO of the Planetary Society, where his enthusiasm and *Science Guy* cachet has re-ignited a Sagan project to launch the LightSail deep-space solar-wind probe. Nye's evolution from latter-day Mr. Wizard to prominent, if somewhat heroically flawed, science defender lends the film something of a dramatic overtone. Interviewees here include scientists/authors Ann Druyan and Neil deGrasse Tyson. Extras include additional scenes. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Cassidy)



Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story ★★★

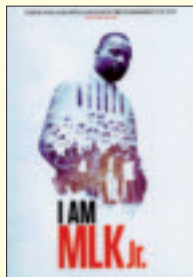
(2017) 88 min. DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95 (\$349 w/PPR from www.kinolorbereedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

Hedy Lamarr was one of the most glamorous movie stars of her day, an Austrian-born actress who became notorious for nude scenes in the 1933 erotic Czechoslovakian drama *Ecstasy* and later fled Nazi Europe to become a star in Hollywood, famed for her beauty. It wasn't until the 1990s, however, that her greatest accomplishment became known. A brilliant woman with a private laboratory and a passion for inventing, Lamarr developed (with composer George Antheil, a fellow European exile in Los Angeles) the technology of frequency hopping for the American Navy to make radio-controlled torpedoes. Never applied at the time, the technology later became the foundation for Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, and cell phones. Filmmaker Alexandra Dean's documentary covers all aspects of Lamarr's life: actress, inventor, doting mother, independent producer, and toward the end a recluse addicted to drugs and plastic surgery. A rare 1990 audio interview discovered in 2016 allows Lamarr to tell her own story throughout, along with letters read by actress Diane Kruger, and comments from Lamarr's children, granddaughter, and biographers. The resulting portrait presents a brilliant, complicated woman whose legacy was once judged solely on her appearance, box-office receipts, and scandals. A fine companion to Richard Rhodes's 2011 book *Hedy's Folly*, extras include extended interviews and an interview with Dean. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Axmaker)

I Am MLK Jr. ★★★★★

(2018) 93 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Filmmakers John Barbisan and Michael Hamilton effectively drill into the psyche of Martin Luther King Jr. in this excellent documentary, detailing his thinking and strategies for political action. Interviewees who knew and worked closely with King, including Jesse Jackson, John Lewis, and James Lawson, as well as sharp contemporary observers such as Van Jones and a pre-scandal Tavis Smiley, talk about King as a man whose name was synonymous with a nation's progress in the area of civil rights. All of the usual historical data and chapters in King's life are presented here, from his origins up through the major victories (and attendant costs on supporters who faced a bloody backlash) and dashed hopes in the struggle, along with a public rebuke in leading newspapers over King's opposition to the Vietnam War. Both the shrewd and visionary sides of King's leadership are explored, including his awareness that recruiting high school kids in brutal Birmingham protests would draw more attention to segregationist violence, and his decision to mount the Selma marches—met by violent state troopers—to give Lyndon Johnson the political capital to write the Voting Rights Act. A fine biographical portrait of one man who carried the destiny of many, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)



Mabel, Mabel, Tiger Trainer ★★★

(2018) 93 min. DVD: \$19.95. Cinema Libre Studio (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Leslie Zemeckis has a penchant for making documentaries about people who were simultaneously on the margins of society and in the glare of a spotlight (*Behind the Burly Q* [VL-7/11] on the history of burlesque, and *Bound by Flesh* [VL-11/14], which told the story of conjoined twins who were briefly stars of vaudeville). Narrated by Melissa Leo, *Mabel, Mabel, Tiger Trainer* centers on the fascinating life of Mabel Stark, a circus trainer of wild cats. Drawing upon multiple interviews and archival materials, the documentary tells the life story of Stark, born in 1889 to a Kentucky farm couple. Following her father's death and mother's psychiatric woes, Stark fled an abusive stepfather to become a dancer, a stand-in for Mae West, and ultimately a circus performer who found her passion taming lions and tigers through positive reinforcement rather than the whip. Attacked, mauled, and bitten numerous times in her 56 years with cats, Stark nevertheless loved what she did and took responsibility for leveraging her deep knowledge of cats into training another generation of tamers. Zemeckis covers the many chapters of Stark's often bumpy life, including her multiple marriages, physical injuries, and cruel dismissal during her final years from an animal sanctuary. As a pioneer in a job once unavailable to women, Stark is certainly unique in her contributions and toughness. Extras include additional footage and a behind-the-scenes featurette with the director. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Man In Red Bandana ★★★★★1/2

(2018) 80 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$325 w/PPR from *edu.passionriver.com*). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

A 9/11 story you might not have heard yet,

this stunning documentary about heroism and self-sacrifice, narrated by Gwyneth Paltrow, tells the story of Welles Crowther, a twentysomething equities trader working on one of the floors where terrorists directly struck the South Tower at the World Trade Center. As the tale is told by some of the 18 people Crowther saved, they were overwhelmed by smoke and darkness on various floors. Unable to find a way out, they were startled by the sudden appearance of an unknown man wearing a red bandana across the lower half of his face. This was Crowther, who announced that he knew the way to a staircase, and repeatedly led groups of injured people (even carrying some) to street level. Crowther lost his own life during his continuing efforts, creating a heartbreaking mystery for his family and friends about what happened to him that day. While all of this proves compelling, the soul of filmmaker Matthew Weiss's *Man In Red Bandana* lies in Crowther's life story, which almost lends itself to the idea that he was born to perform such an extraordinary act of valor. Interviews with his family are beautiful and tear-inducing, and viewers come away with the feeling that what Crowther did that terrible day was utterly characteristic. An inspiring documentary about a true American hero, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

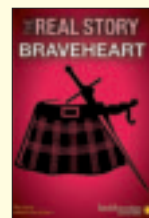
Video Librarian Online

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Series Update

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

Newly available from PBS, **The Real Story: Braveheart**, **The Real Story: Live Free or Die Hard**, and **The Real Story: True Grit** (45 min. each, DVD: \$14.99 each) are the three latest titles in the titular series produced by the Smithsonian Channel that uses modern technology to explore "legendary" stories. See review of *The Real Story: Saving Private Ryan* in VL-3/18.



PAW Patrol: Summer Rescues (97 min., DVD: \$10.99) is the latest title from Paramount and Nickelodeon's computer-animated series following the canine crew as they engage in summertime adventures including a firework rescue and the saving of a chili cook-off competition. See review of *PAW Patrol* in VL-7/14.

Paramount is also releasing **Bubble Guppies: Bubble Puppy's Awesome Adventures** (114 min., DVD: \$10.99), the most recent title in Nickelodeon's animated preschool series following the underwater-dwelling Bubble Guppies in adventures including "The Temple of the Lost Puppy" and "The New Doghouse." See review of *Bubble Guppies* in VL-7/12.

Kino Lorber has released **The Pink Panther Cartoon Collection, Volume 2 1966-1968** (125 min., DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95), co-created by Warner Bros. animator Friz Freleng, which features 20 animated escapades based on Blake Edwards's original creation. See review of *The Pink Panther Classic Cartoon Collection* in VL-3/06.

Newly available from the BBC is the 2017 debut season of the American-based version of the popular British car aficionado series, **Top Gear America: Season One** (360 min., DVD: 2 discs, \$24.98), hosted by William Fichtner and Antron Brown. See review of *Top Gear: The Complete First Season* in VL-9/11.



ACCA—13-Territory Inspection Dept.: The Complete Series

★★★★1/2

(2017) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Based on the popular manga series by Natsume Ono, this delightfully peculiar anime series centers on ACCA, a bureaucratic organization that coordinates government agencies within the 13 states of the Kingdom of Dowa. Things are not going well in the kingdom: the monarch is in poor health, a *coup d'état* is being planned, and Jean Otus—the number two man in ACCA's inspection agency—is being targeted by enemies of the state. Jean is a fairly unusual character who exudes a seemingly indolent demeanor with a streak of absentmindedness (his tendency to misplace his cigarette lighter creates more than a few headaches; indeed, Jean's smoking habit is something you almost never find in today's animation). A great deal of political plotting and convoluted plot twists follow, presented with a sense of maturity and playful intellectualism along with a stylish visual approach. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2017 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Bungo Stray Dogs ★★

(2016) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



This anime series opens with the 18-year-old Atsushi Nakajima being expelled from his orphanage after a curious series of events involving a destructive tiger. Penniless and hungry, Atsushi rescues a strange man from drowning in the river who turns out to be a detective named Osamu Dazai. Dazai and his partner Doppo Kunikida belong to the Armed Detective Agency, where every member of the investigative staff has some supernatural power. Each carries the name of a famous writer, either Japanese or Western, and their abilities are tied to a memorable plot device in a classic literary work. Without divulging too much information that would create a major spoiler, Atsushi becomes part of this uncommon crime-solving team, which is in constant conflict against a shadowy organization known as the Port Mafia. While the literary angle is a bit more cerebral than usual, *Bungo Stray Dogs* suffers from predictable plot twists and merely adequate animation, and Atsushi is not a particularly engaging protagonist. Presenting all 12 episodes from the 2016 first season in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, this is an optional purchase. (P. Hall)

Chaos;Child: The Complete Series

★★★★1/2

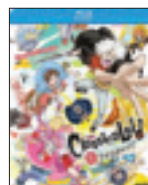
(2017) 5 discs. 375 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



This anime series, based on a popular video game, follows Takuru Miyashiro, the president of a school newspaper club, who is in charge of investigating a series of mysterious deaths. Takuru becomes aware of something called the Sumo Sticker, a strange graffiti symbol that was first seen a few years before the devastating earthquake that killed his parents. Looking into the Sumo Stickers leads Takuru and his fellow student journalists into a strange medical environment where experimentation is being done on the creation of delusions. Here, Takuru finds himself confronting emotional trauma that alters his perceptions of reality. *Chaos;Child* boasts one of the most imaginative storylines in recent anime, and it is presented with stylish animation that enhances the sense of paranoia lacing its way through the central characters' experiences. Presenting all 12 episodes plus a bonus OVA from 2017 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

ClassicaLoid: Complete Collection ★★1/2

(2016) 3 discs. 625 min. Blu-ray: \$79.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



Fantasy anime series can be very peculiar, but few are quite as strange as *ClassicaLoid*, in which Mozart and Beethoven (or weirdly oversized replicas) inhabit a mansion—left to young Kanae by her grandmother (along with its huge pipe organ)—that is scheduled for demolition but rescued at the last minute. As the episodes progress, the two musicians are joined by similar oddballs representing Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Chopin, and Liszt (some in female form), who are all capable of producing modernized versions of their most recognizable melodies that are largely synthesizer-based and wield enormous power over the masses. Much of the series plays like a sitcom, with Kanae and her slacker best friend Kagura constantly having to deal with the ClassicaLoids' antics (many involving cooking). But there is an overarching plot that focuses on the imperious figure of Bach, as well as giant robots, hordes of zombie-like humans, the *Voyager* mission, and enormous alien spacecraft. Of course, these disparate elements do not exactly form a logical narrative, and the characters tend to scream a lot, but the colorful psychedelic animation is engaging. Although advertised as the "complete collection," this set only compiles the debut 2016 season (a 2017 second season has aired). Presenting all 25 episodes in a

Blu-ray edition, in Japanese with English subtitles, rated TV-14, this is a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

The Disastrous Life of Saiki K.: Season One, Part 1 ★★★★★

(2016) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



The slyly entertaining and wry premise of this hit paranormal classroom comedy is that the lead character who has near-godlike psychic powers finds it all a burden, which makes him a 16-year-old curmudgeon, not a superhero. Saiki Kusuo can hear peoples' thoughts (which are annoying), is clairvoyant (so nothing surprises him), and can perform teleportation, shape-shifting, telekinesis, and all the rest (so his feckless dad constantly tries to exploit him for an easier life). Narrating nonstop in sarcastic style, Saiki—who has game-controller-like antennae in his head—tries to avoid attention, shuns heroic acts, and discourages sycophants at school. But he still winds up with plenty of all three in episodes that are sometimes more like collections of skits, frequently riffing on Japanese culture, including nudges at *Shonen Jump*, the hugely popular manga magazine in which Saiki first appeared, and a bit with Saiki dissecting the demerits of a video game. Since prudish (or just bored) Saiki foils male students from peeping at unclad co-eds, the dirty-joke elements here are minimal. Presenting the first 12 episodes from 2016 in a DVD/Blu-ray Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include an episode commentary. Highly recommended. [Note: *The Disastrous Life of Saiki K.: Season One, Part 2* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)

Fairy Tail: Dragon Cry ★★

(2017) 85 min. DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Anyone unfamiliar with the anime series *Fairy Tail*, will have a hard time trying to figure out what's going on in the 2017 feature film *Dragon Cry*, which takes place narratively within the last few story arcs. Familiar characters return for this tale about a wizard who enters the Kingdom of Fiore and successfully steals the Dragon Cry—a magic staff discovered in a dragon graveyard. What ensues is an incredibly complicated story involving possession of the staff by one party or another, with heroes and villains alternately victorious and defeated. It's difficult keeping track of who's doing what, and for what reason, while the animation is pretty run of the mill. Presented in separate dual-language DVD and Blu-ray/DVD Combo editions, rated TV-14, this is an optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

Flip Flappers: Complete Collection ★★1/2

(2016) 2 discs. 325 min. Blu-ray: \$69.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



Cocona, a seemingly average, demure schoolgirl, is suddenly accosted by the sprite-like and mysterious Papika (voiced in the Japanese track by pop-idol and voiceover actress M·A·O), who rides a surfboard-style flying craft and is accompanied by a whimsical robot. Together the girls have the ability to enter a fantastic realm called Pure Illusion, where weird, wonderful, and sometimes nightmarish metamorphoses take place. Cocona and Papika become embroiled in the accumulation of “shards” that grant ultimate power, but behind the scenes is a far darker conspiracy involving Cocona’s true identity and a lifetime of deception that has surrounded her. To call *Flip Flappers* confusing would be an understatement, but it is dazzling on a visual level, with fluid artistic styles that befit the reality-bending storylines. One might possibly read into the shojo-oriented material a metaphor for a romantic relationship between the leads (who cry out each other’s names incessantly) that meets strong social/parental resistance. Or, maybe it’s just a lot of noisy warrior-girl and monster-boss battles after all. Presenting all 13 episodes from 2016 in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-14, this is a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Izetta—The Last Witch: The Complete Series

★★1/2

(2016) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Izetta boasts a promising premise: a World War in which the outcome is determined not by an atomic bomb but by magic wielded by witches. The core relationship between Princess (later, Empress) Finé and young witch Izetta drives the story, providing heavy subtext of more-than-friends behavior (that never goes anywhere). And while the setting could have presented a true alternate reality, instead viewers will see familiar technology and a barely-veiled “Germania.” Which is not to say that watching *Izetta* isn’t an occasionally tense and sometimes heart-tugging experience. The combat scenes are engaging, and the character design is mostly strong. *Izetta* provides most of the fan service as everyone else keeps their clothes on and dignity intact. Despite a few clever ideas and some nice design work, this is a somewhat disappointing series, cool-looking but lacking a truly imaginative alternate reality and side-stepping any deeper exploration of a devoted and loving female friendship. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2016 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, this

is a strong optional purchase. (L. Martincik)

Kado: The Right Answer

★★★★1/2

(2017) 4 discs. 325 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).

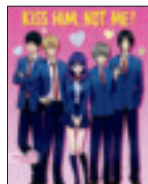


A big-think anime series that may remind some of the fiction of Arthur C. Clarke, *Kado* is a quality production based on an original script hailing from the venerable Toei film studio. A giant cube materializes at a Japanese airport—absorbing an airliner full of VIPs in the process—from which emerges a godlike being in more-or-less human form calling himself “zaShunina.” This entity claims to be from a higher dimension (37 dimensions higher, to be specific) called the “anisotropic,” and he presents Japan with a series of incredible technologies designed to advance human evolution. But even the first gift—limitless free energy—throws the world community into turmoil. Are the inscrutable zaShunina’s intentions for Earth benign or hostile, and can the creature possibly be resisted? A continual sense of wonder permeates this handsome and engaging series. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2017 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include a bonus episode that is actually more of a story-so-far bridge at the halfway point. Highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Kiss Him, Not Me! The Complete Series

★★1/2

(2016) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



The slender premise of this risible classroom-harem comedy is rooted in “otaku” obsessions and fandom. Homely, manga-addicted girl student Kae Serinuma doesn’t mind being a friendless wallflower because she can glory in secretly being a “fujoshi”—i.e., a female obsessed with male-on-male couplings (albeit wishful and imaginary), not only among hunks in the comics and cartoons but also the schoolboys around her. When her favorite male anime character dies, however, Kae’s traumatic weight loss leaves her suddenly svelte and attractive to all the classroom “princes.” Now the introvert fangirl must deal with their avid courtship. Some episodes trade on such uncomfortable material as near date-rape (by a boy suffering from fever delirium) and a young teacher who demands exclusive rights to date Kae. But it’s also about female empowerment, with Kae defiantly refusing to choose any suitor. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2016 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, this is a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Koro Sensei Quest ★★

(2016) 2 discs. 120 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



A spin-off of the *Assassination Classroom* manga, this anime series is set in an alternative role-playing game universe. The central characters are the students in E Class of Kunugigaoka Junior High School, who are being trained as heroes to fight off some rather odd villains. One of their instructors in Koro Sensei, aka the Demon King, who gladly teaches E Class how they will one day be able to bring him down in defeat. And that’s the least bizarre aspect of this series, which often seems like an unholy mixture of J.K. Rowling, Salvador Dali, and Tex Avery with its heaping servings of wild fantasy, surreal landscapes, and lowbrow humor. The episodes are presented in 10-minute segments, but even these bite-sized offerings are overstuffed with excessive detours into body swapping, children turned into monsters, dungeon misadventures, and adult humor. And while some of the shenanigans are amusing—if only for their sheer weirdness—the production fails to maintain the kinetic energy needed to keep the wackiness engaging. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2016 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include an episode commentary. Optional. (P. Hall)

The Life of Budori Gusuko

★★★

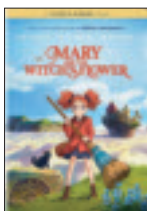
(2012) 105 min. Blu-ray: \$29.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



A fascinating 2012 anime feature based on the 1932 novel by Kenji Miyazawa, *The Life of Budori Gusuko* centers on the title character, a walking, talking cat (in a world of human-like cats) who is a kindhearted schoolboy living with his parents and younger sister in a mossy cottage between a quaint nearby village and a forest. Dad works in the woods and scavenges for food, while mom takes care of the house and little daughter. When Budori comes home from school, he takes his eager sister outdoors to play. But Budori’s idyllic life is turned upside-down when a famine strikes, causing hunger and distress. Finding himself alone, Budori tries to survive, entering a series of misadventures with various crackpot masters who feel like they are straight out of Dickens. As he ages, Budori ultimately finds purpose working as a volcanologist trying to save the world from a volcano-induced climate catastrophe. Directed by Gisaburo Sugii, this is an enchanting movie about shaping one’s destiny. Presented in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-14, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

Mary and the Witch's Flower ★★★

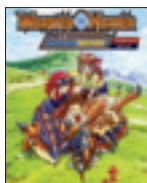
(2017) 103 min. DVD: \$22.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99. Universal Pictures Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.



Based on the 1971 children's novel *The Little Broomstick* by British author Mary Stewart, this 2017 magical fantasy anime feature by filmmaker Hiromasa Yonebayashi follows the adventures of a schoolgirl who receives magical powers for a day from a flower that blooms once every seven years. The magic rejuvenates a broom that whisks Mary away to Endor College, a school of magic run by a headmistress and a wizard scientist wanting the flower for their own experiments, who kidnap a human boy to force Mary to bring them the rare buds. Yonebayashi was an animator for Hayao Miyazaki at Studio Ghibli and he honors the master's work with this sweet, playful film, as the self-conscious, timid Mary—with her wild red hair and innate clumsiness—rouses her courage and finds the strength to fight adult wizards. Presented in separately available dual-language DVD and Blu-ray/DVD Combo editions, rated PG, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and filmmaker interviews. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Monster Hunter Stories—Ride On: Season One, Part One

★★★1/2
(2016) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Inspired by the popular video game franchise *Monster Hunter*, this rambunctious anime series is set in a fantasy land where the best way for human “riders” to hunt and battle monsters is to befriend other monsters (“Monsties”), preferably bonding with one from the moment it hatches. Several village kids and a freeloading catlike creature called Navirou sally forth to learn from the pros how to be a better Monstie master and monster fighter, as a mystery “black blight” is turning all of the beasties bad. Simplified “chibi” art on the protagonists may remind viewers of *South Park* characters, while the monsters are rendered with CGI right out of the video games (intentionally reinforcing the brand). The individual episodes dwell on sibling rivalries, teamwork, and sacrifice, with a bit more depth than one might expect from joystick-generated material. Presenting the first 12 episodes from the 2016 debut season in a DVD/Blu-ray Combo set, rated TV-PG, this is a strong optional purchase. [Note: *Monster Hunter Stories—Ride On: Season One, Part Two* is also newly available, with *Part Three* slated for release on July 17.] (C. Cassidy)

Myriad Colors Phantom World: The Complete Series ★★★1/2

(2017) 4 discs. 350 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



This middling-to-okay comedy-fantasy has a rushed and (for anime) fairly typical setup: a release by terrorists of a lab-created virus has granted humans the ability to see normally invisible ghosts and spirits. Meanwhile, young people have evolved different superpowers handy in banishing or destroying the phantoms (although some entities are fairly benign). Protagonist Haruhiko, a freshman at a special school for phantom hunters, compensates for his lack of athleticism with a studious attitude; he is the one who typically explains the far-out scenarios the hunters face (a dream world of warrior teddy bears; students changing into cats). Surrounding our hero are chesty co-eds—and an *I Dream of Jeannie*-like sprite—who provide fan service. Although this is based on a novel series, one might easily assume that video games spawned the material, given all of the monster battles. Presenting all 13 episodes plus a bonus OVA from 2016 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include an episode commentary and “Unlimited” shorts (with the Japanese voice-over cast doing bits over static drawings). A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Tanaka-kun is Always Listless: Complete Collection ★★★1/2

(2016) 300 min. DVD: 3 discs, \$59.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$69.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



Web-based comics inspired this droll farce about a lackadaisical youth named Tanaka who can't even summon the strength or self-actualizing drive to open his umbrella during rain. It's not a medical condition, apparently; Tanaka has just made a lifestyle choice to be low energy and apathetic. Fortunately, he has a tall, brawny best friend named Ohta, who actually carries him from place to place, especially at school. As much as Tanaka tries to resist activity or involvement in anything, he nevertheless winds up fascinating some of his classmates. Hard-charging little co-ed Miyano aspires to be his “disciple” so that she can add slacking off to her achievements (Tanaka tries to disqualify Miyano, on the grounds that her goal shows too much ambition). The show gets considerable comedic mileage out of this simple situation, which may remind Western viewers of the American hit *Napoleon Dynamite*, which also featured a poker-faced protagonist and character-based humor. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2016 in separately available dual-language DVD

and Blu-ray editions, extras include bonus shorts. Highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Typhoon Noruda ★★★

(2015) 26 min. Blu-ray: \$19.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



In filmmaker Yojiro Arai's 2015 short anime adventure, teenage boy Azuma confronts mysteries within mysteries in the midst of a powerful typhoon trapping him and his classmates at school. Spotting a strange naked girl in an otherwise empty classroom, Azuma sees her leap through a window and disappear. But she turns up again, fully clothed, rain-soaked, and in distress, drawing Azuma away from his peers as they deal with the school building crumbling from severe weather. Questions arise: who is this girl, and is her sudden arrival connected to the storm? What made Azuma and his best friend get into an uncharacteristic fistfight just before the crisis? What is the odd blue jewel the girl wears around her neck, and what does it have to do with an enormous hole in the ground leading to who knows where? Boasting fine visuals, *Typhoon Noruda* tells a suspenseful and exciting story that should have appeal even beyond anime fans. Presented in a dual-language Blu-ray edition, rated TV-PG, extras include a bonus short film, a Q&A event, and an interview with the creative team. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Yamada-kun & the 7 Witches: The Complete Series ★★★1/2

(2015) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



While the title conjures up familiar fantasy clichés of an academy for witchcraft and wizardry, *Yamada-kun & the 7 Witches* is actually a talky classroom rom-com with paranormal vibes that seldom offers any major special effects. Suzaku High School student Ryu Yamada discovers that he has supernatural powers after inadvertently switching bodies with a co-ed. According to school lore, a handful of other kids in the student community are secretly “witches” as well, each possessing different powers (precognition, mind-reading, the ability to erase memories, etc.). And if one can find and unite them all, a wish may be granted. Yamada and cohorts thus establish a “paranormal club” to ferret out the hidden witches. A twist is that what passes for spellcasting here almost always involves the act of kissing, sparking a veritable cauldron of jealousy and misunderstandings among the young people. Overall, the series offers mild fun. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, this is a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

The Best of The Supremes on The Ed Sullivan Show ★★1/2

(2018) 42 min. DVD: \$15.98. Universal Music Enterprises (avail. from most distributors).



The Supremes appeared 16 times on *The Ed Sullivan Show* between 1964-1969, more than any other Motown act. This 12-song (plus one extended medley) compilation kicks off with their first appearance singing "Come See About Me" in the classic line-up of Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard. Hit songs ("The Happening," "Love Child") are interwoven with covers ("My Favorite Things," "More"), although many of their classic tunes are only heard in mere snippets during the medley ("Baby Love," "Stop! In the Name of Love," "Reflections," "I Hear a Symphony"). There are a few special moments, such as in "You Can't Hurry Love," when one of Ross's earrings falls off, and she discreetly catches it mid-flight without missing a beat (a blink-and-you-miss-it shot), and the Supremes diss each other good-naturedly when singing "You're Nobody 'Til Someone Loves You." Of course, there was more dissing down the road for the group when Ross left to go solo. Included as a bonus track here is the post-Ross Supremes singing "Up the Ladder to the Roof." Not as good as *The Supremes—Reflections: The Definitive Performances 1964-1969* (VL-3/07), this collection—presented in Dolby Digital stereo—should still be considered a strong optional purchase. (R. Pitman)

The Doors: Live at the Isle of Wight Festival 1970 ★★

(2017) 67 min. DVD: \$21.98, Blu-ray: \$26.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



One of the quintessential West Coast bands of the late '60s, The Doors played their last filmed concert in 1970 at England's Isle of Wight Festival before some 600,000 fans, taking the stage at 2 a.m. to perform a subdued seven-song set. Still under the threatening shadow of a Miami obscenity trial for alleged public weenie-wagging (a highly questionable charge), lead singer Jim Morrison looks and acts more or less straitjacketed but sings well as the group—Robby Krieger on guitar, Ray Manzarek on keyboards, John Densmore on drums—plays a handful of key Doors songs, including "Back Door Man," "Break on Through (To the Other Side)," "When the Music's Over," and the perennial classic "Light My Fire." The show fittingly wraps with an alternate version of "The End," performed as a medley with interesting segues into "Across the Sea," "Away in India," and "Crossroads Blues." Less than a year later, the music was truly over and Morrison was dead at 27. Not the most dynamic of Doors

concerts, this is still one in which the music hypnotizes. 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 a retrospective featurette with the band, and a bonus audio CD. Recommended. (R. Pitman)

Ingmar Bergman Through the Choreographer's Eye ★★

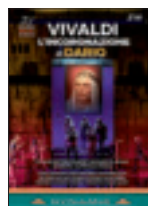
(2016) 51 min. In Swedish w/English subtitles. DVD or Blu-ray: \$24.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).



As part of the centenary celebration of the birth of Ingmar Bergman, Sweden's greatest filmmaker, Fredrik Stattin, Claes Du Rietz, and Bergman's son Ingmar Jr. fashioned this tribute in which four notable Swedish choreographers present new ballets inspired by the director's careful use of movement and rhythm in his films and stage productions, all performed at a spacious airfield hanger. The first piece is a solo by Alexander Ekman set to a Chopin nocturne, accompanied by Ekman's narrated thoughts on Bergman's connections with dance. Pär Isberg's duet, set to three movements from Bach's solo cello suites, depicts a couple dancing prior to boarding a plane for a film shoot. Stefan Levin's music informs the third ballet by Pontus Lidberg, featuring Lidberg, a horse, and a female groom danced by Isabelle Lundberg, while the fourth, also set to Levin's music by Joakim Stephenson, juxtaposes scenes of two women in a hospital ward with scenes of the pair on a beach. Ekman's piece includes brief clips from three of Bergman's films, while fragments of the director's thoughts about his methods (with references to his own life, including a near-death experience) are occasionally superimposed over the visuals. The result is a quartet of splendidly performed short ballets that demonstrate the reverence for Bergman within Sweden's contemporary arts community. Presented in PCM stereo, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

L'Incoronazione di Dario ★★

(2017) 160 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: 2 discs, \$34.99; Blu-ray: \$39.99. Dynamic (dist. by Naxos of America).



The operas of Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) are far less familiar to modern audiences than his famed instrumental pieces, such as *The Four Seasons*, but occasional revivals are helping to rectify the imbalance. This 2017 Turin production of a relatively early effort from 1717 (toward the end of his life the composer said he had written more than 90 operas) is set in the Persian court in the fifth century B.C., but

its *opera seria* plot is timeless. After the death of King Cyrus, his elder daughter Statira is wooed by several suitors—Arpago, Oronte, and Dario—each desirous of becoming the new ruler as well as her husband. Meanwhile, Statira's younger sister Argene conspires to do away with Statira and secure the throne for herself. The title gives away who the victor will be, but the matrimonial battle provides an opportunity for a succession of florid arias for the principals, as well as a few supporting characters, including the princesses' teacher and their maid. The sets and costumes, which situate the action in the modern Middle East, complete with oil rigs and automatic weapons, are not especially inventive, nor is Leo Muscato's staging, which pretty much adheres to the stand-at-stage-center-and-sing formula. But the vocalism—by Sara Mingardo (Statira), Delphine Galou (Argene), Carlo Allemano (Dario), Lucia Cirillo (Oronte), and Veronica Cangemi (Arpago)—is strong, although the preponderance of trouser roles leaves little variety in tone. And baroque specialist Ottavio Dantone coaxes fine playing from the company orchestra. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is a solid introduction to a still underappreciated body of work from Vivaldi's prodigious output. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Le Coq d'Or (The Golden Cockerel) ★★

(2016) 118 min. In Russian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Bel Air Classiques (dist. by Naxos of America).



Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's final opera is enjoying a renaissance on disc, with this 2016 production from the Palais de la Monnaie in Brussels following closely on the release of the Mariinsky Opera version from St. Petersburg (VL-11/17). Based on a poem by Alexander Pushkin, *The Golden Cockerel* was written in 1907 but not performed until 1909—after the composer's death—because Tsar Nicholas II's censors rightly perceived it as a satire of Russian military ineptitude in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. The title refers to a magical bird that is given to King Dodon by an astrologer—who claims it will crow at the sign of imminent danger—in return for the monarch's pledge to fulfill any wish. In response to the cockerel's warning, Dodon leads an assault on a neighboring kingdom, but his incompetent sons kill one another during the invasion, and he is seduced by the kingdom's queen. At their wedding, the astrologer demands her for himself but is murdered by Dodon, who is in turn killed by the cockerel. Laurent Pelly's staging of this remarkable work is highly imaginative, with intriguingly dark sets and outrageous costumes (including that of the cockerel), and the predominantly Slavic cast—including bass Pavlo Hunka (Dodon),

soprano Venera Gimadieva (the queen), and high tenor Alexander Kravets (the astrologer)—is outstanding, while Alain Altinoglu beautifully conducts the colorful score. This is superior to the uneven Mariinsky performance, and the equal of Nagano's fine Paris version (VL-11/04). 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)

Margherita D'Anjou

★★★1/2

(2017) 2 discs. 161 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$34.99. Dynamic (dist. by Naxos of America).



Giacomo Meyerbeer's 1820 opera—inspired by England's 15th-century Queen Margaret—receives a bold modern-day adaptation in director Alessandro Talevi's 2017 Festival della Valle d'Itria production. Much of the staging is set within a punk-chic fashion show, with the characters sporting brilliantly outrageous theatrical garb while pacing the catwalk. Modern technology and contemporary obsessions with reality TV and social media also are evident, with video cameras and cell phones in the hands of cast members. Remarkably, the experiment pays off, with the complex plotlines involving Middle Ages monarchical turf wars, disguises, and regal egos nicely shoehorned into the bump-and-grind strutting of the present-day fashion sphere. Giulia De Blasis is a commanding physical and vocal presence in the title role, while Gaia Petrone is equally memorable as Isaura, who is driven to excessive extremes to regain the love of her husband, the Duke of Lavarenne, who left her for the widowed queen. In the scene-stealing comic supporting role of Michele Gamautte, Marco Filippo Romano makes melodic mischief. This presentation marks the DVD debut of this rarely-revived Meyerbeer work, and while one can hope that a more traditional interpretation will eventually appear, this playfully imaginative riff is a delightful treat for today's audiences. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

The Moody Blues: Days of Future Passed Live

★★★

(2017) 135 min. DVD: \$14.98, Blu-ray: \$19.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



One would think the 50th anniversary of landmark rock 'n' roll albums from the 1960s would prompt more iconic bands to go on the road in celebration. But illness and death have left their marks on septuagenarian rock stars, including the Moody Blues, who are now down to three surviving members. This 2017 concert filmed at the Sony Centre

for the Performing Arts in Toronto finds the British progenitors of "art rock" reviving their beloved 1967 *Days of Future Passed*, an early concept album that fused trippy pop with symphony-scale orchestral music. With a couple of hit songs still playing on classic rock radio, the record has never lost relevance. Here, Justin Hayward (guitars, vocals, songwriter), John Lodge (bass and vocals), and Graeme Edge (drums) perform *Days* in its entirety, backed by a large orchestra. But the show begins with memorable chart hits spanning the band's long career ("Isn't Life Strange?", "The Story in Your Eyes," "I Know You're Out There Somewhere") before the orchestral players, Moodies, and sundry accompanists tackle the dreamlike romanticism of *Days'* dawn-to-midnight theme. An encore includes two more radio staples ("Question," "Ride My See-Saw"), capping off this two-dozen-plus song set that is a satisfying and often magical experience. 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 a retrospective featurette with band members. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

OneRepublic: Live in South Africa

★★★
(2015) 126 min. DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$21.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Sam Dunn and Scot McFadyen, co-directors of *Metall: A Headbanger's Journey*, helmed this OneRepublic concert film. The Oklahoma-based quintet aren't metal, but they rock hard in an anthemic way when they don't slow the pace with cello, piano, or acoustic guitar. The band had been on tour for two years, promoting their 2013 album *Native*, when they played this Johannesburg date for an audience of 20,000. The 18-song set includes the hits "Apologize" and "Counting Stars," as well as a cover of "What a Wonderful World." There are no misfires during the two-hour show, but no real standout performances either, since they don't have the most distinctive sound, although they are competent players (frontman Ryan Tedder has done production work for Beyoncé and Adele). But this concert should please fans, and the all-out percussive assault on the closing number "If I Lose Myself" ends the show on a high note. McFadyen and Dunn also directed the accompanying half-hour documentary *Don't Look Down*, which traces the band's unique road to success through a series of ups and downs before "Apologize" blew up on MySpace, leading to residencies, a major label contract, and a U2 tour. Since then, they've sold 50 million records. Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, other extras include a bonus live performance of "Wherever I Go" from a Sydney concert. Recommended. (K. Fennesy)

Plain Spoken: John Mellencamp from the Chicago Theatre

★★★1/2

(2017) 87 min. DVD: \$21.98, Blu-ray: \$26.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



A gum-chewing, guitar-wielding, mostly laconic John Mellencamp takes the stage at the Chicago Theatre in 2016 for this energetic 16-song set while touring for his 2014 release *Plain Spoken*. Backed by an excellent band that includes Mike Wanchic and Andy York on guitars, Miriam Sturm on "fiddle," John Gunnell on bass guitar, Troye Kinnett on keyboards, and Dane Clark on drums, Mellencamp opens with a couple of cuts from his latest before settling into a comfortable groove of hits and notables songs from his extensive catalog. Going all the way back to 1983 with the great rebel tune "Authority Song" ("I fight authority/Authority always wins"), Mellencamp regales the crowd with faves including "Small Town," "Check It Out," "Rain on the Scarecrow," "Paper in Fire," and "Pink Houses," while also serving up some lesser-known songs, including "The Full Catastrophe," a Tom Waits-channeling ode to life in all its messiness. One of the best moments finds Mellencamp telling a story about his dying grandmother before launching into the lovely, haunting "Longest Days" ("Life is short even in its longest days"). Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include audio commentary by Mellencamp and a bonus audio CD. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

Robert Glasper Experiment: Live

★★★

(2017) 81 min. DVD: \$15.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



The Blue Note recording collective Robert Glasper Experiment splits the difference between jazz and soul on this live release, which features 11 performances from four different dates between 2012-14 in support of the Houston pianist and composer's Grammy Award-winning *Black Radio* albums, which combine covers, original compositions, vocal tracks, and instrumentals. Onscreen text identifies each location, venue, song, and guest performer. The set opens with a Rotterdam version of "All Matter" featuring big band-style backing from the Metropole Orchestra (led by composer Vince Mendoza), a blazing sax solo from Casey Benjamin, and whisper-to-an-almost-scream vocals from Philadelphia vocalist Bilal. On the Shanghai performance of Radiohead's "Packt Like Sardines in a Crushd Tin Box," which plays up the more psychedelic side of the Experiment's sound, Benjamin trades the sax for a keytar and a

vocoder, while bassist Derrick Hodge brings things to a contemplative close (drummer Mark Colenburg rounds out the ensemble). Hodge, a solo artist in his own right, also takes the spotlight during a Harlem performance of "Cherish the Day," featuring velvety vocals from Lalah Hathaway. And Algebra Blessett provides the sexy, spirited vocal on "Calls" from West Hollywood's Troubadour, where she engages in a little call and response with Glasper. The Los Angeles performances could have benefited from cameras that were better at capturing detail in dimly-lit spaces, but overall it is the performances here that win the day, including a freestyle from singer-actor Wayne Brady and a showstopping falsetto scat from B. Slade on "Ah Yeah." Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo, this is recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Concert ★★★

(2018) 674 min. DVD: 4 discs, \$34.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99. Time Life (avail. from most distributors).



This star-studded set compiles the 2014-17 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in their *entirety*—meaning the talk-to-music ratio is about 3-to-1. Of course, musicians are not primarily known for their verbal eloquence and they are just as prone as Oscar winners to wheel out heartfelt thanks to a bunch of people you've never heard of. And yet, for every so-so or worse speech (Miley Cyrus inducts Joan Jett & the Blackhearts), there is another that shines (Paul McCartney inducts Ringo Starr). Still, the real draw here is not the speeches, but the music from the honored solo artists and bands (with varying amounts of stand-ins): Cat Stevens ("Father & Son"), Peter Gabriel ("In Your Eyes"), Nirvana ("Smells Like Teen Spirit"), Joan Baez ("The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down"), Green Day ("American Idiot"), Deep Purple ("Smoke on the Water"), Chicago ("25 or 6 to 4"), Cheap Trick ("I Want You to Want Me"), Yes ("Roundabout"), and more. Disappointingly, no songs are played by/for N.W.A. (inducted by Kendrick Lamar, who asks—clearly rhetorically—"Can I cuss?") or Tupac Shakur (inducted by Snoop Dogg). And the Journey set is fronted by Arnel Pineda, not Steve Perry—who was present to accept the award and give a speech. But there are some very fine moments here, including Stevie Wonder performing Bill Withers's "Lean on Me," Beck serving up Lou Reed's "Satellite of Love," and Pearl Jam delivering an impassioned rendition of "Given to Fly," a favorite of appreciative attendee Michael J. Fox. Presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and stereo on the Blu-ray release (which incorrectly lists Dolby Digital 5.1), this is recommended. (R. Pitman)

Sakuntala ★★½
(2016) 113 min. in Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$34.99. Bongiovanni (dist. by Naxos of America).



Franco Alfano's 1921 opera based on an ancient play by Kalidasa (believed to date from sometime between the 1st century BCE and 4th century CE) receives a long-overdue revival in this intelligent and elegiac 2016 production from the Teatro Massimo Bellini of Catania. *Sakuntala* is one of three young women who serve as the keepers of a sacred temple. She becomes the object of affection of King Dushyanta, who gives her a ring as a token of love. But this union is damaged when *Sakuntala* doesn't open the temple door to the powerful hermit Durvasas, who places a curse on her that prevents the king from recognizing her until she returns the ring. But there are problems: she discovers not only that she is carrying the king's child but she has also lost the ring. Director Massimo Gasparon shrewdly downplays the exotica of the ancient Indian setting by using sparse sets that vaguely hint of the bygone world, which allows for a more focused concentration on the dreamlike element of Alfano's haunting composition and the deeply moving performances by Silvia Dalla Benetta, who brilliantly projects the doomed innocence of the lovestruck *Sakuntala*, and Enrique Ferrer, who brings physical and vocal majesty to the role of the emotionally tortured king. Presented in PCM stereo, this is highly recommended. (P. Hall)

The Sleeping Beauty ★★½

(2017) 138 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).



Tchaikovsky's ever-popular ballet sparkles in this 2017 production by London's Royal Ballet, which actually represents a revival twice over: resurrecting the 2006 staging by Monica Mason and Christopher Newton, which in turn was an effort to recreate the legendary 1946 version by Oliver Messel that reopened the Royal Opera House after its conversion into a dance hall during World War II. Peter Farmer's set and costume designs necessarily adapt Messel's originals to some degree, but the result is still gorgeous, with luscious pastel-colored backgrounds and extravagantly detailed costumes. The choreography, following Marius Petipa's for the 1890 St. Petersburg premiere (with additions by Frederick Ashton), is splendidly performed by Marianela Núñez as Princess Aurora, who falls into a deep sleep after pricking her finger on a cursed

spindle, and Vadim Muntagirov as Prince Florimund, who awakens her. Kristen McNally and Claire Calvert are equally fine as Carabosse, the wicked fairy who imposes the curse, and her good counterpart, the Lilac Fairy. And the whole troupe displays expertise throughout, especially in the Act III wedding festivities. Featuring solid support from the ROH orchestra under the baton of Koen Kessels, this release is one of the best of the many versions of Tchaikovsky's evergreen ballet available on disc. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray release) and LPCM stereo, extras include an introduction to the opera, and behind-the-scenes featurettes. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Van Morrison in Concert

★★★★

(2016) 76 min. DVD: \$15.98, Blu-ray: \$21.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



It's easy to take Van Morrison for granted. Listen to a radio station or streaming service playing Baby Boomer classic tunes, and something or other by Morrison ("Brown Eyed Girl," "Wild Night") will turn up. Same with piped-in music at the grocery store. Morrison is part of our cultural background noise, which is unfortunate because it obscures his unique vitality as an artist. Happily, *Van Morrison in Concert* features not one but two live performances by the Irish singer-songwriter that underscore Morrison's soulful blend of rhythm and blues, Celtic mystery, and spiritual yearning. Filmed at the BBC Radio Theatre in 2016, Sir Van (he was knighted that same year) appears with a well-oiled band to draw from a broad catalogue of blues covers ("Baby Please Don't Go"), classics by Morrison's 1960s band Them ("Here Comes the Night"), and a healthy number of songs from his half-century as a solo artist ("Enlightenment," "Sometimes We Cry," "Keep Me Singing") in a generous 18-song set. Morrison is all business, more interested in weaving a grand spell than in stage patter, trusting his audience will be moved by a common quest for sensual, emotional, and sacred fulfillment. The second concert—an outdoor performance in Morrison's hometown of Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 2015 (celebrating his 70th birthday), finds him a bit looser, talking a little with the crowd and drawing deep from some of his finest work, including "And the Healing Has Begun" and "Cyrus Avenue," ending the 12-song performance with a mesmerizing, shamanic "On Hyndford Street." Presented in DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, and DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (T. Keogh)

Contact information for distributors of titles reviewed in this issue are listed below. Some titles must be ordered direct, while others are available from a wide variety of distributors.

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Web: bullfrogfilms.com

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Brooklyn, NY 11229
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Cinema Libre Studio
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Web: cinemalibrestudio.com

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Tel: (971) 236-2056
Web: collectiveeye.org

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Tel: (877) 983-7326
Web: dreamscapeab.com

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237 West 35th St., Ste. 604
New York, NY 10001
Tel: (866) 937-3456
Web: filmmovement.com

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630 Ninth Ave., Ste. 1213
New York, NY 10036
Tel: (800) 229-8575
Web: firstrunfeatures.com

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New York, NY 10016
Tel: (646) 586-3060
Web: grasshopperfilm.com

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Web: passionriver.com

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Worcester, PA 19490
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Danbury, CT 06816
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13 Reasons Why: Season 1	44
25 in 24	58
44 Pages	59
78/52: Hitchcock's Shower Scene	59
ACCA: 13-Territory Inspection Dept.	67
Accident, The	44
Acorn and the Firestorm	62
Americans: Complete Fifth Season	44
America's Untold Story	62
And Then I Go	14
Antony and Cleopatra	60
Arctic Wolf Pack	55
Are We Not Cats	14
Ask the Sexpert	57
Augie	64
Backstabbing for Beginners	14
Beauty and the Dogs	14
Before She Was Harriet	46
Before We Vanish	14
Beirut	16
Best of the Supremes on The Ed Sullivan Show	70
Better Man, A	51
Beuys	65
Big Sonia	65
Bill Nye: Science Guy	65
Biology: The Science of Seeds	56
Black Eagle	36
Black Scorpion, The	36
Black Venus	16
Blockers	16
Blue Planet II	55
Bombing of Wall Street, The	63
Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story	65
Boston: The Documentary	58
Boy Downstairs, The	16
Bungo Stray Dogs	67
C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert	50
Campaign of Their Own, A	50
Canine Soldiers	63
Chaos/Child: Complete Series	67
Child in Time, The	16
Christopher Kimball's Milk Street: Season 1	57
Church, The	36
Classicaloid: Complete Collection	67
Claws: Complete First Season	44

Advertiser Directory

Action! Library Media Service	51
Baker & Taylor Entertainment	2
Breaking Glass	35
Cordobe LLC	59
Criterion	41
Dark Hollow Films	4
Dreamscape	9
Film Movement	19
Films Media Group	49
First Run Features	5
Green Planet Films	51
Icarus Films	29
IndiePix Films	33
Juno Films	11
Kino Lorber Education	27
Midwest Tape	76
Music Box Films	15, 17
MVD Entertainment Group	31
NCircle Entertainment	38, 39
Oscilloscope Pictures	21
Passion River Films	75
PBS Video	7
Strand Releasing	25
Synagogue Emanu-El	63
Vision Video	13
Wolfe Video	23
YMAA Publication Center	57

Color of Pomegranates, The	37
Curb Your Enthusiasm: Complete Ninth Season	44
Daughter of the Nile	37
Day the Dinosaurs Died, The	56
Dayveon	18
Dear Dictator	18
Death Wish	18
Destruction of Memory, The	64
Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun?	51
Disastrous Life of Saiki K.: Season One, Part 1	67
Discoveries..America National Parks: Acadia National	
Park & Historic New England	61
Divine Order, The	18
Doors: Live at the Isle of Wight Festival 1970	70
Du Iz Tak?	46
Every Day	18
Fairy Tail: Dragon Cry	67
Fatima: The Ultimate Mystery	50
Fencer, The	20
Final Year, The	62
Flip Flappers: Complete Collection	68
Following the Ninth	51
Forever, Chinatown	60
Forgiven, The	20
Freedom to Marry, The	52
Game Night	20
Geek Girls	52
Gilded Age, The	64
Governor: Complete Collection	44
Graduation	20
Gringo	20
Half-Breed, The	37
Handmaid's Tale: Season One	45
Harper	37
Have a Nice Day	20
Henry Miller: Asleep & Awake	60
Hey Arnold! The Jungle Movie	46
High Anxiety: Causes, Symptoms, Help	56
Hippie Family Values	52
Homeland: Complete Sixth Season	45
I Am MLK Jr.	66
I Am Somebody: Three Films by Madeline Anderson	61
I Can Only Imagine	22
I Kill Giants	22
In Between	22
In Search of Fellini	22
In the Name of Confucius	54
Ingmar Bergman Through the Choreographer's Eye	70
Ingrid Bergman's Swedish Years	37
It's the Old Army Game	40
Izetta—The Last Witch: Complete Series	68
Jane	22
Joe	40
Kado: The Right Answer	68
Killing for Love	55
Kiss Him, Not Me! Complete Series	68
Koro Sensei Quest	68
L'Incoronazione di Dario	70
Lady Takes a Chance, A	40
Last Refugees, The	52
Le Coq d'Or (The Golden Cockerel)	70
Les Girls	40
Life of Budori Gusuko, The	68
Like Me	24
Liquid Sky	40
Little Women	3
Little Women (Animated)	46
Lots & Lots of Animal Stories for Kids! Vol. 4:	
Froggies	46
Lots & Lots of Really Big Trains	46
Loud House: It Gets Louder—Season 1, Volume 2	47
Love, Simon	24
Loveless	24
Mabel, Mabel, Tiger Trainer	66
Man in Red Bandana	66
Manhandled	42
Manifesto	24
Margherita D'Anjou	71
Mary and the Witch's Flower	69
Maya the Bee 2: The Honey Games	24
Mayors of Shiprock, The	52
Midsummer Night's Dream, A	24
Miss Kiet's Children	54
Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: It's a Beautiful Day	47
Mohawk	26
Monster Hunter Stories—Ride On	69

Moody Blues: Days of Future Passed Live	71
Most Likely to Succeed	54
Much Ado About Nothing	47
My Father the Hero	42
Myriad Colors Phantom World	69
Mystery Science Theater 3000: Season 11	45
Nanette's Baguette	47
Neat: The Story of Bourbon	58
No Orchids for Miss Blandish	42
Nocturama	26
Nostalgia	26
November	26
OCD and Me	57
OneRepublic: Live in South Africa	71
Only Living Boy in New York, The	26
Other Side of Hope, The	28
Out of State	55
Outlander: Season Three	45
Paradox	28
Party, The	28
Paul, Apostle of Christ	28
Pinkalicious & Peterrific: Pinkamagine It!	47
Plain Spoken: John Mellencamp	71
Politics of Hate, The	53
Polluting Paradise	53
Puppy Dog Pals	47
Qi Gong for Strong Bones	56
Qigong for Women	57
Quiet Place, A	28
Railway Children, The	48
Ready Player One	30
Real Mad Men of Advertising, The	60
Reclaiming Life: Faith, Hope, and Suicide Loss	49
Regal Academy: The Grand Ball	48
Relationtrip, The	30
Road Movie, The	61
Robert Glasper Experiment: Live	71
Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Concert	72
Rule of Law	55
Russian Doll	30
Sacha Guitry: Four Films 1936-1938	42
Sakuntala	72
Saving Brinton	61
Savior, The	50
Scotch	58
Shakespeare Wallah	42
Show Me Democracy	53
Sleeping Beauty, The	72
Small Town Crime	30
Souvenir	30
Spirits of Rebellion	61
Stage Struck	43
Staging Post, The	53
Strangers: Prey at Night	32
Suitable Girl, A	53
Sunny Day	48
Sweet Escape, The	32
Sweet Virginia	32
Tad the Lost Explorer and the Secret of King Midas	32
Tai Chi Fit in Paradise	57
Take My Nose... Please!	58
Tanaka-kun is Always Listless	69
Taxi Driver, A	32
Thoroughbreds	32
Titanic's Tragic Twin: The Britannic Disaster	64
Tokyo Ghoul	34
Tomb Raider	34
Travel Safe Not Sorry: Discover Rugged Canada	62
Trouble Is My Business	34
Typhoon Noruda	69
VA: The Human Cost of War	64
Van Morrison in Concert	72
Violent Life, A	34
Wacky Races: Start Your Engines!	48
Watershed Guardians of the Fraser River	56
We Breathe Again	50
We Found a Hat	48
We're Going On a Bear Hunt	49
Welcome to Refugeestan	54
While the City Sleeps	43
White Sun	34
Windjammer: The Voyage of the Christian Radich	43
Women in Love	43
Workshop, The	34
Wrinkle in Time, A	36
Yamada-kun & the 7 Witches	69
Zombies	36

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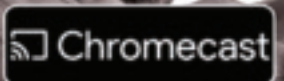
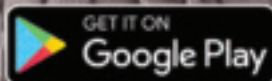
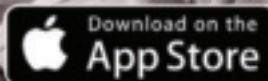
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