

May-June 2017

Video Librarian

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Scene & heard

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Publisher/Editor: Randy Pitman
Associate Editor: Jazza Williams-Wood
Editorial Assistant: Christopher Pitman
Graphic Designer: Carol Kaufman
Marketing Director: Anne Williams

Contributing Writers

Carson Block, formerly with
Poudre River Public Library District
Kathleen C. Fennessy, Reviewer,
The Stranger
Susan Granger, SSG Syndicate
Donald Liebensohn, Reviewer,
Entertainment Weekly, Amazon.com
Stephen Rees, Librarian, formerly with
Bucks Co. Free Library, Levittown, PA
Frank Swietek, Associate Professor
of History, University of Dallas, TX

Additional Contributors:

Sean Axmaker
Charles Cassady
Jose Cruz
Phil Hall
Tom Keogh
Lisa Martincik
Michael Sandlin

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Subscriptions: (800) 692-2270
Editorial: (360) 626-1259
Advertising: (800) 265-7965
Fax: (360) 626-1260
E-mail: vidlib@videoliberalian.com
Web: www.videoliberalian.com

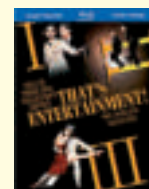
La La Land ★★★★★
Lionsgate, 128 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, Apr. 25



Opening with a fabulous fantasy song-and-dance sequence featuring commuters caught in congested traffic on Los Angeles freeways, Damien Chazelle's dazzling multi-Oscar-winning contemporary musical serves up a chronicle of longing, love, and lingering wistfulness. Aspiring actress Mia (Emma Stone) works as a barista on the Warner Bros. lot, while brooding jazz pianist Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) is tired of playing background music at bars and restaurants. They "meet cute" several times before actually connecting, after which they encourage each other to follow their dreams as their respective careers move forward. Mia writes a one-woman show attracting the interest of an influential agent, while Sebastian joins a touring pop band that is fronted by his old friend (John Legend). But long separations take a toll on their romantic relationship as the story follows the couple over changing seasons. Inspired by Jacques Demy's classic *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, as well as *A Star Is Born* and *Singin' in the Rain*, Chazelle stylishly transitions from naturalism into the

breezy romanticism of make-believe through entrancing, unabashedly twinkly musical numbers choreographed by Mandy Moore (not the pop singer) that are reminiscent of Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers and Gene Kelly/Debbie Reynolds, particularly when the lovebirds glide into the heavens during the sparkling "City of Stars" at the Griffith Observatory. A lovely contemporary update of the classic Hollywood musical, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (S. Granger)

In many of its song-and-dance numbers, *La La Land* pays homage to the Golden Age of the Hollywood musical, particularly MGM's hits from the 1930s through the '50s. Viewers can get a taste of those classic, star-studded films in Warner Home Video's *That's Entertainment! The Complete Collection* (VL Online-11/04), which compiles 1974's *That's Entertainment!*, 1976's *That's Entertainment, Part 2*, and 1994's *That's Entertainment III*, and features Fred Astaire, Bing Crosby, Jimmy Stewart, Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds, and Donald O'Connor, among others.



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**DARK
HOLLOW
FILMS**

New Releases



KAZIRANGA

Explores the battle between poachers and conservationists in Kaziranga Park, the last stronghold for the endangered Indian rhino.

"A powerful portrayal of how human empathy is an effective strategy for reforming rhino poachers." —Dawn Smallman, Festival Director, Portland EcoFilm Festival



SINCE: THE BOMBING OF PAN AM FLIGHT 103

Tells the story of some of the first victims of terrorism, who proved that ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary feats in the wake of politically fueled mass murder.

"A powerful portrayal of the emotional price of terrorism."

—Heather Kenihan, Newport Beach Film Festival



BEYOND THE DIVIDE

Two brave people find a way to bridge the divide of unresolved resentment between those who served in the Vietnam War and those who fought a different war at home.

"...a remarkable story of peace building that will help shape and heal our divided culture."

—Michael C. Klein, The University of St. Thomas

www.darkhollowfilms.com

Video Newsbriefs

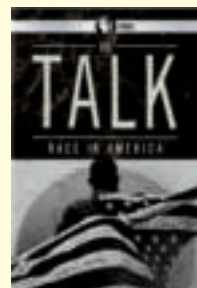
"Marseille Trilogy," "Straw Dogs," and "Ugetsu" Lead Criterion Collection June Slate

The Criterion Collection's June slate kicks off June 6 with Kenji Mizoguchi's 1953 Japanese drama *Ugetsu* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), an exquisite ghost tale derived from stories by Akinari Ueda and Guy de Maupassant, following two villagers whose pursuit of fame and fortune leads them far astray from their loyal wives. Coming June 13 is legendary director Nicholas Ray's 1948 debut *They Live By Night* (DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95), a lyrical film noir that travels with a wide-eyed fugitive (Farley Granger) and his innocent love interest (Cathy O'Donnell). Arriving June 20 is a newly restored edition of Marcel Pagnol's *Marseille Trilogy* (DVD: 4 discs, \$99.95; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$99.95), a sweeping three-film saga set in the author's native Provence that tracks the lives and loves of its characters over the course of a generation: *Marius* (1931), a tale of lovers torn between devotion and the restless urge for adventure; *Fanny* (1932), which picks up moments after *Marius* has left his would-be titular wife for a sailor's life; and *César* (1936), leaping forward 20 years and resolving the protagonists' star-crossed destinies. Slated for June 27 is 1927's *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), a silent serial-killer boardinghouse thriller that Alfred Hitchcock considered his true debut, starring matinee idol Ivor Novello. Also coming June 27 is Sam Peckinpah's notorious 1971 shocker *Straw Dogs* (DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95), starring Dustin Hoffman as a young American mathematician who is forced to face off against local thugs after he moves to the village hometown of his English wife (Susan George).

"The Talk: Race in America" Available Now from PBS Distribution

PBS Distribution has recently released the documentary *The Talk: Race in America* (DVD: \$24.99), centering on increasingly common conversations taking place in homes and communities across the country between parents of color and their children—especially sons—about how to behave if they are stopped by the police. Filmed in Long Beach, Oakland, St. Louis, Memphis, and Cleveland, *The Talk* features six

personal stories that illustrate the issue from multiple points of view: parents, children, the police, and the community. Among those profiled are activist and founder of The Ethics Project, Dr. Christi Griffin; Samaria Rice, mother of Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy killed by the Cleveland police while playing with a toy gun in a local park; Reverend Catherine Brown, who was assaulted by Chicago police in front of her children in her own car; retired NYPD sergeant Trevena Garell; Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, and members of the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy. Other participants include *black-ish* creator Kenya Barris, musician Nas, actress Rosie Perez, filmmaker John Singleton, and *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow.



Shout! Factory Announces June 27 Release for "The Pink Panther Film Collection"

Shout! Factory has announced the upcoming release of *The Pink Panther Film Collection* (Blu-ray: 6 discs, \$99.99), slated for June 27. The legendary Peter Sellers stars as the irrepressible and incompetent Inspector Jacques Clouseau in this six-film collection, which includes *The Pink Panther* (1964), *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), *The Return of the Pink Panther* (1975), *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (1976), *Revenge of the Pink Panther* (1978), and *Trail of the Pink Panther* (1982), each directed by Academy Award winner Blake Edwards (with four of the titles making their Blu-ray debuts). One of the most influential comic actors of all time, Academy Award nominee Sellers is well-remembered for his iconic role as the bumbling detective Inspector Clouseau. The *Pink Panther* films showcase a magical combination of Edwards's masterful directing, writing, and producing skills; Sellers's hilarious verbal and physical antics; and sparkling performances from, among others, series staples Herbert Lom, Burt Kwouk, André Maranne, and Graham Stark. Bonus features include a 24-page book with an essay by animation historian and film critic Jerry Beck, new interviews with cast and crew members, audio commentaries, TV spots, stills galleries, and more.

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

Coming in May

The Dinner (May 5) is based on Herman Koch's 2009 international bestselling Dutch novel. Directed by Oren Moverman, the dramatic thriller stars Richard Gere, Steve Coogan, Laura Linney, Rebecca Hall, and Chloë Sevigny.



King Arthur: Legend of the Sword (May 12) is loosely based on Sir Thomas Malory's 1485 *Le Morte d'Arthur*, chronicling the legend of the British leader. Directed by Guy Ritchie, the adventure film stars Charlie Hunnam as the king, as well as Djimon Hounsou, Åstrid Bergès-Frisbey, Aidan Gillen, Jude Law, and Eric Bana.



Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul (May 19) is based on the 2014 ninth book in author and cartoonist Jeff Kinney's YA series. Directed by David Bowers, this fourth film features a new cast that includes Jason Drucker, Alicia Silverstone, and Tom Everett Scott.



Everything, Everything (May 19) is an adaptation of Nicola Yoon's 2015 debut YA novel. Directed by Stella Meghie, the romantic drama stars Amandla Stenberg, Nick Robinson, and Anika Noni Rose.



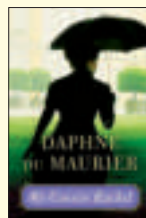
Coming in June

Captain Underpants (June 2) is an animated adaption of Dav Pilkey's children's novel series, which began with 1997's *The Adventures of Captain Underpants*. Directed by David Soren, the film features the voices of Ed Helms, Kevin Hart,

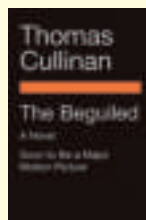


Jordan Peele, Thomas Middleditch, and Kristen Schaal.

My Cousin Rachel (June 9) is adapted from Daphne du Maurier's 1951 novel. Directed by Roger Michell, the Cornwall-set mystery-romance stars Rachel Weisz, Sam Claflin, Iain Glen, and Holliday Grainger.

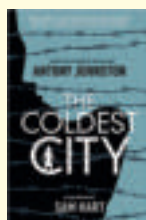


The Beguiled (June 30) is based on Thomas P. Cullinan's titular 1966 Southern Gothic novel and the 1971 film adaptation starring Clint Eastwood. Directed by Sofia Coppola, the film stars Colin Farrell, Nicole Kidman, Kirsten Dunst, and Elle Fanning.



Looking Ahead

Slated for July is **Atomic Blonde**, based on Antony Johnston's 2012 graphic novel *The Coldest City*. Directed by David Leitch, the film features a star-studded cast that includes Charlize Theron, James McAvoy, John Goodman, Toby Jones, and Sofia Boutella.



Also coming in July is **The Dark Tower**, inspired by horror master Stephen King's 1982-2004 dark fantasy series. Directed by Nikolaj Arcel, the film stars Idris Elba, Matthew McConaughey, Katheryn Winnick, Jackie Earle Haley, Abbey Lee, and Nicholas Hamilton.



Arriving in August is **Tulip Fever**, an adaptation of English writer Deborah Moggach's 1999 period novel. Directed by Justin Chadwick, this Netherlands-set 17th-century drama stars Alicia Vikander, Dane DeHaan, Zach Galifianakis, Judi Dench, Christoph Waltz, Cara Delevingne, and Holliday Grainger.



DARK HOLLOW FILMS

NEW RELEASE!



RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE IS EXPOSED

From Academy Award Winning Director Mark Harris

Just days after the revolution in Ukraine, the country was invaded by Russia. Ukrainians of all backgrounds rallied to the country's defense, in the process creating a new sense of Ukrainian nationhood. *Breaking Point: The War for Democracy in Ukraine* is the dramatic and inspiring portrait of people willing to give up their private, normal lives to unite in a collective effort to bring the rule of law and democracy to their country.

Run time 98 min

2016 USA / Ukraine

Languages: English, Ukrainian, Russian

English Subtitles, Close Captioned



Order the DVD, PPR, and streaming rights at:

www.darkhollowfilms.com

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

LEGO City Undercover (Warner, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: E10+). In this third-person action-adventure game, players assume the identity of Chase McCain, an undercover officer armed with clever disguises who is trying to end fiendish Rex Fury's crime wave in LEGO City.

April 30—May 6

FlatOut 4: Total Insanity (Strategy First, PS4/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: T). This demolition derby-style racing game features over 25 customizable cars and 20-plus tracks.

Prey (Bethesda, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: M). In this first-person shooter set aboard Talos I, a space station orbiting the moon in the year 2032, the player awakens as Morgan Yu—key subject of an experiment meant to alter humanity forever—only to find that the station has been overrun by hostile aliens.



May 7—May 13

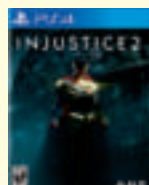
Birthdays: The Beginning (NIS America, PS4: \$39.99, Rated: E). In this sandbox game, players create cube-shaped worlds that give rise to diverse and unique lifeforms, changing the geography and altering the temperature of each world to make an entire ecosystem.

May 14—May 20

Akiba's Beat (XSEED, PS4: \$49.99, Rated: T). In this modern-day satirical spin on a classic Japanese third-person RPG formula—set in a true-to-life recreation of Tokyo's Akihabara ward—players take control of a party of characters led by protagonist Asahi Tachibana as they seek to rid the town of anything out of sync with reality.



Injustice 2 (Warner, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: T). This sequel to the popular fighting game features a huge selection of DC superheroes and supervillains, with each iconic character sporting unique and powerful gear.



May 21—May 27

Summon Night 6: Lost Borders (Gaijinworks, PS4: \$59.99, Rated: T). This third-person RPG game weaves an emotional tale of friendship and discovery that begins in the sparsely populated "cocoon world" of Fillujah, where the three main characters (Raj, Amu, and Ist) live in virtual isolation.

May 28—June 3

RiME (Grey Box, PS4/XOne: \$29.99, Rated: E10+). In this third-person puzzle-adventure game, players take on the role of a young boy—shipwrecked on a mysterious island after a torrential storm—who faces challenges and finds secrets in a world strewn with rugged terrain, wild creatures, and the crumbling ruins of a long-forgotten civilization.



Tekken 7 (Bandai Namco, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: T). This latest entry in the popular fighting game franchise features over 30 playable characters, as well as photo-realistic graphics and new fighting mechanics.

June 4—June 10

DiRT 4 (Codemasters, PS4/XOne: \$59.99, Rated: RP). This fourth entry in the popular racing franchise features over 50 cars to race in locations including Australia, Spain, Michigan, Sweden, and Wales, as well as a rally route creation tool that allows players to produce an almost infinite number of unique stages.

WipEout: Omega Collection (Sony, PS4: \$39.99, Rated: E10+). This futuristic racing game collection brings together all of the content from *WipEout HD*, *WipEout HD Fury* and *WipEout 2048*.

June 11—June 17

Cars 3: Driven to Win (Warner, PS3/

PS4/Switch/X360/WiiU/XOne: \$49.99-\$59.99, Rated: RP). Released to coincide with the titular Pixar animated theatrical film, this racing game finds Lightning McQueen and Cruz Ramirez preparing for a rematch against rival racer Jackson Storm.

June 18—June 24

Micro Machines World Series (Codemasters, PS4/XOne: \$29.99, Rated: RP). This racing game supporting up to four co-op players combines the thrill of racing micro vehicles with epic team battle strategies, set against the interactive backdrops of an everyday home.

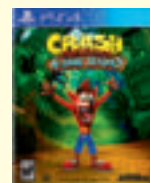


MXGP 3: The Official Motocross Videogame (Square Enix, PS4/XOne: \$49.99, Rated: E). This motocross racing simulation game features every track and rider from the 2016 Official MXGP Championship, and is built on the new Unreal Engine 4 graphics engine.

Redout (505 Games, PS4/Switch/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: E). In this racing game, players speed over some 25-plus stylish tracks to a heart-pounding soundtrack.

June 25—July 1

Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy (Activision, PS4: \$39.99, Rated: RP). This collection features the first three third-person action-platform games in the series—*Crash Bandicoot*, *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back*, and *Crash Bandicoot: Warped*—with fully-remastered HD graphics.



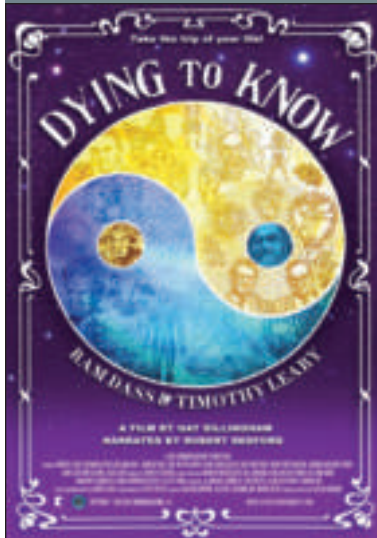
Valkyria Revolution (Sega, PS4/XOne: \$39.99, Rated: T). Taking place in an alternate world based on the European era of industrialization, this third-person action-tactical game has players banding together with Jutland's elite soldiers as they fight against the merciless Ruzi Empire in fast-paced real-time combat.

TV on DVD/Blu-ray

Available Now

The Affair: Season Three (Paramount,

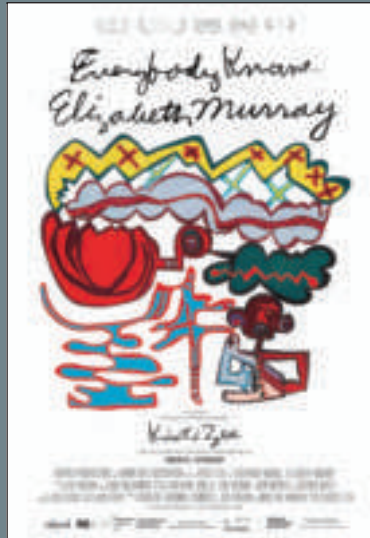
Best Sellers & New Releases from KINOLORBEREDU.COM



DYING TO KNOW

In the early 1960s Harvard psychology professors Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert began probing the edges of consciousness through their experiments with psychedelics. Leary became a missionary for mind-altering drugs, igniting a global counter-culture movement and Alpert journeyed to the East to become Ram Dass, a spiritual teacher for a new generation and the author of the book "Be Here Now". This documentary incorporates 80 years of rare footage and never-before-seen interviews. Narrated by Robert Redford, DYING TO KNOW examines their seminal work as potentially more relevant today than in the past and encourages us to ponder questions about life, death, drugs & the biggest mysteries of the human condition.

"....it inspires boomers and millennials alike." -Eat, Drink, Film



EVERYBODY KNOWS... ELIZABETH MURRAY

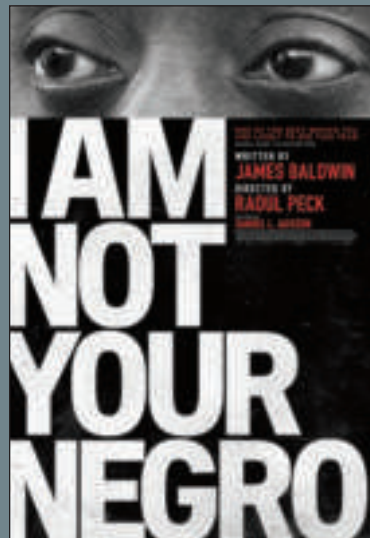
EVERYBODY KNOWS...ELIZABETH MURRAY is an intimate portrait of the groundbreaking artist Elizabeth Murray who broke convention, and made an indelible imprint on contemporary art as one of the great painters of our time. This film explores the relationship between Murray's family life and career and her remarkable journey from an impoverished childhood to artistic maverick, before she lost her life to cancer in 2007. Murray's personal journals, voiced by Meryl Streep, give viewers a privileged window into Murray's internal struggles and incredible ambition. Verité footage of her studio and home videos help round out this profile, and include exclusive interviews with art world luminaries.

"cognent, fascinating portrait of the artist"
-The New York Times



LOVE, SWEAT, & TEARS

Death, taxes, and menopause are unavoidable facts of life. LOVE, SWEAT, & TEARS is a groundbreaking, inspiring, and humorous look at a long-taboo subject that will impact both women and men during their lifetimes. Filled with humor, insight, and important medical information, the film follows Dr. Pamela Dee Gaudry, "America's Menopause Romance Doctor," as she guides women through the isolation, fear, and confusion of this phase of life. It includes interviews with renowned medical experts, comedians like Joan Rivers, and spiritual leaders such as Dr. Michael Beckwith. On a mission to de-stigmatize menopause, Dr. Pam takes a sex-positive approach, encouraging women to keep romance alive and enjoy intimacy long after the flow is gone.



I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO

I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO is a journey into black history that connects the past of the Civil Rights movement to the present of #BlackLivesMatter. Filmmaker Raoul Peck envisions the book that James Baldwin never finished, a revolutionary and personal account about the lives and assassinations of his three close friends- Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a film that questions black representation in Hollywood and beyond. And, ultimately by confronting the deeper connections between the lives and assassinations of three leaders, Baldwin and Peck have produced a work that challenges the very definition of what America stands for.

"FIVE STARS. A cinematic seance, and one of the best movies about the civil rights era ever made." -The Guardian



FIRE AT SEA

**ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINEE -
BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE**

FIRE AT SEA takes place in Lampedusa, a once peaceful Mediterranean island that has become a major entry point for African refugees into Europe. There, we meet Samuele, a boy who lives simply, climbing rocks by the shore and playing with his slingshot. Yet nearby we also witness thousands of men, women and children trying to survive the crossing from Africa in boats that are too small for such a journey. Filmmaker Gianfranco Rosi masterfully places these realities side by side, and creates a remarkable third narrative that jolts us into a new understanding of what is really happening in the Mediterranean today.

"Deliberate storytelling that allows us to consider what documentary can do. It is urgent, imaginative and necessary filmmaking." -Meryl Streep



DARE TO DRUM

DARE TO DRUM tells the story of rock star composer Stewart Copeland, drummer for The Police, teaming up with D'Drum, a Texas-based world percussion group, and Maestro Jaap van Zweden with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra to create groundbreaking work. In 2011, after three years of composing, rehearsals, recording sessions, and trips to Bali and Java, "Gamelan D'Drum" - a musical synthesis of pitch, rhythm, and orchestration - is ready for its world premiere. But when uncharacteristically cold and icy weather hits Dallas, it threatens to derail their dreams of performing the creative masterpiece with the Dallas Symphony.

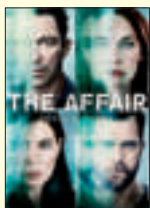
DVD includes full 30-minute concert from the Dallas Symphony.

For information about exhibition, public performance rights or streaming, please go to www.kinolorberedu.com or call (212) 629-6880

Classroom rights: \$149 • With PPR: \$349 • DSL Streaming: \$499

KINO LORBER
incorporated

DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98). Set three years after Noah's (Dominic West) guilty plea at the murder trial, this 2016-17 third season of the Showtime drama also stars Ruth Wilson, Joshua Jackson, and Maura Tierney.



The Art of More: Season One (Sony, DVD: 2 discs, \$30.99). Starring Dennis Quaid, Kate Bosworth, and Cary Elwes, this 2015 debut season of the Crackle-aired series goes behind-the-scenes at various New York auction houses.

People Just Do Nothing: The Complete Seasons 1-3 (Shout! Factory, DVD: 3 discs, \$22.98). This compilation includes episodes from the 2014-16 first three seasons of the BBC sitcom that is set at a pirate radio station.

To Walk Invisible: The Brontë Sisters (PBS, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99). Writer sisters Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë (Finn Atkins, Chloe Pirrie, Charlie Murphy) are profiled in this 2016 BBC One-aired drama that also stars Jonathan Pryce and James Norton.

Top Gear: The Complete Season 23 (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.98). This 2016 23rd season of the car aficionado series features celebrity guests including Damian Lewis, Kevin Hart, and Jennifer Saunders.

May 2

The Last Ship: The Complete Third Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$39.99). This 2016 third season of the TNT-aired post-apocalyptic series starring Eric Dane, Adam Baldwin, and Rhona Mitra features a new captain of the *Nathan James* destroyer.



May 9

Divorce: The Complete First Season (HBO, DVD: 2 discs, \$19.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$24.98). Starring Sarah Jessica Parker and Thomas Haden Church, this 2016 first season of the marriage-ending comedy series also features Molly Shannon and Tracy Letts.

Inside Amy Schumer: Season 4 (Paramount, DVD: 2 discs, \$22.98). The titular

comedienne is back in this 2016 fourth season of the Comedy Central sketch series that includes guest appearances by Lin-Manuel Miranda and Liam Neeson.

Ironside: Season 3 (Shout! Factory, DVD: 7 discs, \$44.99). Wheelchair-bound Chief Robert T. Ironside (Raymond Burr) heads a San Francisco special detective unit in this 1969-70 third season of the Emmy-winning series.

Lou Grant: The Final Season (Shout! Factory, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.98). This 1981-82 fifth and final season of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* spin-off drama—winner of Peabody and Humanitas awards—stars Ed Asner as the titular newspaper editor.

Orange Is the New Black: Season Four (Lionsgate, DVD: 4 discs, \$34.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$34.98). Minimum security penitentiary Litchfield becomes a profitable business in this 2016 fourth season of the Netflix dramedy series starring Taylor Schilling and Laura Prepon.



Simon & Simon: Season Five (Shout! Factory, DVD: 6 discs, \$39.95). San Diego detective brothers Rick and A.J. (Gerald McRaney and Jameson Parker) continue to solve crimes in this 1985-86 fifth season.

The Streets of San Francisco: The Complete Series (Paramount, DVD: 32 discs, \$89.98). Karl Malden and Michael Douglas star in this 1972-77 popular crime drama, newly available in a complete series set.

May 16

Ice: Season One (Sony, DVD: 3 discs, \$40.99). The insider's world of diamond dealing is at the center of this short-lived 2016-17 drama series co-created by Antoine Fuqua and starring Cam Gigandet, Jeremy Sisto, Ray Winstone, and Donald Sutherland.

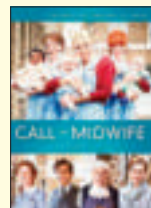


The Kennedys: After Camelot (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.98). Based on a 2012 book by J. Randy Taraborrelli, this 2017 two-part historical biographical miniseries stars Katie Holmes as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, with Matthew Perry as Ted Kennedy and Alexander Siddig as Aristotle Onassis.

The Westerner: The Complete Series (Shout! Factory, 2 discs, DVD: \$19.98). Brian Keith stars as a drifter cowhand who travels with his dog in this short-lived 1960 highbrow Western series.

May 23

Call the Midwife: Season Six (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$44.98). Sister Julianne (Jenny Agutter) is demoted as the leader of the Nonnatus House nursing convent in this 2017 sixth season of the historical drama.



Dark Angel (PBS, DVD: \$29.99). Based on the real-life story of English serial killer Mary Ann Cotton, this 2016 two-part *Masquerade* miniseries stars Joanne Froggatt and Alun Armstrong.

Outsiders: Season Two (Sony, DVD: 4 discs, \$38.99). An Appalachians mountain clan clashes with the local townspeople in this 2017 second season of the WGN America-aired drama series starring David Morse, Joe Anderson, and Kyle Gallner.

May 30

Code of a Killer (Acorn, DVD: \$34.99). Based on Joseph Wambaugh's 1989 nonfiction book *The Blooding: The True Story of the Narborough Village Murders*, this 2015 three-part ITV-aired police procedural drama exploring the origins of DNA fingerprinting stars David Threlfall and John Simm.

The Last Kingdom: Season Two (Universal, DVD: 3 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$44.98). The history of King Alfred the Great (David Dawson) is given the docudrama treatment in this 2017 second season based on Bernard Cornwell's *The Saxon Stories*.

Major Crimes: The Complete Fifth Season (Warner, DVD: 5 discs, \$39.99). This 2016-17 fifth season of the Los Angeles-set police procedural spin-off of *The Closer* stars Mary McDonnell and G.W. Bailey.



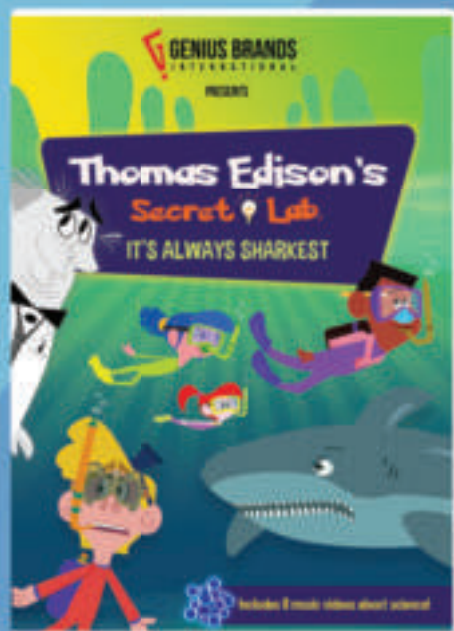
Queen Sugar: The Complete First Season (Warner, DVD: 3 discs, \$29.99). Co-executive produced by Oprah Winfrey and Ava DuVernay, this 2016 debut season of the sugarcane farm family drama is based



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on the 2014 novel by Natalie Baszile and stars Rutina Wesley, Dawn-Lyen Gardner, and Kofi Siriboe.

Suits: Season Six (Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$44.98). Associate Mike Ross's (Patrick J. Adams) prison stint is the centerpiece of this 2016-17 sixth season of the USA Network legal drama series that also stars Gabriel Macht and Meghan Markle.



June 6

CHiPs: The Sixth and Final Season (Warner, DVD: 4 discs, \$24.98). This 1982-83 sixth and final season of the action series follows California highway patrol officers (Erik Estrada, Tom Reilly).

Doctor Who: Series Ten, Part One (BBC, DVD: 3 discs, \$24.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$29.98). This compilation includes the first six episodes from the 2017 10th season of the latest incarnation of the sci-fi cult series starring Pearl Mackie, Matt Lucas, and Peter Capaldi as The Doctor.

Kingdom: Seasons One and Two (Shout! Factory, DVD: 9 discs, \$29.95). An MMA fighter (Frank Grillo) runs a Venice gym in this compilation from the 2014-16 first and second seasons of this drama series, also starring Kiele Sanchez, Nick Jonas, Jonathan Tucker, and Joanna Goings.

Last of the Summer Wine: Vintage 2007 (BBC, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Wine is still flowing in the Yorkshire Dales in this 2007 28th series from the long-running Britcom starring Brian Murphy, Peter Sallis, and Frank Thornton.

Van Helsing: Season One (Universal, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$44.98). Set in a near-future world controlled by vampires, this 2016 first season of the dark fantasy horror series based on the Dracula legend stars Kelly Overton, Jonathan Scarfe, and Paul Johansson.



Wentworth: Season 3 (Acorn, DVD: 4 discs, \$59.99). Dominant leader Bea Smith (Danielle Cormack) intimidates the other inmates in this 2015 third season of the Australian prison drama series that also features Nicole da Silva and Kate Atkinson.

June 13

American Epic (PBS, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.99; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.99). Executive produced by T Bone Burnett, Robert Redford, and Jack White, this PBS-aired three-part documentary series explores the history of early American recorded music.

Aquarius: The Complete Second Season (Anchor Bay, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98). David Duchovny stars as a detective who comes in contact with the Manson Family in this 2016 second and final season of the Los Angeles-based 1960s-set period crime drama.



Baa Baa Black Sheep: Season One (Universal, DVD: 5 discs, \$22.98). Based on the career of Marine Corps aviator Greg Boyington (Robert Conrad), this 1976-77 first season of the period military series features guest appearances by George Takei, Anne Francis, and René Auberjonois.

Dark Matter: Season Two (Funimation, DVD: 5 discs, \$44.98; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.98). Based on a comic book series, this 2016 sophomore season—aired on Space and Syfy—focuses on six amnesiacs on a starship, and stars Marc Bendavid, Melissa O'Neil, and Jodelle Ferland.

Shooter: Season One (Universal, DVD: 2 discs, \$34.98). Ryan Phillippe stars as a Force Recon Marine and sniper in this 2016-17 debut season of the USA Network action series based on the 1993 novel *Point of Impact* by Stephen Hunter, as well as the 2007 feature film.



The Vampire Diaries: The Eighth and Final Season (Warner, DVD: 4 discs, \$39.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$44.99). The saga of the Salvatore brothers comes to a close in this 2016-17 eighth and final season of the supernatural series based on the books by L.J. Smith and starring Paul Wesley, Ian Somerhalder, and Nina Dobrev.

June 27

Midsomer Murders: Series 19, Part 1 (Acorn, DVD or Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$34.99). This first volume from the 2016-17 19th season of the long-running detective drama series features episodes including "The

Village That Rose from the Dead" and "Red in Tooth & Claw."

Striking Out: Series 1 (Acorn, DVD: 2 discs, \$39.99). Amy Huberman stars as a Dublin-based solicitor in this 2017 first season of the Irish legal drama series.

Looking Ahead

Slated for July is the first season of the prequel series **Prime Suspect: Tennison**, the second seasons of **Dominion Creek** and **The Tunnel: Sabotage**, the third season of **Grantchester**, the fourth season of **The 100**, the sixth season of **Diff'rent Strokes**, the seventh and final season of **Pretty Little Liars**, and the complete series sets of **T.J. Hooker** and **TV Party**. Slated for August is the 10th season of **Murdoch Mysteries**, the second set of the 10th season of **Doctor Who**, as well as the complete series of **Porridge**.

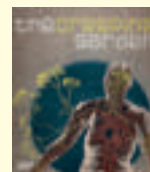


Re-priced or New to DVD/Blu-ray

The Business of Being Born / More Business of Being Born (Kino Lorber, DVD: \$29.95). Director Abby Epstein examines the contemporary state of maternity healthcare in this double-feature set that includes 2007's *The Business of Being Born* (VL-7/08 ★★) and the four-part sequel series *More Business of Being Born* (2011).

Come Hell or High Water (Icarus Films, DVD: \$24.98). Filmmaker Leah Mahan discovers a memorable hero in longtime friend and Boston teacher Derrick Evans in this documentary (VL Online-9/14 ★★) that covers a 10-year story marked by activism, corporate greed, and race-tainted Deep South land grabs.

The Creeping Garden (Music Video Distributors, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.95). Filmmakers Tim Grabham and Jasper Sharp's delightfully oddball documentary (VL-9/16 ★★1/2) investigates slime mold, following hobbyist Mark Pragnell (who searches the forest for organisms), and visiting a museum with a huge collection of molds. Bonus features include a soundtrack CD, directors' audio commentary, short films, and behind-the-scenes featurettes.



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#501715D, \$14.99, UPC 7 27985 01715 0

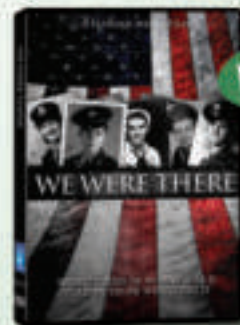


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Calvin, Zwingli, and Br. Klaus: Shapers of the Faith

John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Brother Klaus (Niklaus von Flüe) were three very different men who shaped the Christian faith in Switzerland. John Calvin was as an intellectual giant of the Reformation, Ulrich Zwingli was a humble priest who brought reform to the church and died in battle, and Brother Klaus was a mystic who left everything to seek God in the wilderness. In comparing and contrasting these three figures, we see how the practice of the faith changed in Switzerland in the late Middle Ages. Docu-drama, 60 minutes.

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NEW!

We Were There

We Were There captures the voices of America's greatest generation as they share their stories of duty, service, and responsibility during World War II. While the tumultuous global events of the early 1940's provide the backdrop for this film, it is the men and women recalling their personal stories who take center stage. The lives and experiences of these veterans from every branch of the service quickly become the heart of this riveting independent documentary. Color and B&W, 103 minutes.

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NEW!

Newton's Grace

John Newton was a troubled young man with a violent temper and a penchant for vulgarity that literally made his fellow sailors blush. Following a powerful conversion experience during a storm at sea, Newton eventually became a pastor in the Church of England and the writer of several of the church's most beloved hymns, including "Amazing Grace." He also came to hate the slave trade, becoming a spiritual leader in the fight to end slavery. *Newton's Grace* is the true story of miraculous forgiveness and change that lies behind the powerful words of one of the world's most beloved hymns. Drama, 80 minutes.

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

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

Current Films

Ali & Nino ★★1/2

MPI, 101 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

The story of the brief independence of Azerbaijan after World War I is told through the love story of Ali (Adam Bakri), a Russian-educated Muslim from a noble family in Baku, Azerbaijan, and Nino (Maria Valverde), an Orthodox Christian from Georgia and the daughter of a Russian Prince (Mandy Patinkin). Their marriage is put on hold when war is declared in 1914 and events split them up—Nino is kidnapped, and Ali goes into hiding—but they are reunited and Ali becomes a part of the new independent government. Their journey takes them from the modern Muslim city of Baku to the poor mountain villages of Azerbaijan to Turkey and Iran and back to Baku, which they must flee when the Soviet Union invades the oil-rich country. This is the first film version of the classic 1937 novel by the pseudonymous Kurban Said, directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker Asif Kapadia (*Amy*) from an adaptation by Oscar-winning screenwriter Christopher Hampton (*Dangerous Liaisons*) and shot on location. But the historical aspects and the portrait of the culture of Azerbaijan 100 years ago are more interesting than the human drama. And while Bakri and Valverde are attractive and likable performers, they never show the kind of epic passion needed to drive their dramatic journey. Still, this handsome film centered on a lesser-known moment in history should be considered a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Always Shine ★★1/2

Oscilloscope, 85 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

In this tale of murderous female obsession—which loosely transposes *Single White Female* to the L.A. B-movie trash-culture

milieu—a pair of second-tier actress pals decide to take a break from the thankless patriarchal industry rat race by traveling to Big Sur to reevaluate their dubious career directions. Beth (Caitlin FitzGerald) is a soft-spoken attractive blond with something resembling a career as a straight-to-DVD horror scream queen, while her angst-ridden friend, Anna (Mackenzie Davis), aspires to bigger and better projects but has had little success. Although the North Cal trip was meant to rejuvenate their precarious friendship, the seclusion ends up doing a number on Anna's head. Displaying signs of mental instability, Anna's more intimate contact with Beth only ramps up her jealousy, which eventually leads to a lot of passive-aggressive head games and worse. Director Sophia Takal serves up moments of David Lynch-ian creepiness and hyper-real social unease, although weak dialogue sometimes undercuts the film's visual merits. A strong optional purchase. (M. Sandlin)



The Ardennes ★★★

Film Movement, 93 min., in Flemish & French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

This Belgian crime drama opens with a home invasion gone wrong that lands the volatile, violent Kenny (Kevin Janssens) in prison while his younger brother Dave (Jeroen Perceval) and Kenny's girlfriend Sylvie (Veerle Baetens) barely escape. Released four years later, Kenny slips back into alpha mode but everyone else has changed. Sylvie left Kenny and she and Dave are sober and have gone straight. What Kenny doesn't know is that Sylvie is pregnant with Dave's child and Dave is determined to keep that relationship secret until Kenny settles, waiting for the "right moment." That moment, of course, never comes, as Kenny's temper stirs things up and pulls Dave into another criminal scheme: getting rid of a dead body in the trunk. While it's clear from the first few minutes after Kenny's release that things will not end well, this turns out to be an understatement. A mix of grim crime thriller, dysfunctional family drama, and social portrait of life on the lowest rungs of survival, this is a simple film with a fatalistic attitude built around a violent, impulsive bully who sows chaos in every situation. But if its portrait of out-of-control criminal lowlifes seems familiar, it's also quite effective, thanks to the commitment of the actors and the tense direction by Robin Pront, who populates the film with offbeat touches (including an ostrich attack!). Belgium's official entry for the Academy Awards, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Assassin's Creed ★1/2

Fox, 115 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99

Based on Ubisoft's popular video game franchise, this time-tripping sci-fi film rarely rises above incoherency. The saga begins with a series of ominous biblical texts claiming that a device known as the Apple from the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden contains "the key to free will itself." In 1492, during the Spanish Inquisition, Knights Templar search for this artifact with the aim of being able to enforce peace through "the power to control all freedom of thought." Their opponents, the secret society of assassins, are all about free will, even if that includes violence. Flash forward to Texas, where prisoner Callum Lynch (Michael Fassbender) is facing execution by lethal injection for murder. Instead, he's transported to an Abstergo Industries laboratory in Madrid where—supervised by Dr. Sophia Rikkin (Marion Cotillard) and her creepy CEO father (Jeremy Irons)—he is hooked up to a virtual reality/time machine called the Animus. The Animus technology enables Cal to participate, via holograms, in the actions of his genetic ancestor, a hooded assassin named Aguilar de Nerha (also played by Fassbender), who is a counter-revolutionary fighting in 15th-century Spain with his companion Maria (Ariane Labed). Their shadowy mission—which is full of parkour-like jumps off medieval rooftops—is to make sure that the besieged Sultan Muhammad XII doesn't surrender the precious Apple. Directed by Justin Kurzel, *Assassin's Creed* is ultimately much more about swashbuckling visuals than coherent storytelling. Not recommended. (S. Granger)

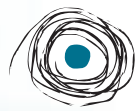


The Assignment ★

Lionsgate, 95 min., R, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$24.99, June 6

Director Walter Hill's pulpy psycho-sexual thriller begins with a gratuitous, full-frontal nude scene involving Frank Kitchen, a nasty hitman, hiding out in a sleazy San Francisco hotel after murdering a gangster. Suddenly, Frank is confronted by thugs who deliver him to megalomaniacal plastic surgeon Dr. Rachel Kay (Sigourney Weaver), whose medical license has been revoked. Because Frank killed Rachel's debt-riddled, playboy brother (Adrian Hough), she is determined to wreak her own deviant revenge. When Frank awakens, he discovers that he's undergone a sex change. Without embarrassment, Frank (Michelle Rodriguez) examines his female breasts and is furious about the surgical removal of his penis, which doesn't seem to deter his relationship with a flirtatious nurse (Caitlin





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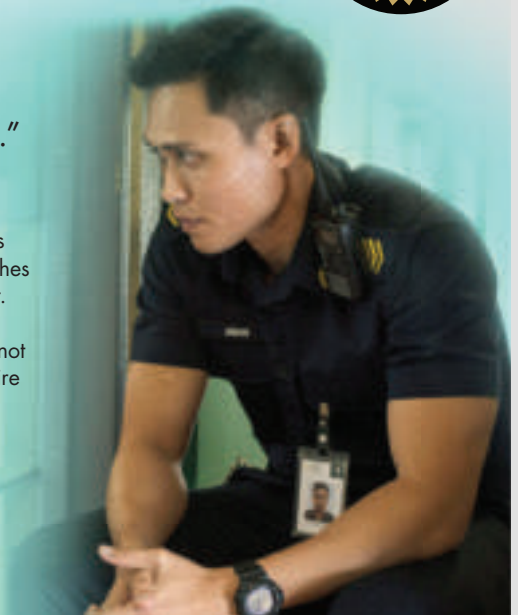
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Gerard) with whom he had a one-night stand. When Dr. Kay is subsequently committed to a mental institution, psychiatrist Dr. Ralph Green (Tony Shalhoub) is assigned to evaluate her sanity. Calm and confident, despite wearing a straitjacket, Kay flaunts her intellectual superiority, quoting Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe. Based on a French graphic novel, *The Assignment* subversively taps into provocative topics like plastic surgery and gender re-assignment, but this is essentially schlocky B-movie fare, a titillating and trashy excuse to present a lurid killing spree. Not recommended. (S. Granger)

Beauty and the Beast

★★★1/2

Shout! Factory, in French w/ English subtitles & English-dubbed, 112 min., PG-13, DVD: \$16.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$22.99



French beauty Léa Seydoux stars as Belle, the youngest daughter of a once-prosperous merchant (André Dussollier) who is ruined after the wreck of his ships, and Vincent Cassel costars as the hirsute Beast whose magical kingdom becomes Belle's prison after her father takes a forbidden rose. Director Christophe Gans frames this lavish and colorful French adaptation of the classic tale as a bedtime story told by a mother to her young children. The enchanted kingdom magically hidden in the forest is beautifully designed and grandly presented, and Belle takes it all in with a sense of wonder and delight even as she glowers at the gruff but gentlemanly Beast. There are cute magical puppies, giant enchanted statues, and an epic battle with a brutal human villain (Eduardo Noriega) who invades the kingdom with his gang of thieves. What's missing, however, is any romantic attraction or bond of friendship between Belle and the Beast. Seydoux brings passion and courage to her role but the CGI-enhanced face of Cassel's Beast costume is flat and inexpressive, leaving him with little dimension or emotional life. Still, fans of fantasy and lavish period spectacles may appreciate (and there may be interest thanks to the new Disney version of the story), making this a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Before I Fall

★★★1/2

Universal, 99 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, May 30



Lifting the supernatural premise of Harold Ramis's classic comedy *Groundhog Day*, this angst-riddled melodrama follows 17-year-old Samantha "Sam" Kingston (Zoey Deutch) who relives a crucial Friday over and over again. In the Pacific Northwest, Cascadia High School celebrates Valentine's Day with "val-o-grams"—rose deliveries that gauge

every student's status. Self-centered Sam has reached the pinnacle of the popularity poll, surrounded by three friends (Cynthia Wu, Medalion Rahimi, Halston Sage). Like many bitchy cliques, they cruelly pick on an ostracized outcast—in this case, wild-haired Juliet Sykes (Elena Kampouris). For Sam, this particular Friday precedes a party hosted by temporarily parent-less Kent McFuller (Logan Miller), who has adored Samantha since elementary school, even though she is currently enamored with hard-drinking Rob (Kian Lawley). When the frivolity at the party is followed by a fatal car crash, Sam is forced to repeat the day over and over again, eventually becoming enlightened and learning important life lessons, even if it's a bit too late. Problem is: Samantha is somewhat passive in this doomed timeline loop—with things happening to her—as morsels of pertinent information about her little sister (Erica Tremblay) and mother (Jennifer Beals), among others, are revealed. And Deutch seems a bit too sophisticated to be convincing as a high-school senior. Based on Lauren Oliver's bestselling 2010 YA novel, and directed by Ry Russo-Young, *Before I Fall* ultimately delivers a sympathetic "savor every moment" message. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Being 17

Strand, 114 min., in French w/ English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, Blu-ray: \$32.99



French writer-director André Téchiné's evocative coming-of-age tale centers on two antagonistic classmates who are drawn to one another after being accidentally thrown together. Damien (Kacey Mottet Klein) is a brainy misfit who knocks heads with Thomas (Corentin Fila), a more rugged but less studious teen who was adopted by a childless family. When Thomas's mother becomes pregnant, Damien's mother, Marianne (Sandrine Kiberlain), who is also the local doctor, suggests that Thomas move in with them to spare him the long trek to school. The boys initially resist any sort of brotherly feeling, but in time Damien will confess his attraction to Thomas, and although their complicated relationship continues to be marked by tension—even violence—as well as physical intimacy, the pair grow closer, especially after an incident involving Damien's father (Alexis Loret), a military man who keeps in touch via Skype. *Being 17* never becomes a simple story of gay sexual awakening—Téchiné even leaves open the possibility that Marianne might be harboring feelings for Thomas in her husband's absence—and it refuses to turn Damien into a nerdy victim (he practices boxing with a neighbor, and can hold his own in a fight). Ultimately, the combination of emotional complexity, a striking setting

(the French Pyrénées, snow-filled in the winter sequences), and fine performances make this a film that both surprises and satisfies. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Bitter Harvest

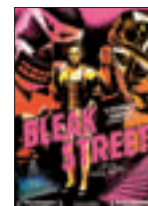
Lionsgate, 103 min., R, DVD: \$19.98, June 13



The Holodomor—Stalin's mass starvation of the Ukrainian populace in the early 1930s, estimated to have killed as many as seven million people—serves as the backdrop for filmmaker George Mendeluk's stilted historical romance, which strives for a *Doctor Zhivago* vibe but falls miles short. The hero is Yuri (Max Irons), an artistically-inclined peasant in love since childhood with Natalka (Samantha Barks). After the Bolshevik revolution, he goes off to the art academy in Kiev, but winds up in jail when his modernist style conflicts with the dictates of Soviet realism. Back home, Natalka, as well as Yuri's grandfather, Ivan (Terence Stamp), falls under the malevolent rule of brutal Communist commandant Sergei (Tamer Hassan), who expropriates the locals' lush fields for collective farms and casts lustful eyes on the women. Yuri escapes from prison, returns to Natalka, and joins rebels fighting the Soviets, but the resistance is doomed to fail. Will the beleaguered couple—along with the sweet orphan boy they have adopted—make it across the border into still-free Poland? The Holodomor deserves to be remembered, but while *Bitter Harvest* has its heart in the right place, this feels more like a TV movie, weighed down by leaden acting and clunky dialogue. An earnest, old-fashioned melodrama that fails to do justice to the historical horrors it seeks to dramatize, this is not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

Bleak Street

Kino Lorber, 99 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95



Revered Mexican director Arturo Ripstein trawls the alleys and byways of the downtrodden in this oddball dramatization of a true crime committed in 2009. Adela (Nora Velázquez), an aging prostitute, is finding it difficult to land johns now that her looks and street status are fading, a downturn in luck that leaves her and her despondent ailing mother (Lety Gómez) with barely enough money for food. Fellow hooker Dora (Patricia Reyes Spíndola) also faces financial and other troubles, with her mouthy daughter (Greta Cervantes) demanding a cell phone and her closeted husband (Alejandro Suárez) secretly dressing in Dora's "work clothes" and sneaking around with strapping young men. Into this already-eclectic fray enters a pair of

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**The
LOVE
WITCH**
A FILM BY ANNA BILLER



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"Lilliputian luchadores" (Juan Francisco Longoria and Guillermo Lopez), identical midget brothers who perform as "shadows" to their full-sized partners in the ring. The brothers' fame and notoriety attract the attentions of the desperate Adela and Dora, who together conspire to pull an old whoring trick on the masked fighters by seducing them and then knocking them unconscious with a roofie of eye drop solution in order to make off with their cash. The ploy proves a little too successful as the toxic dosage ends up killing the brothers and sets the entire city on the trail of the murderous hookers. While the material may sound highly sensationalistic and exploitative, Ripstein—aided greatly by the stark, beautiful black-and-white cinematography of Alejandro Cantú—maintains a quiet, introspective demeanor. A surprisingly touching film, this is recommended. (J. Cruz)

The Brand New Testament ★★½

Music Box, 115 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

The latest phantasmagoria from Belgian writer-director Jaco Van Dormael (a onetime circus clown) imagines that God (Benoît Poelvoorde) is a slovenly, middle-aged jerk in a bathrobe living in a Brussels high-rise with his downtrodden family. God is a cruel deity who enjoys sitting at his home-office computer and making humanity suffer in ways ranging from major wars to the phone always ringing when people are trying to relax in the tub. Jesus, aka JC (David Murgia), rebelled against cranky Father long ago and is banished, while JC's kid sister Ea (Pili Groyne)—also disgusted with God—goes to Earth to form her own band of disciples, including a one-armed beauty, a would-be serial killer, a sex pervert, and a wealthy matron (played by screen legend Catherine Deneuve), who team up to further subvert God. Despite the subject matter, the tone here is more whimsical than blasphemous, serving up a playful, iconoclastic vibe. An entertaining, oddball foreign fantasy, this is highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)

The Bride (La Novia) ★

Strand, 96 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

This strained and often laughable adaptation of Federico García Lorca's play *Blood Wedding* lacks the sense of dangerous immediacy that drives the stage version with such blinding passion. Director Paula Ortiz chokes on the poetry of Lorca's dialogue, wringing the life out of his language with so much absurd reverence that a viewer can quickly forget the point of any given scene. Set in rural Spain, the story



involves an innocent love triangle between two boys and a girl that goes south when the suitors' families are caught up in a blood feud. Years later, the now-grown Novia (Inma Cuesta) is emotionally stuck between her old friends, having been the lover of one and the new bride of the other. A smoldering desire, however, upends everything, causing history to repeat itself. Ortiz derives good performances from Cuesta, as well as some of the older actors who play an exhausted generation either too hopeful or too skeptical about the potential of a marriage to heal everyone's old wounds. But with its agonizingly slow pace and Ortiz's misguided need to push raw emotions to operatic heights, *The Bride* is ultimately a movie that simply (and fatally) doesn't trust its best assets to deliver on their own. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

The Bye Bye Man ★

Universal, 97 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98

"Don't think it! Don't say it!" This is the cautionary phrase that propels *The Bye Bye Man*, a tiresome, tepid horror-thriller, based on an urban legend. During the 1969-set prologue, deranged Larry Redmon (Leigh Whannel) goes on a shooting rampage, killing eight neighbors and himself. Cut to the present, as three University of Wisconsin students—nerdy Elliot (Douglas Smith), his sexy girlfriend Sasha (Cressida Bonas), and a jock named John (Lucien Laviscount)—rent a large, decrepit house in rural Madison. Elliot discovers mysterious inscriptions inside his bedside table—a repeated warning that reads: "Don't think it. Don't say it." And the scrawled words, "Bye Bye Man." No one knows what this means, but during a housewarming party Sasha's psychic friend Kim (Jenna Kanell) conducts a séance that reveals a malevolent, supernatural presence. And then Elliot glimpses a ghostly, hooded figure (Doug Jones). Adapting Robert Damon Schneck's 2005 short story *The Bridge to Body Island*, screenwriter Jonathan Penner and his wife, director Stacy Title, go with the evil boogeyman curse concept instead of developing an intriguing backstory, relying on predictable jump-scares and not-so-subtle misdirection. Also featuring Faye Dunaway as Redmon's aged widow and Carrie-Anne Moss as a suspicious police detective, this is not recommended. (S. Granger)



Claire in Motion ★★★

Breaking Glass, 84 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

An interesting drama about a tightly wound college professor, co-writers and co-directors Lisa Robinson and Annie J. Howell's *Claire in Motion* stars Betsy Brandt as Claire,

whose husband, Paul (Chris Beetem), an ornithologist, vanishes during what is supposed to be a three-day hike. When a police investigation finds Paul's car still at the trailhead but no sign of Paul, Claire and her young son, Connor (Zev Haworth),

enter a kind of stasis in which life slows to a crawl because of doubt and irresolution. How does one get through a day? Make decisions? Look ahead? With no evidence that Paul died, or intentionally disappeared, or met an unknown fate, closure becomes impossible. Claire and Connor begin to take baby steps toward growing and evolving, all the while feeling they are under the microscope of friends and colleagues who see them as hapless victims. Another layer of intrigue is added when Claire discovers that Paul had sides to his life he did not reveal to her, including a key relationship with an oddly aggressive artist (Anna Margaret Hollyman). Brandt shines in the title role, playing a deliberately colorless figure who is more at ease blending into the background than looking into the shadowy unknown. A fine character study built around a low-key mystery, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)



Collateral Beauty ★½

Warner, 96 min., PG-13, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

David Frankel's totally shameless, crudely manipulative tearjerker begins with Howard Inlet (Will Smith)—hotshot head of a successful New York ad agency—devastated by the death of his beloved 6-year-old daughter, so he retreats into grief-ridden isolation. His prolonged depression—which leads to his penning accusatory letters to Death, Time, and Love—threatens the business, so his partners (Edward Norton, Kate Winslet, and Michael Peña) hire actors from a struggling theatrical troupe (Helen Mirren, Jacob Latimore, and Keira Knightley) to accost Howard in the guise of those abstractions and goad him into actions that will provide proof of his mental instability—allowing them to sell the company. This cruel plan unwittingly encourages Howard to join a therapy group of grieving parents led by a sympathetic counselor (Naomie Harris). The maudlin quotient escalates exponentially as the three perpetrators transcend into confessional mode about their own regrets and fret over the damage they are doing to their friend and partner, until a final reel offers an avalanche of cathartic emotional climaxes before adding twists that take the plot into magical territory. Apart from Mirren, who brings an elfin mischief to her role, the cast is sabotaged by the awful material. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Comedian ★★

Sony, 120 min., R, DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray: \$26.99, May 2

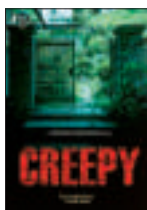
Robert De Niro, who played a sociopathic wannabe celebrity in Martin Scorsese's 1983 film *The King of Comedy*, stars here as former TV sitcom star Jackie Burke. Aging Burke has hit hard times, unable to move beyond nostalgic references to his earlier show. When an obnoxious heckler with a webcam taunts him in a Long Island comedy club one night, Jackie clobbers the guy in a scuffle that winds up on YouTube. After spending 30 days in the slammer, Jackie reports for community service at a homeless shelter, where he meets Harmony (Leslie Mann), who also has anger problems. Despite their obvious age difference, the pair connect. He takes her to the Comedy Cellar and his lesbian niece's wedding; she takes him to a birthday dinner for her domineering father (Harvey Keitel). Cobbled together by a quartet of screenwriters and superficially directed by Taylor Hackford, *The Comedian* features strained insult comedy, a Friars Club Roast of a legendary comedienne (Cloris Leachman), and a sleazy *Fear Factor*-like game show. Edie Falco costars as Jackie's frustrated manager, while Danny DeVito and Patti LuPone play his long-suffering brother and resentful sister-in-law. Also featuring cameos by Charles Grodin, Billy Crystal, Richard Belzer, Gilbert Gottfried, and others, this is a flimsy, faltering film that is definitely not funny. Optional. (S. Granger)



Creepy ★★★

KimStim, 130 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99

Japanese fright-master Kiyoshi Kurosawa's deeply unsettling thriller centers on ex-police detective Takakura (Hidetoshi Nishijima), who leaves the force to take up a position as a university instructor following an on-the-job tragedy. He and his wife (Yuko Takeuchi) move into a new suburban home, but find their neighbors to be curiously unfriendly, except for Nishino (Teruyuki Kagawa), a strange, erratic man who lives next door with his teenage daughter (Ryoko Fujino). While the couple try to settle in, Takakura is asked by a former colleague to help with a cold case—the inexplicable disappearance of a family who left a young daughter behind. Now a teen, she recalls that her parents seemed to have fallen under the spell of some stranger before they abandoned her, and Takakura's inquiries eventually suggest that Nishino might have been involved. That coincidence, along with an ensuing series of weird revelations, strain credulity, but once the film moves inside Nishino's house, it creates an ambience that will chill viewers to the bone—while also serving up a



strong dose of the grisly gore that devotees of the genre expect. *Creepy* proves that Kurosawa is one of the most skillful horror filmmakers working today. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

A Cure for Wellness ★★

Fox, 146 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.98, June 6

A young, ambitious Wall Street investment banker is dispatched to Switzerland to retrieve his company's CEO from a mysterious, idyllic spa encased in an Alpine castle. Upon his arrival, Lockhart (Dane DeHaan) observes the elderly, outwardly contented residents wandering around in white robes. As the plot twists and turns, Lockhart winds up in an automobile accident. Awakening with a broken leg, he discovers that he is now a patient, cared for by the suavely sinister Dr. Heinrich Volmer (Jason Isaacs), who explains that the spa's miraculous rejuvenation treatment comes from the water. "Drink!" he's urged. "Drink the water." Hobbling around the asylum grounds, Lockhart meets Hannah (Mia Goth), a pale, hollow-eyed adolescent who says she's lived there all her life. Commandeering her bicycle to search for a telephone, Lockhart takes Hannah into a nearby village whose Bavarian residents display an obvious antagonism to the castle and all it represents. In addition to an excruciating torture scene—with Lockhart strapped in a dentist's chair, evoking horrifying memories of Laurence Olivier/Dustin Hoffman in *Marathon Man*—and a shocking rape involving incest, the most malevolent scare comes from the repellent use of slimy, slithering eels. Director Gore Verbinski's creepy dystopian thriller slogs along for an ominous two-and-a-half hours, saddling viewers with a surly anti-hero, lunatic villain, and ghastly, nightmarish imagery in a grotesque Gothic horror film gone awry. Optional. (S. Granger)



Departure ★★★

Wolfe, 109 min., in English & French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$26.99

Andrew Steggall's debut feature takes place in a bucolic part of southern France full of streams, forests, and quaint cottages. Elliot (Alex Lawther) is helping his mother, Beatrice (Juliet Stevenson), prepare to sell their summer home in the wake of her separation from Elliot's father, Philip (Finbar Lynch). Elliot is bored, restless, and insists on wearing a vintage soldier jacket that Beatrice can't stand. One afternoon, he spots an older boy swimming in the reservoir—a forbidden activity—and it piques his interest, so he sets out to befriend Clément (Phénix Brossard), a smoker and motorcycle enthusiast who is



staying with his aunt. They speak a little of each other's language, but certain words, like "deer," are lost in translation. Aspiring writer Elliot likes to correct other people's grammar, so Clément calls him, somewhat sarcastically, "the poet." As they hang out together, Elliot becomes increasingly disapproving of Beatrice. Clément, whose own mother has terminal cancer, tells him that Beatrice seems sad, but Elliot is too self-absorbed to notice. He's more interested in Clément, who uses "fag" as a pejorative term even as he seems fully aware that his new friend has a crush on him. Steggall gives no indication whether Clément is gay or straight, only that he seems flattered by Elliot's attentions. When Philip drops by to sign some paperwork, tensions between mother and son increase, although greater understanding will eventually follow. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

A Dog's Purpose ★★1/2

Universal, 100 min., PG, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, May 2

Lasse Hallström's adaptation of W. Bruce Cameron's popular 2010 novel—a celebration of canine loyalty based on the weird premise that doggie souls are reincarnated to bring joy to their human owners (even those who have forgotten them)—is a shameless mixture of slapstick, melodrama, and cloying sentimentality. Following a brief prologue in which a stray puppy (voiced by Josh Gad) is picked up by animal control and presumably euthanized, the pooch is reborn as a Golden Retriever adopted by Ethan (Bruce Gheisar), who names the dog Bailey. Ethan grows into a teen heartthrob and star quarterback (now played by KJ Apa), but he suffers a football-ending accident, and faithful Bailey dies after his master goes off to agricultural college. The dog (always voiced by Gad) is reborn several times—first as a German Shepherd who becomes a heroic police dog, then as a Corgi who accompanies an initially lonely college student through a happy married life, and finally as a mutt that, after years of abuse, finds its way back to an older Ethan (Dennis Quaid), arranging a reunion with the latter's long-lost high school sweetheart. Even without the viral video showing one of the stunt dogs apparently being mistreated during filming, *A Dog's Purpose* would be an iffy prospect to join the ranks of classic canine movies. Still, there is always an audience for schmaltzy family movies about dogs, so consider this a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)



Elle ★★1/2

Sony, 131 min., in French w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$25.99, Blu-ray: \$30.99

Oscar-nominated Isabelle Huppert stars in Paul Verhoeven's chilly thriller as Michèle,

an imperious Parisian businesswoman who reacts with apparent nonchalance after being raped by a masked intruder. Refusing to report the assault to the police, she continues to oversee a firm that produces violent, sexually explicit video games, while also carrying on a halfhearted affair with the husband of her partner and encouraging her troubled son to dump his shrewish girlfriend. Although one might assume she has been traumatized, her icily pragmatic demeanor actually masks her determination to take vengeance on all who have wronged her—not only the intruder but also her mother, who is making a fool of herself with a young gold digger, and her father, a long-imprisoned mass murderer who implicated her in his crimes, as well as a hacker (perhaps a staff member) who has posted insulting images of her on the web. Verhoeven and Huppert obviously relish the intricacies of this lurid revenge tale in which Michèle deals with all of her enemies, although the means are twisty and shot through with mordant humor and a soupçon of bitterness. Presiding over all like a stern goddess is Huppert's Michèle, a model of hauteur who never apologizes for even the most horrendous acts. *Elle* is a cinematic game in which director and star toy with the audience like expert puppeteers. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)



The Eyes of My Mother

★★★

Magnolia, 76 min., R, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Shot in elegant wide-screen black-and-white, Nicolas Pesce's lurid horror film offers abundant shivers along with a few major jolts. After an opening sequence in which a truck driver stops on a desolate road to aid an injured person, the narrative flashes back to an isolated farmhouse, where a woman teaches her little daughter Francisca useful knowledge—such as how to dissect a cow's eye. The oddly bucolic aura—enhanced by Portuguese *fado* music—is shattered when a wandering stranger murders the mother in front of the girl. The farmer father returns home to extract a terrible revenge on the killer, which his daughter shares in—using her mother's earlier instructions. After her father's death, the grown-up Francisca (Kika Magalhães) seeks the companionship of others, who tend to meet gruesome fates at her hands, including a young woman with a little son, who Francisca adopts as her own. Although she warns the tyke never to go into the barn, his curiosity wins out, and ultimately the secret that Francisca is hiding there is revealed. *The Eyes of My Mother* suffers from plot holes, but it also creates a genuinely eerie atmosphere, and in



the end has more of an impact than many more elaborate horror films. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Fair Haven ★★★

Breaking Glass, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

The controversial, emotionally wrenching practice of conversion therapy for gays is the starting point for this thoughtful, gentle story about a young man caught between his own identity and pressure to follow through on Christian-based reparative "treatment" to turn him straight. Nineteen-year-old James (Michael Grant) is taken home by his remote widower father, Richard (Tom Wopat), following a stint at a conversion clinic run by a zealous doctor (Gregory Harrison). Discovering that his dad paid for the therapy with James's college savings, the already dispirited son feels trapped by a bleak future on a failing family farm when what he really wants is to pursue his dreams as a talented pianist. Pushed toward a relationship with a bright, earnest young woman (Lily Anne Harrison) while cautiously reconnecting with a potential soulmate (Josh Green), James slowly becomes the man he is meant to be despite obstacles. The moving script by Jack Bryant eschews thinly disguised lectures about the obvious problems with gay conversion, instead wisely allowing the relationships to speak for themselves. And the cast is first-rate, with Wopat in particular doing a terrific job playing a somewhat lost man torn between his principles and muted love for his son. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



Fall ★★1/2

Breaking Glass, 82 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Veteran character actor Michael Murphy is the principal reason to see this agonizingly evasive drama about an elderly priest who might or might not have committed an act of sexual abuse decades ago. As Father Sam Ryan, Murphy is mesmerizing as an active—albeit weary—cleric looking after his small community of parishioners on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. With his days consisting of a series of exhausting rituals including saying the mass at a retirement home, delivering last rites, and hearing maddening confessions, Father Sam grabs moments of privacy to enjoy silence or tend, by phone, to the care of his nonagenarian mother in northern Ontario. Writer-director Terrance Odetta has a good feel for the mix of isolation and intense responsibilities that are the burden of a career priest, but he is cagey when it comes to forming a clear narrative. The arrival of a letter from a dying, middle-aged man, alluding to a blurry memory of sharing



a bed with Father Sam 40 years earlier, stirs the pot a bit story-wise, but Odetta is intent on dragging this plot strand out. And that's a shame, because some scenes are quite moving, including a counseling session for a young, distressed woman terrified that her upcoming wedding will fall apart, and another in which a gay Iranian man rants about the Catholic Church. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

Fences ★★★

Paramount, 138 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Denzel Washington directs and stars in this multi-Oscar-nominated adaptation of August Wilson's iconic 1983 Pulitzer Prize-winning play centered on a dysfunctional family. Set in Pittsburgh, PA, during the 1950s, *Fences* revolves around the relationship between a bitter, Negro League baseball player-turned-sanitation worker, 53-year-old Troy Maxon (Washington), and his long-suffering wife, Rose (Viola Davis). Plus, there's Troy's best friend/co-worker (Stephen Henderson), brain-damaged brother (Mykelti Williamson), and adult son (Russell Hornsby) by another woman. When we first meet hyper-talkative Troy, he's riding on the back of a garbage truck, complaining that only whites get to be drivers, while blacks do the heavy lifting of trash cans. The main conflict here revolves around the tension between Troy, Rose, and their teenage son (Jovan Adepo), who is hoping for a football scholarship. Closely following Wilson's poetic text, Washington elicits insightful, intelligent, nuanced performances from his acting ensemble, although with the action primarily restricted to the yard of a two-story brick home, the film cannot escape its theatrical origins. Still, this is a formidable, character-driven drama. Recommended. (S. Granger)



Fifty Shades Darker ★1/2

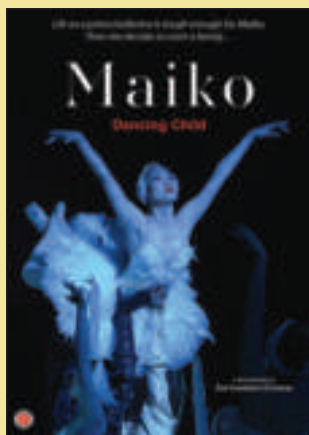
Universal, 118 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, May 9

When we last saw Anastasia "Ana" Steele (Dakota Johnson), she'd brusquely walked out on domineering Seattle billionaire Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan), after the latter turned her into his personal sex slave. Now, she's an assistant to the editor in a publishing house. Still, when Christian buys an entire art exhibit of her photos, gullible Ana returns to his kinky red room, which has been sensuously redecorated, and their arrangement is renegotiated: this time, no pain (unless you count nipple clamps). In addition to a creepy, spurned stalker (Bella Heathcote), there's also a pivotal woman haunting Christian's twisted psyche: his mother's (Marcia Gay Harden)





FIRST RUN FEATURES PRESENTS



MAIKO: DANCING CHILD

70 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917315D
STREET DATE: APRIL 25

Born in Japan, Maiko Nishino's destiny was decided before she was born: her name, Maiko, means dancing child. Now Maiko is 32 and at the top of her career as a prima ballerina for the Norwegian National Ballet. But Maiko is not a young dancer anymore, and as talented newcomers vie for her position, she decides to start a family.

"As honest and powerful as it is beautiful in showing the difficulties of becoming a mother and reaching your career goals. You will love Maiko's advice to all women and mothers." -Reel Honest Reviews



UNLOCKING THE CAGE

91 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917339D
STREET DATE: MAY 23

DA Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus's new film follows animal rights lawyer Steven Wise as he tries to break down the legal wall that separates animals from humans. Arguing that chimpanzees, whales, elephants and other complex animals deserve "personhood" rights, Steve and his team are at the forefront of a monumental shift in how we think about animal rights.

"Fleet, engaging...with legal-thriller pacing and emotional intelligence." -LA Times

"Take a journey of enlightenment in this eye-opening documentary." -Boston Herald



ALL GOVERNMENTS LIE

91 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917346D
STREET DATE: MAY 23

Independent journalists like Jeremy Scahill, Glenn Greenwald and Amy Goodman are changing the face of journalism, providing investigative, adversarial alternatives to mainstream news outlets. We follow them as they expose corporate and government deception – just as the groundbreaking journalist I.F. Stone did decades ago.

"This timely, convincing documentary will cause audiences to question what they see and read. Remarkably nonpartisan, it is a damning indictment of mainstream media." -Los Angeles Times



TOMCAT

114 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917360D
STREET DATE: JUNE 13

Andreas and Stefan lead a passionate and happy life: together with their beloved tomcat Moses, they live in a beautiful old house in Vienna's vineyards.

But an unexpected and inexplicable outburst of violence suddenly shakes up their relationship and calls everything into question – the blind spot that resides in all of us.

"Beautifully filmed and deliciously acted. A sensuous and delicate look at gay love that is torn asunder."
-Reviews by Amos Lassen



A MATTER OF TIME

85 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917322D
STREET DATE: APRIL 25

Acclaimed musician Kathryn Calder is touring the world with one of Canada's biggest indie rock bands, The New Pornographers, when she receives devastating news: her mother, Lynn, has ALS, and a short time left to live. Kathryn leaves the tour and returns to her childhood home to be with her mom through her final months.

"The great triumph of this moving, deeply emotional, beautifully shot film is that, by the end, it's turned something awful into something life-affirmingly positive."
-The Georgia Straight



THE FUTURE OF WORK AND DEATH

89 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917353D
STREET DATE: MAY 23

In this provocative documentary, experts in the fields of futurology, anthropology, neuroscience and philosophy consider the impact of technological advances on the two certainties of human life: work and death. Featuring Will Self, Gray Scott, Rudolph Tanzi, Joanna Cook and Zoltan Istvan, the film looks at the astonishing exponential rate at which mankind creates technologies to ease the process of living.

"Thought-provoking...massively engaging. It is essential viewing." -UK Film Review



AS GOOD AS YOU

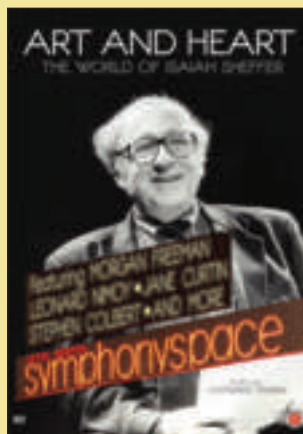
85 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917377D
STREET DATE: JUNE 13

In mourning over the untimely passing of her wife, Jo resolves to continue with their plan for her to have a baby, using her brother-in-law as the sperm donor. But unexpected dalliances with her two best friends changes the equation.

As Good As You is a comedy about trying to grieve the right way – and maybe growing up a bit in the process.

Winner – Best LGBT Film!
Hollywood Reel Independent Film Festival

"Authentically funny, sexy and moving."
-Lisa McNulty, Women's Project Theater



ART AND HEART THE WORLD OF ISAIAH SHEFFER

52 minutes, color, \$24.95, FRF 917384D
STREET DATE: JUNE 13

One of New York's great Renaissance men, Isaiah Sheffer left an indelible mark on music, theater, and culture across three decades in the Big Apple. A celebration of his life and work, this warmly affectionate documentary includes archival material, stage performances, and interviews with friends and colleagues including Morgan Freeman, Stephen Colbert, Jane Curtin, Leonard Nimoy, and many others.

"Intellectually rewarding and deliciously retrospective." -The Forward

best friend, Elena (Kim Basinger), a cougar who taught Christian all about obedience and sadomasochistic sex. "He needs a submissive—in life as well as in the bedroom," she tartly informs skittish Ana. Complicating matters further, Ana's smarmy editor, Jack Hyde (Eric Johnson), loses his livelihood when Christian buys the publishing house, and Hyde is determined to wreak revenge. Adapted from E.L. James's bestselling novel with steamy Harlequin-esque dialogue, *Fifty Shades Darker* is ineptly directed by James Foley, featuring simulated, stylized sex scenes that are laughably ludicrous. Not recommended. (S. Granger)

Fist Fight ★★

Warner, 91 min., R, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$35.99, May 30

Richie Keen's campus comedy is a reworking of 1987's *Three O'Clock High*, only the battling characters are now warring teachers rather than high school students. Making the combatants older does not, of course, make the material any more mature. A typical contemporary R-rated comedy that confuses raunchiness for humor and nastiness for smarts, *Fist Fight* serves as a starring vehicle for nerdy comic Charlie Day, who plays Andy Campbell, a dedicated milquetoast English teacher at Roosevelt High. On the last day before summer break he falls afoul of Roy Strickland (Ice Cube), a mad-as-hell history teacher prone to violent outbursts. When Andy's maneuvering to save his job in the face of budgetary cutbacks winds up costing Roy his position, the latter challenges Andy to a fight in the parking lot after classes let out—a taunt that is of course caught on student smartphones and quickly goes viral, ensuring a big turnout for the beat-down. Andy, who also has to tend to the needs of his very pregnant wife and attend his daughter's talent show, tries to avoid the possibility of getting pulverized, but his various schemes go awry and a confrontation becomes inevitable—although naturally there is an implausibly happy ending. Some subplots—with Tracy Morgan as a clueless coach and Jillian Bell as an oversexed guidance counselor with the hots for a graduating senior—are particularly crude, but it is the basic idiocy of the central premise coupled with the clumsy choreography of the concluding brawl that ultimately send *Fist Fight* down for the count. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

For the Love of Spock ★★

FilmRise, 111 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95

Directed by Adam Nimoy, this documentary began as a collaborative project with his father Leonard to examine the phenomenon of Mr. Spock in and out of the *Star Trek* universe. When the elder Nimoy died in 2015,

Adam expanded the film to also embrace his father's life and career. Mr. Spock, the half-Vulcan, half-human science officer on the USS *Enterprise* in *Star Trek*, grew from being a pop culture figure into an international icon. Nimoy had been an actor for over a decade—appearing in bit parts and supporting roles in movies and on TV—when he took on the role written for him by Gene Roddenberry. Although Nimoy went on to enjoy a successful career in movies, TV, theater, and even as a director, he was forever identified with the iconic role of Spock. The film explores Nimoy's roots (he drew from his childhood growing up Jewish in Boston for Spock), life, career, and troubled relationship with his family, ultimately coming across as a loving portrait of the actor by his son. But it is most illuminating when exploring Nimoy's love-hate relationship with the character of Spock, which he finally embraced after reviving the role in a series of *Star Trek* movies. Featuring interviews with Nimoy's colleagues, friends, family, and fans (including renowned astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson), this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Fragments of Love

★★1/2

Strand, 100 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.99

Two people with different approaches to relationships fall in love in debut director Fernando Vallejo's erotic drama. Rodrigo (José Ángel Bichir), a frustrated composer, enters the orbit of Susana (Angelica Blandon), a sculptor, when he visits her fiancé's apartment to tune his piano. During the visit, he learns that she and Isaias (Alfredo De Quesada) are preparing to relocate to Shanghai. After asthmatic Rodrigo rescues Susana from an explosion, they fall into each other's arms both literally and figuratively. While unexplained terrorist attacks have Bogotá on edge, their tryst develops into an affair. Each time they meet, Susana tells Rodrigo a story about a different lover, which drives him crazy. Seriocomic flashbacks depict these encounters, including flings with a philosopher, an ornithologist, and a man studying for the priesthood. When Rodrigo complains to Carmen (Angélica Aragón), she tells him to stop asking Susana to talk about her past, but he can't seem to help himself. Carmen, who is older, treats Rodrigo like a son or nephew, but Vallejo never clarifies their connection, other than that she's the closest thing he has to a support system. Cumulatively, Susana's stories torture Rodrigo, who smokes and mopes, but they also turn him on, and in due time, he's composing again. Unfortunately, both characters become increasingly less



sympathetic as Susana cheats on Rodrigo and he turns his petulant child act up a few notches. Still, this adaptation of Héctor Abad Faciolince's 1998 novel *Fragmentos de Amor Furtivo* has its moments, making it a strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Get Out ★★1/2

Universal, 104 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, May 23

Giving a satirical jolt to what has been described as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* meets *The Stepford Wives*, actor Jordan Peele in his directing debut has created one of the most astute, critically acclaimed horror movies in recent years. As Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) packs to join his girlfriend, Rose Armitage (Allison Williams), for a weekend in the country to meet her parents, he hesitantly asks if she's told them that he's black. Chris's paranoid buddy (Lil Rel Howery) has warned him not to go, and viewers are already wary after witnessing a prologue in which a black pedestrian in suburbia is stalked and stuffed into the trunk of a car. But Rose quickly assures Chris that her parents, Missy and Dean (Catherine Keener, Bradley Whitford), will welcome him with open arms. Dean's a neurosurgeon, an Obama-admirer who says it's cool to be black, and Missy's an Earth Mother-type hypnotherapist, offering to help Chris stop smoking. Chris's uneasiness is amplified by the eerily ominous African-American housekeeper (Betty Gabriel) and gardener (Marcus Henderson) who cared for Rose's elderly grandparents and are "like family." Plus, Rose's pugnacious brother (Caleb Landry Jones) seems overly competitive. At a garden party, the elite guests' stereotypical veneer cracks, leading to bizarre behavior that impels Chris to try to escape. Having honed his skills on Comedy Central's *Key & Peele*, the director's subversive, surrealist *Get Out* depicts the soul-sucking danger posed by so-called liberals, making for a scathing commentary on racial tensions in America. Highly recommended. (S. Granger)



Gimme Danger ★★★

Sony, 109 min., R, DVD: \$30.99

Jim Jarmusch is possibly the perfect director to profile Iggy Pop and the Stooges. Two years after Jarmusch directed Iggy in his metaphysical Western *Dead Man*, he made a documentary about Neil Young (the film's composer). Now, he builds *Gimme Danger* around lucid, self-effacing recollections from Iggy, bolstered by archival material, band mate commentary, and cut-out animation. Iggy, who grew up in Detroit, was so enthusiastic about drumming that his parents gave him their bedroom for his practice sessions.





LOVESONG

Starring Riley Keough (*Mad Max: Fury Road*)
& **Jena Malone** (*The Hunger Games*)

This delicate exploration of female friendship and unspoken love, Sarah embarks on a road trip with her young daughter and best friend. The dynamic between them intensifies but circumstances force them apart.

Street Date: **May 16, 2017** | DVD \$27.99

DVD # 3618-2 | UPC 7 12267 36182 3

84 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated

STAYING VERTICAL

Visceral...a dreamy fairy tale! -NPR

The follow-up to visionary filmmaker Alain Guillaudie's *Stranger by the Lake*, the "delightfully adventurous" (*Film Comment*) *STAYING VERTICAL* follows filmmaker Leo who unexpectedly becomes a father and experiences a series of unusual encounters, while simultaneously struggling to find inspiration for his next film, Leo will do whatever it takes to stay standing.

Street date: **May 30, 2017** | SRP: \$27.99

DVD # 3618-2 | UPC: 7 12267 36182 5

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



SUNTAN

Captures the explosive aura of youth...breathtaking! -Variety

When Kostis meets the beautiful and flirty Anna, he falls hard for her and goes out of his way to impress her. What starts as a rediscovery of his lost youth slowly turns into an obsession. *SUNTAN* celebrates the beauty and strength of the youthful body, while simultaneously embracing its inevitable decay.

Street Date: **June 13, 2017** | SRP: \$27.99

DVD # 3622-2 | UPC 7 12267 36222 6

104 Minutes - Color - Widescreen - Not Rated
In Greek with English subtitles

HELI

**WINNER! Best Director Prize
Cannes Film Festival**

When Heli's 12-year-old sister inadvertently involves him in Mexico's brutal drug war, Heli must do everything it takes to protect his family. As he descends further into inescapable and nightmarish corruption and violence, it threatens to tear his life apart.

Street date: **June 27, 2017** | SRP: \$24.99 / \$29.99

DVD # 3708-2 | UPC: 7 12267 37082 5

BD # 3708-3 | UPC: 7 12267 37082 2

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



In his teens, he played in garage bands before moving to Chicago to soak up the blues scene and deciding that he would rather sing than drum. Back in Detroit, he formed the Stooges with Dave Alexander and Ron and Scott Asheton (James Williamson would later replace Alexander). While their friends in the MC5 embraced left-wing politics, the Stooges presented a nihilistic image. After signing to Elektra, they recorded a debut in New York and a follow-up in L.A., and that's when drugs entered the picture. By 1972, Elektra had had enough, so Iggy went home, got clean, and flew to London to make *Raw Power* with David Bowie. The rest of the band came later, but the album was no more successful than the others. As Iggy puts it, "We were stumbling and bumbling," so they went their separate ways, working on other projects and inspiring other bands. Three decades later, they re-formed with Mike Watt on bass, ending this story on a high note. *Gimme Danger* was clearly made with love, and it shows. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Golden Kingdom ★★★

Alive Mind, 103 min., in Burmese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99



American journeyman director Brian Perkins helms this quiet, mostly realist film about four Myanmar child monks-in-training, adding occasional supernatural and spiritual touches. Viewers are given a fly-on-the-wall perspective on the daily prayer routines of these four young aspiring Buddhist monks and their rigidly ascetic existences—all steadfastly overseen by their patient master, the head abbot (U Zaw Ti Ka) of the monastery. Slowly but surely, the film builds up to more dramatic notes: when the head monk has to leave the youngsters for a few days to attend to urgent business in the nearest town, the green pre-adolescent monks must fend for themselves until their master returns. And when the sheltered children finally emerge from their monastery in search of food, they get a phantasmagoric glimpse of Myanmar's recent reality as they are confronted with the ugly truth of the political conflicts that have been raging on and off ever since Burmese independence was declared in the late 1940s. The film's strength lies in its visual elements, with the lush rural Myanmar backdrop stunningly juxtaposed against the monks' mostly hushed interior existence. A rewarding watch for patient audiences, this is recommended. (M. Sandlin)

The Great & The Small ★★

Breaking Glass, 104 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

A classic case of creative overreach, writer-director Dusty Bias approaches his overstuffed film as if the opportunity to work may never arise again—so why not include

every story gadget and whim one could think of? The clunky result is unfortunate, because buried in here is an original tale about two strangers with a shared tragedy. Scott (Nick Fink) is a young vagrant getting by through squatting in foreclosed homes and eating scraps and garbage. He's only vaguely human: not much of a talker, Scott expresses himself through drawing on walls, and he drops by the home of an ex-girlfriend, Nessa (Louisa Krause), now and then for sex if she's in the mood. But she usually isn't, and this is where things begin to get unnecessarily complicated. Nessa has a baby fathered by another ex, but she also had a baby with Scott whom she gave up for adoption (because Scott couldn't handle the responsibility). That baby was taken in by Margaret (Melanie Lynskey), but the child died after a few years, leading to the breakup of Margaret's marriage. Meanwhile, Scott lands a job working for a moving company whose boss (Ritchie Coster)—a caricature of every Guy Ritchie Brit-gangster type imaginable—is secretly running a fencing operation. And an Alabama police detective (Ann Dowd)—a sideways eccentric who seems to have stepped out of a bad Coen brothers knockoff thriller-comedy—is on Scott's trail, although why is unclear. If Bias had thrown out 80% of this nonsense, the remainder—a healing friendship between Scott and Margaret that redeems each—would have been well worth exploring. Not a necessary purchase. (T. Keogh)

The Great Wall ★★

Universal, 103 min., in English & Mandarin w/English subtitles, PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, May 23



Filmed entirely in China, this action-adventure-fantasy epic was directed by Zhang Yimou (*Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers*), who also orchestrated the opening and closing ceremonies of Beijing's 2008 Summer Olympic Games. According to a 12th-century legend, European mercenary William Garin (Matt Damon) and his sidekick Tovar (Pedro Pascal) went searching in the Gobi Desert for "black powder" (gunpowder) that would change the future of war. When they're taken prisoner by the Nameless Order, headed by General Shao (Zhang Hanyu), strategist Wang (Andy Lau), and Commander Lin (Jing Tian), they discover that the Great Wall was not erected to protect against foreign invaders, but to serve as a fortress against hordes of ravenous, dinosaur-like creatures—the mythical Tao Tei—which attack every 60 years. The Industrial Light & Magic-created pageantry here is awesome: the massive formations of

the elite military garrison are color-coded, with crimson archers wielding massive crossbows, and a bright blue Crane Corps of spear-toting, female aerialists, secured by cables, bungee-jumping down the wall to stab the reptiles. Lurking within the wall is another Western captive, Ballard (Willem Dafoe), who helps Tovar plan an escape. Garin will eventually acknowledge the Chinese army's altruism with its principled culture of "trust," celebrating the cohesive unit over capitalism and individuality. Unfortunately, while visually captivating, the film has a very straightforward plot featuring little or no character development and the dialogue is bizarrely peppered with contemporary phrases. Optional. (S. Granger)

Hidden Figures ★★★★★

Fox, 127 min., PG, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



During the early 1960s, several African-American women worked for NASA, providing the mathematical data needed to launch the nation's first successful space mission. But every day—in a myriad of ways—their integrity and perseverance were challenged by the hostile racism and inherent sexism of the period. Graduating from college *summa cum laude* at the age of 18, Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson) was perhaps the most brilliant mathematician of her time. When the Space Task Group's manager (Kevin Costner) finally admitted Katherine into the elite rocket scientists' inner sanctum, she calculated trajectories for John Glenn's Earth orbit in 1962 and subsequent missions. But she suffered numerous humiliations, including not being allowed to use the bathroom facilities in the building in which she worked, and being assigned an often-empty "colored coffee" thermos. Even Katherine's admiring husband-to-be (Mahershala Ali) could not comprehend her aptitude for analytical geometry. Her colleagues (Octavia Spencer, Janelle Monáe) were condescendingly referred to as "colored computers" and paid considerably lower wages. Based on Margot Lee Shetterly's 2016 nonfiction book, this multi-Oscar-nominated film (including Best Picture) directed by Theodore Melfi is highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (S. Granger)

I Am Michael ★★1/2

Passion River, 100 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



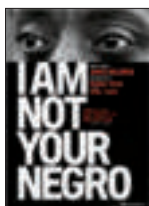
An unusual "coming out" tale, filmmaker Justin Kelly's drama tells the real-life story of Michael Glatze, a gay activist who became a Christian preacher and subsequently described homosexuality as an immoral abnormality that should be overcome—a view that puzzled

and antagonized many of his former friends, who were equally surprised by his decision to marry a girl he met while studying theology. *I Am Michael* tries to present Glatze's story in a balanced fashion, aided by the earnest performance of James Franco as Michael and equally committed turns by Zachary Quinto as Bennett, his former partner, and Emma Roberts as Rebekah, who Glatze falls in love with. It does not ignore aspects of Glatze's conversion that might raise eyebrows—for example, the medical problems (diagnosed as panic attacks) that led him to religion, or an uncomfortable stay at a Buddhist retreat where he was eventually asked to leave. But it is never cynical in dramatizing Glatze's transformation, and it refreshingly treats religious belief seriously rather than dismissing it as misguided. Unfortunately, Kelly's approach also often comes across as excessively cautious, making for a rather staid film. Still, *I Am Michael* deserves credit for its sympathetic portrait of a complex character. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

I Am Not Your Negro

★★★★1/2

Magnolia, 94 min., PG-13, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99, May 2



Although skirting over many details of James Baldwin's life, Raoul Peck's documentary serves up an engrossing intellectual biography of the great African-American writer that is set within a broader context of the black experience in America. The centerpiece is a highly personal prospectus that Baldwin wrote for a proposed book on Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who were all assassinated during the tumultuous 1960s. Excerpts read by Samuel L. Jackson detail Baldwin's personal connection to each man, but they also range widely, offering observations about the treatment that blacks endured from early slavery up through the '80s. Peck accompanies the words with beautifully-chosen collages of archival footage, as well as clips from movies, from *King Kong* to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. He also periodically intercuts excerpts from the writer's appearances on TV talk shows, in which Baldwin challenges liberal voices that might appear supportive but come across as patronizing. Peck emphasizes the continuing relevance of Baldwin's stinging criticism concerning America's racial attitudes by adding visual references to Trayvon Martin and Ferguson, MO. *I Am Not Your Negro* makes it clear that Baldwin's brilliant critiques are not a thing of the past, but a continuing stain on the country's moral character. Passionate yet incisive, moving yet clear-sighted, this impressionistic documentary captures how Baldwin forced fellow Americans to confront racism in society, while also showing how deeply racism impacted his own personal ex-

periences. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Ixcanul ★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 91 min., in Spanish & Kaqchikel w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.99



The first film from Guatemala to be submitted in the Best Foreign Language Film category of the Academy Awards, *Ixcanul* serves up a mix of documentary realism and fable-like drama set in isolated mountains. At the base of a dormant volcano, inhabitants of an impoverished Mayan village eke out a living harvesting coffee beans at a nearby plantation and farming inhospitable fields hewn out of the jungle. The parents of Maria (María Mercedes Coroy)—a beautiful, hard-working young woman—have arranged a marriage with the plantation foreman, but she has made her own plans to run off to America with a cocky worker her own age who talks big and drinks his wages away at the local dive bar. She seduces him to seal the deal, which has consequences that change everything for her. The feature debut of filmmaker Jayro Bustamante, this is a powerful portrait of traditional Mayan culture, where peasants live in huts without electricity or running water and speak their native Kaqchikel, unable to communicate with the Spanish speakers from the nearby city without an interpreter. The ordeal of Maria and her parents is harrowing and Bustamante presents it without sentiment or melodramatic flourish, focusing on their strength as he shows their plight in this primal, powerful, and rare portrait of a hidden culture. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Jim ★★★1/2

FilmRise, 113 min., not rated, DVD: \$31, Blu-ray: \$37



A sad, painful, yet also inspiring portrait of one man's enormous courage in the face of monstrousness, filmmaker Brian Oakes's HBO-aired documentary *Jim* chronicles the events that led to the murder of American journalist James Foley, who was beheaded by ISIS in 2014. This film features a mix of wartime footage shot by or featuring Foley, along with interviews of his parents, siblings, colleagues, and former captives who were jailed with him in the months prior to his death. The aggregate vision of Foley that emerges from all of these shared perspectives is that of a young man too restless for the suburban life embraced by his family, compelled instead to seek out the frontlines of war-ravaged countries and report on the suffering. Against his family's wishes, Foley became a "combat journalist," one of a breed of freelancers writing about and shooting vid-

eo in Iraq (embedded with soldiers), and then on his own during Libya's descent into chaos following the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi. Foley was kidnapped by a Libyan militia and held for a period before returning to the U.S. After that, his family and friends were astonished when he chose to go to Syria just as Bashar al-Assad began to bomb his own people. Heartbreaking images from some of those atrocities are seen, accompanied by accounts of Foley's efforts to help people while reporting about the carnage. Foley's lengthy imprisonment, torture, and beheading by ISIS are also detailed (images of the gruesome execution are not shown here), and the film presents disturbing evidence that U.S. official policy of not negotiating with terrorists (unlike other nations that were able to get captives released) was short-sighted and inhumane. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)

Julieta ★★★

Sony, 99 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray: \$30.99



Celebrated writer-director Pedro Almodóvar serves up an opulently crafted soap opera in this adaptation of several stories by Alice Munro, transferring the American setting to Spain. The title character (Emma Suárez) is initially introduced as a woman in late middle age about to leave Madrid and move to Portugal with her boyfriend. But her plan is derailed after a chance encounter with Bea, a young woman who was once her daughter Antía's best friend. Bea tells her that she has recently seen Antía, who went missing years earlier after a religious retreat. So Julieta decides to remain in the city in hopes of tracking Antía down, and she recalls, during a lengthy flashback (in which she is now played by Adriana Ugarte), her meeting with her daughter's fisherman father during an eventful train ride, their marriage after the death of his ill wife, his accidental drowning, and the circumstances of Antía's still-unexplained disappearance. The final act returns to the present and Julieta's search for closure. Almodóvar tells this tale with his customary visual flair, and the performances of Suárez and Ugarte mesh nicely, even if the actresses do not especially resemble one another. While not quite as distinctive as some of the director's earlier films, this one is still a satisfying addition to an impressive oeuvre. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Just a Sigh ★★★

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

Director Jérôme Bonnell's French feature film can't help but bring to mind David Lean's 1945 classic *Brief Encounter*. But its Gallic take on two strangers drawn to one another against a backdrop of trains, who find a temporary oasis of love in a world of anguish,

has some unusual shadings. Emmanuelle Devos stars as Alix, a 43-year-old actress appearing in an Ibsen stage production in Calais. Not yet paid for her work, Alix has to hustle back home to Paris for an audition, hoping to get support (and maybe cash) from her live-in lover, a documentary filmmaker who is off on some adventure. But the two don't connect, Alix has lost her phone charger, she has no funds (save for train fare and coffee), and her credit card is being denied. One soon gets the idea that this is typical of Alix's life, where talent and artistic inspiration outweigh practical living. But then she and Douglas (Gabriel Byrne), a mystery man in his 60s, exchange looks on a train, and Alix is soon lost in the intrigue of his sad eyes and vulnerable if wary bearing. Thus begins a journey for two people who know nothing about one another, yet see what they need to see at this moment in their lives—possibilities. The two stars bring a sad, experienced soulfulness to their grownup characters, giving *Just a Sigh* a welcome sense of poignancy in our youth-obsessed film culture. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



Justice League Dark

★★★

Warner, 76 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$24.99

While the name suggests an evil version of the superhero team made up of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and others, *Justice League Dark* is actually a comic book series featuring an alternative team of characters whose powers are more supernatural than super. Filmmaker Jay Oliva's animated movie version re-imagines the team's origin. When citizens start seeing demons in the streets, Batman (voiced by Jason O'Mara) seeks out help from stage magician Zatanna and freelance supernatural investigator John Constantine (Matt Ryan, reprising his role from the live-action TV series). They pull together a team that includes Deadman (a spirit who can inhabit living bodies), Etrigan the Demon (a genuine demon from Hell who speaks in rhyme), Black Orchid (a shapeshifter), and Swamp Thing (an elemental plant creature), who help the original Justice League defeat Destiny, a villain who plans to use the magical Dreamstone to take over the world. This is one of the darkest animated films from the DCU Animated Original Movie series, with a corresponding visual palette, magical battles with morphing imagery, and some gruesome violence. It puts relatively obscure characters in the lead, with Constantine taking charge from Batman (who is out of his depth in the supernatural world). Overall, it's a well-made entry with an engaging story and an intriguing



ing cast, likely to appeal to superhero comics fans. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Lion ★★★★★

Anchor Bay, 118 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$34.99

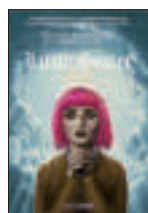
After 5-year-old Saroo (Sunny Pawar) is accidentally abandoned in a railroad station, he gets on a train and falls asleep, travelling thousands of miles across India, far away from his family. Left to fend for himself as an orphan on the streets of Calcutta, Saroo embarks on the adventure of a lifetime—one that takes him all the way to Australia, where he's adopted by a loving couple (Nicole Kidman, David Wenham). Some 25 years later, guided only by fractured, fragmented memories and steadfast determination, adult Saroo (Dev Patel) discovers Google Earth, which leads him back to his long-lost village and a birth family he barely remembers. Based on Saroo Brierley's 2014 memoir *A Long Way Home*, this multi-Oscar-nominated film is sensitively directed by Garth Davis, telling a spiritually uplifting story that doesn't succumb to sentimentality. Diminutive Pawar exudes charismatic vulnerability, while Patel's guilt-conflicted resolve is raw, strong, and powerful. Rooney Mara costars as Saroo's supportive girlfriend. The film's secondary theme revolves around the unconditional love of an adoptive parent—and the two mother-figures here are the pillars that support this story about searching for family and identity. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (S. Granger)



Little Sister ★★

Kino Lorber, 91 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95

Little Sister is one of the many recent indie productions that attempts to set itself apart from the mainstream by letting overplayed quirkiness masquerade as humor. A subdued hipster-turned-nun, Colleen (Addison Timlin) moves from Brooklyn to Asheville, NC, to please her mentally disturbed mother (played by a wizened Ally Sheedy), trying to leave her goth-girl past behind to make a new life as a servant of the Lord without being driven to the brink of insanity by her hypercritical mother and her annoying dork of a father. Colleen's brother Jacob (Keith Poulson) is a creepily exploited character—an Iraq war veteran who was badly burned in an explosion and is presented as sort of a figure of fun, which is indicative of the tin-eared humor in this film set in 2008, which also banks on crude terrorism and 9/11 jokes and silly religious humor to carry the flat dialogue. Director-screenwriter Zach Clark unsuccessfully tries to mine family dysfunction for laughs, but portraying Colleen's parents as bumbling



passive-aggressive misfits doesn't really add up to much more than predictable teen comedy swipes at parental authority. And Timlin's turn as Colleen is a wasted opportunity—instead of investing the character with necessary empathetic human dimension, she somnambulates uncomfortably through the movie as if nursing a particularly acute migraine headache. Optional. (M. Sandlin)

Live by Night ★★

Warner, 129 min., R, DVD: \$28.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98

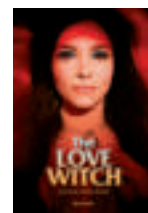
Adapted from Dennis Lehane's 2012 Edgar Award-winning crime novel, director-star Ben Affleck's drama finds disillusioned WWI vet Joe Coughlin (Affleck) returning home to Prohibition-era Boston, vowing never to take orders from anyone again. Resisting all authority, he becomes a thief and outlaw, falling in love with Emma (Sienna Miller), the sassy, selfish mistress of an Irish gangster (Robert Glenister). Badly beaten and believing that Emma is dead, Joe allies himself with the boss (Remo Gironi) of the rival Italian Mafia, much to the chagrin of his law-abiding dad (Brendan Gleeson), a bigwig with the Boston police, who warns, "What you put out into the world will always come back to haunt you, but never how you predict." When Joe is dispatched to run Florida's rum-smuggling racket, he marries a black Cuban émigré (Zoe Saldana), becoming a target of the Ku Klux Klan leader (Matthew Maher), who is the brother-in-law of the pious, pragmatic sheriff (Chris Cooper). Meanwhile, the sheriff's aspiring starlet daughter (Elle Fanning) takes off on an ill-fated trip to Hollywood, eventually becoming a Bible-thumping evangelist. *Live by Night* is weighed down by melodramatic subplots and extraneous characters, consistently choosing clichéd style over narrative substance. Optional. (S. Granger)



The Love Witch ★★1/2

Oscilloscope, 120 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

This highly stylized occult schlock-fest has its roots somewhere in late 1990s Charles Busch vintage ironic horror-comedy (think: *Psycho Beach Party*), not to mention Roger Corman's 1960 low-budget B-movie fare. The title character, Elaine (Samantha Robinson), is a stunningly gorgeous wiccan who seems to live in an Austin Powers fantasy land of retro visuals. She's a lovestruck necromancer with potent potions and lethal spells that she uses on male victims to try and control their worst instincts once she's seduced them. But her sex magic is simply too much for her unworthy victims. Writer-director Anna Biller weaves in some heady feminist criticism that unfortunately





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clashes badly with the dominant poker-faced ironic humor. The costumes are well-chosen and the sets are imaginatively conceived, but *The Love Witch* seems cursed by an inability to laugh at its own cheesy grindhouse-cinema conceits. A strong optional purchase. (M. Sandlin)

Lovesong ★★★

Strand, 85 min., not rated, DVD: \$27.99, May 16

Longing looks never seemed more painful than in *Lovesong*, an unusual relationship drama about two women whose deep yearning for one another is inhibited not so much by external pressures as by their own inability to say and do what is in their hearts. Actresses Riley Keough and Jena Malone are deeply effective as old friends whose lives intersect a second time when Sarah (Keough) senses that her marriage is evaporating, leaving her to raise a young daughter alone. Nights of nostalgia with Mindy (Malone) lead to looks, embraces, and kisses, and beyond—to the sense of a palpable, enduring bond between the two that has always been there and always will be. But a failure to acknowledge the truth and take their relationship to the next level makes it too easy for Sarah and Mindy to separate, which is what happens until they meet again three years later on the eve of Mindy's half-hearted wedding. Filmmaker So Yong Kim again places the two characters in scenes that will easily change the course of their lives if the right words are spoken. Also featuring a brief appearance by Rosanna Arquette as Mindy's mother, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)



Marinoni: The Fire in the Frame ★★★

First Run, 87 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95

Filmmaker Tony Girardin spent years trying to get famed cyclist and bicycle frame-making master Giuseppe Marinoni to be the subject of a documentary, only to find that once permission was granted, the 75-year-old, deeply suspicious Marinoni thought the director was merely trying to steal his bike-building secrets. Fortunately, Marinoni's cranky paranoia softens, and Girardin is able to dig into the interesting past of this man who in his youth was a champion cyclist in his native Italy before immigrating to Canada and resuming competition. After becoming a legend in the sport, Marinoni opened a workshop near Montreal, where his custom-made frames are built and remain highly prized by enthusiasts. But the narrative hook of this film is Marinoni's determination to break one more record in his age category: for covering the most ground in one hour on a bike, a trial that will



take place in Marinoni's Italian hometown. *Marinoni* also tells the moving, related story of Jocelyn Lovell (1950-2016), another cycling champion who was hit by a truck and left a quadriplegic. Lovell was a longtime friend of Marinoni, and it is Lovell's old bike—which Marinoni built for him years before—that the old lion rides during his effort to break the record. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

Mifune: The Last Samurai ★★★1/2

Strand, 80 min., in Japanese & English w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99

"Icon" is a word tossed around all too easily in popular culture. But it is the only meaningful word that fits the outsize impact that legendary Japanese actor Toshirō Mifune (1920-1997) had both on world cinema and the imaginations of cinephiles and budding directors everywhere. Despite starring in 170 movies (including *The Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo*), Mifune said little in public about his work and legacy. Filmmaker Steven Okazaki's tribute combines generous film clips from Mifune classics with interviews of the leading man's surviving collaborators, among them a stuntman and fight choreographer whom Mifune "killed" on camera over 100 times. Several of Mifune's frequent costars—including Yoko Tsukasa and Kyoko Kagawa, actresses famous in their own right—provide the most personal details here, testifying to Mifune's iconoclastic mix of tightlipped gruffness and broadly generous character. Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese also offer insightful appraisals of what made Mifune both a galvanic presence and transcendent, inimitable star. But the soul of *The Last Samurai* lies in its depiction of Mifune's place in Japan's homegrown cinematic culture, where the nation's earliest experiences with silent movies proved a breeding ground for samurai tales. Following World War II, a defeated Japan was in search of new cultural directions, and Mifune's rebellious streak and onscreen intensity turned out to be a perfect complement to filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's disruptive style in over a dozen films. Their pairing over two decades made for one of the most rewarding director-actor partnerships in history, which is examined here in depth by Okazaki, who is helped immeasurably by recollections from both Mifune's and Kurosawa's middle-aged sons. Highly recommended. (T. Keogh)



Miss Hokusai ★★★

Universal, 90 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, PG-13, DVD: \$26.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99

The title character is actually an artist from early 19th-century Japan by the



name of O-Ei Katsushika, a young woman who trained under her legendary painter father, Hokusai Katsushika. Based on the biographic manga *Sarusuberi* by Hinako Sugiura, filmmaker Keiichi Hara's animated feature, presented in the classic hand-drawn style, has an episodic quality, serving up memories and vignettes illustrating the kind of man Hokusai was—a dedicated and brilliant artist but neglectful and emotionally distant father—as seen through his daughter's eyes. But it is also the story of this daughter who works in the shadow of her father and even paints commissions that are sold under his name. Scenes of their daily life in Japan, circa 1814, are interspersed with sequences of fantasy and wonder—dreams, stories, and magical moments that may or may not be all in the creative imagination of the characters. And the gentle, serene direction evokes the style of Hokusai's artwork (Hokusai and O-Ei also painted erotica and while there are no explicit images, the film does suggest and discuss the sexuality of their work). Although ostensibly a biographical drama, *Miss Hokusai* actually focuses on a short period of time, exploring the artistic process and creative imagination of its characters. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Mountain ★★★

First Run, 81 min., in Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.95

Yaelle Kayam's debut feature is a nuanced character study centering on Zvia (Shani Klein), an Orthodox Jewish woman who lives with her husband Reuven (Avshalom Pollak) and their four children at the edge of a huge, crowded cemetery on the slope of Jerusalem's Mount of Olives. Reuven, a Yeshiva teacher who is mostly away at work, has grown increasingly distant from his wife even when he is home, and the children—especially the oldest daughter—are becoming restive as well. Starved for supportive human interaction, Zvia converses with the graveyard's sympathetic Palestinian caretaker, and even makes contact with the worldly souls—prostitutes, pimps, and drug-dealers—who frequent the cemetery as a base of operations (she even goes so far as to bring them food). Her yearnings are also mirrored in her fascination with the poetry of a woman buried there, which she pores over as she sits by the latter's tombstone. *Mountain* does not pretend to fully explain Zvia's personality or resolve her issues, but it offers a commendably subtle glimpse into the psyche of a woman straining to balance the demands of her religious beliefs with her human needs. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Mr. Pig ★★★

First Run, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99

In what could be considered yet another

variation on John Steinbeck's classic *Travels With Charley*—here substituting a prize pig for a dutiful dog—director Diego Luna's third feature is an understated road movie that is reminiscent of early 1970s itinerant-themed low-life dramas.



Here, a grizzled Danny Glover stars as fading septuagenarian pig farmer Ambrose, who decides to embark on one last alcohol-fueled, for-the-hell-of-it road trip across the Mexican border to visit old friends after the bank decides to coldly repossess his SoCal hog farm. Problem is, his daughter (Maya Rudolph) only finds out about her father's ill-advised trip after it's too late to stop him. Meanwhile, the heavy-drinking (and as we soon learn, deathly ill) Ambrose's last ambition is to sell off his best hog so his daughter will have something like an inheritance. By all rights, Glover's pitch-perfect performance should have catapulted *Mr. Pig* out of the trough of 2016's indie-film also-rans. But Luna's platitude-laced script can't quite resist a tendency towards easy sentimentalizing, which detracts from the otherwise respectably gritty performances by Rudolph and Glover. An entertaining oddball film with fine acting, this is recommended. (M. Sandlin)

Passengers ★★

Sony, 116 min., PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99



Passengers features a terrific sci-fi premise: two passengers on a 120-year journey on the immense, ultra-luxurious spaceship *Avalon* awake from their hibernation pods 90 years too early. Along with 5,000 fellow travelers and 258 crew, they're headed for a distant colony called Homestead II, which offers a promised land alternative to "overpopulated, overpriced, and overrated Earth." After a damaging asteroid strike, Jim Preston (Chris Pratt) emerges from cryogenic sleep, but soon realizes that he's the only one awake—with just a genial android bartender (Michael Sheen) for company. Jim is a mechanical engineer, so he spends a full year trying to remedy the situation—to no avail. Almost suicidal with loneliness, Jim finds another awakened passenger, a beautiful New York writer, Aurora Lane (Jennifer Lawrence). Naturally, a romantic relationship develops but one with turns and twists. Helmed by Norwegian director Morten Tyldum, *Passengers* tackles profound moral and philosophical dilemmas in a provocative, character-driven story that unfortunately disappoints during the final act, which feels like it was adjusted by a focus group that demanded some spectacular action/thriller sequences. So, sadly, the compelling castaway concept is ultimately squandered. Optional. (S. Granger)

Puppylove ★★★

Film Movement, 85 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.95



A coming-of-age tale told in faux *cinéma vérité* style, Delphine Lehericq's *Puppylove* centers on Diane (Solene Rigot), a 14-year-old living in a provincial town with her single father Christian (Vincent Perez) and little brother. She is nervously inching toward sexual experimentation, secretly watching adult movies on TV (the story is set before the Internet), masturbating while bathing, and even climbing into bed with an equally nervous classmate, although they do not progress beyond a bit of snuggling. All of that changes when neighbor Julia (Audrey Bastien) moves in. Far more experienced and reckless than timid Diane, Julia enjoys nightclubs and one-night stands with older guys, introducing Diane to her wild lifestyle. The parents seem oblivious: Julia's father is abusive, and Christian is depicted as a hopeless man-child, all too ready to revert to frat-boy foolishness (at one point, Julia attempts to seduce him, and his flustered response proves his immaturity). A cautionary tale buoyed by the performance of young Rigot, who conveys a perfect mixture of wide-eyed naiveté and teen angst, this is a familiar story, but edgier and more provocative than usual. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Resistance ★★1/2

Film Movement, 92 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



Director Amit Gupta's alternative-history film, based on Owen Sheers's titular 2007 novel, is set in a 1944 where the D-Day invasion has failed and the German army is engaged in the conquest of Great Britain. In a valley in Wales, most of the men have gone into hiding to form an underground resistance movement while their wives remain behind. A German squadron arrives to establish control, but the commanding officer (Tom Wlaschiha) has become disillusioned after witnessing so much carnage, and he suggests that the women accept the help of his men on their farms as winter weather arrives. He is also attracted to Sarah (Andrea Riseborough), who doesn't know whether her absent husband is alive or dead, and she in turn is drawn to the German. Gupta clearly wants to convey the realities of occupation, along with the tension between remaining loyal to one's country and inching toward collaboration. Unfortunately, however, the film is slow and enervated, with both stars delivering performances that are so understated they almost evaporate. *Resistance* offers some lovely location shooting—which is beautifully

photographed—but its dramatic dreariness ultimately undermines an intriguing premise. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Rings ★1/2

Paramount, 102 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, May 2



In the era of DVD, Blu-ray, and streaming video formats, it would seem rather foolhardy to revive a horror series based on an outmoded technology—the VCR. Director F. Javier Gutiérrez returns to the *Ring* franchise, last heard from in 2005, built around the notion that a cursed VHS tape will doom viewers to die in a week (unless they are able to get someone else to take on the curse by watching it). Here a new "outbreak" is traced to a professor named Gabriel (Johnny Galecki), who is interested in vintage devices and finds a copy of the dreaded tape lodged in a video recorder that he buys at a flea market. Believing it can reveal truths about the afterlife, Gabriel enlists his unsuspecting students in a kind of pyramid scheme, inducing them to watch the tape and then pass it on. One is Holt (Alex Roe), whose girlfriend Julia (Matilda Lutz) intervenes and together they try to uncover the tape's origin and end its reign of terror. That quest requires a visit to a spooky small town, where a blind guy (Vincent D'Onofrio) guards the cemetery, kicking off an investigation that reveals secrets about child abuse, hidden skeletons, mysterious symbols in braille, and revenge and reincarnation, wrapping up with a twist that pushes the concept into the digital age. Not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story ★★

Disney, 133 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, George Lucas launched a visionary series built around space-age mythology, utilizing droids, alien entities, and aerial dogfights as background for a compelling human drama that evolved over the course of six films, creating a quasi-mystical epic. In 2012, Disney bought Lucasfilm for \$4.06 billion, with plans for a series of spin-offs that begin with this prequel (set between *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* and *Star Wars Episode IV—A New Hope*) from filmmaker Gareth Edwards, with the iconic stars missing and much of the spirit lost, which only leaves a lot more wars. After her backstory is established, scrappy, resourceful Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones) joins the Alliance, working with Intelligence Officer Cassian Andor (Diego Luna) and a ragtag group of freedom fighters, to steal plans for Darth Vader's Death Star, an immense galactic

weapon that was designed by Jyn's father (Mads Mikkelsen). Combat prevails as a multitude of characters are all-too-briefly introduced, including Saw Gerrera (Forest Whitaker), Bail Organa (Jimmy Smits), and a blind ninja (Hong Kong action star Donnie Yen), plus villainous Imperial overlord Orson Krennic (Ben Mendelsohn). James Earl Jones once again voices Darth Vader, and Cassian Andor's black metallic robot, K-2SO (voiced by Alan Tudyk), provides caustic comic relief. But this is mostly like a big-screen video game with lots of Stormtroopers. Optional. (S. Granger)

The Salesman ★★★★★

Sony, 124 min., in Persian w/ English subtitles, PG-13, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99, May 2

This year's Oscar winner for Best Foreign Language Film, Asghar Farhadi's (who also won for 2011's *A Separation*) marital drama centers on Emad (Shahab Hosseini) and Rana Etesami (Taraneh Alidoosti), who are forced to evacuate their crumbling Tehran apartment and move into a more dilapidated abode that was previously occupied by a single woman with a young child. The clutter left behind by the former tenant gives subtle clues as to the promiscuous life that she led. Emad and Rana are actors appearing in an amateur theater company's production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. But there are problems translating the blunt sexuality of this American classic for an Iranian audience, particularly due to local censors. One day, when Emad is out, the doorbell rings, and thinking it's her husband, Rana unlocks the front door and takes a shower. But it turns out to be a stranger who brutally assaults her and flees, leaving his keys and his minivan outside. Rana did not see her attacker (nor do viewers). When Emad suggests going to the police, emotionally devastated Rana refuses, knowing that she would have to justify why she left the door open and fearing that her reputation would suffer. Rana feels shamed, guilty, and afraid to be alone, while enraged Emad is determined to track down the intruder and wreak revenge. Farhadi builds a suspenseful thriller that is haunted by themes of inadequacy, intimacy, and respect. Offering an engrossing, empathetic commentary on contemporary Iranian society, this is highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (S. Granger)



Seasons ★★★★★

Music Box, 96 min., in French w/English subtitles, PG, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.99

A bit like *Planet Earth* on quaaludes, filmmakers Jacques Perrin and Jacques Cluzaud's *Seasons* is a very sparsely narrated documentary shot in Eu-



rope's beautiful green forests. The central conceit here is to imagine seeing these forests at end of the last Ice Age, after which a cycle of seasons emerges with burgeoning flora, fauna, and—eventually—humans, the latter ultimately upsetting the natural balance and forcing larger animals (in particular) to abandon the thinning forests for higher ground in the mountains. This “story” is told in mere snippets of overlaid narration as the often leisurely camera captures the birth of a deer, baby ducks marching towards water, and squirrels playing, among other sights. These scenes are punctuated by occasional bursts of extraordinarily dramatic sequences, including one in which wolves chase a boar (filmed with incredible tracking shots). While the environmental live-in-harmony message is so lightly presented as to feel almost ephemeral, the gorgeous visuals make this nature documentary well worth the watch. Recommended. (R. Pitman)

Silence ★★1/2

Paramount, 160 min., R, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Director/co-writer Martin Scorsese adapts Shusaku Endo's 1966 historical novel about two Jesuit priests who travel from Portugal to Japan to find their mentor, a man who is rumored to have renounced his religion under torture. In 17th-century Buddhist Japan, Catholicism has been outlawed, and believers are persecuted, but fervent Father Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Father Garape (Adam Driver) are determined to track down Father Ferreira (Liam Neeson). While searching, they minister to villagers who risk their lives to hide them from the wily Inquisitor (Issey Ogata), who gives suspected Christians the opportunity to recant by stepping on an image of Jesus or the Virgin Mary. If they refuse, he mercilessly torments and tortures them in a myriad of graphically gruesome ways, including hot-water scalding, burning on a pyre, drowning on a crucifix in the rising tide, or slowly bleeding to death while hanging upside down over a pit. Betrayal is a recurring theme here, as the priests' guide Kichijiro (Yosuke Kubozuka) repeatedly deceives them, yet begs forgiveness, promising to be stronger next time. The title refers to Rodrigues's prayers for divine guidance—and the silence that ensues. Visually magnificent (an Oscar nominee for its cinematography), *Silence* is ultimately more of an intellectual exercise than an emotionally engaging film—a dour depiction of an agonized, seemingly endless pilgrimage. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)



Sing ★★★★★

Universal, 108 min., PG, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98

The old “let's put on a show” adage is at the

center of filmmaker Garth Jennings's Oscar-nominated animated jukebox musical, which features a playlist that adults will enjoy and enough cheerily colorful critter shenanigans to keep kids happy. Matthew McConaughey voices Buster Moon, a koala bear who runs a music hall where he serves as an enthusiastic MC. All of his productions have sadly bombed, and to save the place from creditors, Buster plans an amateur singing contest with a \$1,000 prize. Unfortunately, while printing up the advertisements his doddering secretary announces the sum as \$100,000. The plot runs along two tracks, with one involving Buster desperately trying to raise money—which leads him to a legendary star (Jennifer Saunders and—in a younger version—Jennifer Hudson) who is the grandmother of his sheep buddy (John C. Reilly). But the main emphasis is on the contest finalists—an arrogant Frank Sinatra-type mouse (Seth McFarlane) being pursued by a bunch of gamblers; a porcupine (Scarlett Johansson) whose punk boyfriend has just dumped her; a homebody pig (Reese Witherspoon) teamed up with a garrulous hog (Nick Kroll); and a Cockney gorilla (Taron Egerton) with a mellow voice and a mobster father. Added to the mix is an elephant (Tori Kelly) who sings sensationally but is hobbled by a seemingly insurmountable case of stage fright. *Sing* might not be the most imaginative film around, but a solid mixture of music and slapstick make this an engaging take on a familiar formula. Recommended. (F. Swietek)



Somewhere in the Middle ★★1/2

Film Movement, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

Somewhere in the Middle tells the story of interconnected relationships between four people. Billie (Cassandra Freeman) runs a New York advertising agency and has a particular gift for controlling her staff with understated threats that are tied to promises of reward. At home, she is breaking up with her husband, Kofi (Charles Miller), the self-centered brother of a therapist who is treating Sofia (Marisol Miranda)—the latter a freelance graphic designer working for Billie. Sofia, who is clueless about Kofi's marriage to Billie, exhibits an obsessive interest in Kofi (in a scary *Fatal Attraction*-like way), until he agrees to have sex with her. Meanwhile, Billie has boundary issues of her own, aggressively cultivating a friendship with employee Alex (Louisa Ward), although perhaps hoping for something more. The entanglements here range from pedestrian to surprising, and writer-director Lanre Olabisi tries to add drama and mystery by presenting scenes in nonlinear fashion, with concurrent



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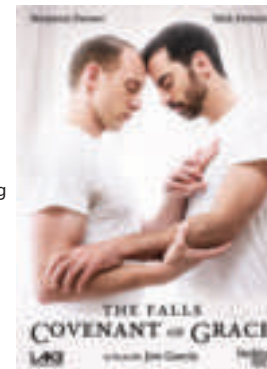
bboy follows Brad O'Connor, who, after the death of his son, becomes entangled in a chaotic and passionate online love affair with Yenny, a young Jamaican man. Starring Anthony Rapp (Rent).



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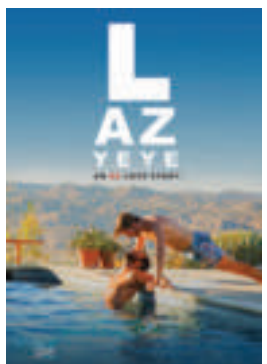
The third film of the beloved Falls trilogy revisits former Mormon missionaries Chris and RJ, six years after they first fell in love and were disciplined for it, as they formulate a plan to be together at long last.



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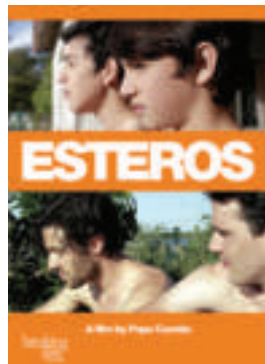
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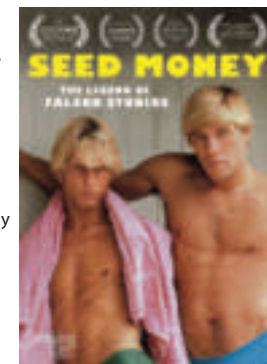
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subplots that circle back, again and again, to certain touchstones. *Somewhere in the Middle*, which reportedly grew out of a year of improvisations, features a consistently strong cast and boasts some very good moments, but the fractured structure ultimately feels like an empty experiment. A strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

The Space Between Us ★★

Universal, 121 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98, May 16



With Earth's resources becoming increasingly depleted, Genesis Space Technologies—founded by eccentric visionary Nathaniel Shepherd (Gary Oldman, channeling Elon Musk/Richard Branson)—is ready to colonize Mars. Working with NASA, Genesis launches a pioneer team to settle in an experimental colony called East Texas. The astronaut crew of six is confidently led by Sarah Elliot (Janet Montgomery), who declares: "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." Complications arise mid-trip when Sarah discovers that she's pregnant. Afraid of losing vital funding, Nathaniel insists on total secrecy, even when Sarah dies giving birth to the baby. Skip ahead 16 years: now a precocious, inquisitive teenager, Gardner (Asa Butterfield) has been raised by Kendra Wyndham (Carla Gugino) and her fellow scientists in an antiseptic, artificial environment. Isolated Gardner strikes up a secret Internet friendship with Tulsa (Britt Robertson), a cynical, angst-riddled Colorado teenager who is shuttling between foster homes. Gardner is eager to meet Tulsa, but he's told that since he was born on Mars, his internal organs could not adjust to Earth's atmosphere. Nevertheless, Gardner boards a shuttle spaceship, breaks out of quarantine, finds street-smart Tulsa, and embarks on a road trip in search of his father. Melodramatically scripted, this sci-fi adventure/romance from director Peter Chelsom is uneven—visually stunning, sometimes surprisingly tender, but also groan-worthy. Optional. (S. Granger)

Staying Vertical ★★1/2

Strand, 100 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$27.99, May 30



Oddball screenwriter Léo (Damien Bonnard), who initially seems like an amoral sponge soaking up random experiences with anyone he sees, roams rural France by car and on foot. He's not so much seeking material for a script that he's supposed to be writing (for which he's regularly receiving advance payments) as he is actively avoiding the work by engaging with strangers in non-nuanced seduction. One result is that he fathers a child with (no kidding) a farmer's daughter, whose postpartum depression

is so intense that she abandons their baby, leaving Léo to play a daddy role for which he is extremely ill-equipped. Filmmaker Alain Guiraudie's *Staying Vertical* is an opaque if frequently comic road movie that ultimately comes across as somewhat unmoored, with Guiraudie adding more fantastic, dreamlike elements (and an explicit hardcore sex scene) as the film rolls on, leading to a haunting, unforgettable ending. A strong optional purchase for more adventurous collections. (T. Keogh)

Tanna ★★1/2

Lightyear, 104 min., in Navvhal w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$25.99



Filmmakers Bentley Dean and Martin Butler's Oscar-nominated Australian tribal romance is based on a true story. Wawa (Marie Wawa) is a young woman who is a member of the Yakel, one of the last remaining traditional tribes in the South Pacific. Wawa is drawn to the chief's grandson, Dain (Mungau Dain), but she is promised to the rival Imedin clan as part of a peace deal. After Dain sleeps with the virginal Wawa, he is banished, and she—despite the threat of continued warfare—runs away to join him. With both tribes hot on the trail of the forbidden lovers, their idyllic time seems destined to be short. Although the subject matter is serious, the tone early on is often light, with some of the best moments provided by the luminous Marceline Rofit as Selin, the mischievous younger sister of Wawa. Filmed on location in Vanuatu, and featuring incredibly natural performances from the non-professional actors (drawn from the Yakel community), *Tanna* is a beautifully filmed tale about lovers who ultimately spurred real-life changes in tribal law regarding arranged marriages. Highly recommended. (R. Pitman)

The Tenth Man ★1/2

Kino Lorber, 80 min., in Spanish & Hebrew w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99



Argentine writer-director Daniel Burman's *The Tenth Man* is set in the Once district that serves as the center of Buenos Aires's Jewish community. New York-based economist Ariel (Alan Sabbagh) returns to his childhood neighborhood there for the Purim holiday, hopeful of reconnecting with his estranged father Usher (Usher Barilka), who runs a local charity. But Usher is strangely elusive, communicating with his son via used cell phones with pre-paid minutes, instructing him to handle a series of menial jobs related to the charity. Ariel's duties on behalf of his father place him in constant contact with Eva (Julietta Zylberberg), an unmarried Orthodox Jewish

woman who volunteers at the charity, and Ariel's relationship with his New York girlfriend further frays with each new phone call, giving him less incentive to leave Buenos Aires. Burman strives to give *The Tenth Man* a low-key style in its approach to relationship comedy, but it often feels enervated, and Usher's machinations and Ariel's gullible personality eventually grow tiresome. The cast tries their best—Sabbagh won an acting award at the Tribeca Film Festival—but they ultimately cannot overcome a weak screenplay. Not recommended. (P. Hall)

Tharlo ★★1/2

Icarus, 123 min., in Tibetan w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.98



An atypical Tibetan film, *Tharlo* is a minimalist black-and-white tale from writer-director Pema Tseden, adapting his own 2013 novella. Tharlo—aka "Pigtail"—is a mountain shepherd with no family, content to dress and work in the fashion of past generations, alone. Dutifully reporting to the nearest city to take a government-mandated ID photo, Tharlo is a curiosity to all, and he has a brief, doomed affair with a modern Tibetan girl that culture-shocks and ultimately breaks his placid spirit. The narrative takes place in austere, long takes, often with Tharlo minimized or off-center in the frame, symbolizing his dwindling stature. More frustrating for (presumably non-Tibetan) viewers will be the miniscule English subtitles, which often flash onscreen at a frustratingly fast rate for such a slow-paced drama. Longstanding controversy about China's conquest of Tibet is only treated tangentially here, mainly in a detail about the simple Tharlo having memorized reams of Mao passages. Likely to appeal to fans of foreign art house fare, this is a strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Three ★★★

Well Go USA, 89 min., in Cantonese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98



Hong Kong filmmaker Johnny To is one of the top directors of action thrillers and crime dramas. If *Three* is not one of To's best, it is still entertaining, consistently engaging, and executed with a precision that turns intriguing ideas into superb action sequences. Set almost entirely in a hospital surgical ward, *Three* stars Louis Koo as driven cop Ken, who crosses the line when he shoots ruthless gangster Shun (Wallace Chung) in the head. Ken accompanies Shun to the hospital where the latter survives. Vicki Zhao co-stars as the intense surgeon who clashes with the frustrated cop (who could lose more than his job if Shun lives to tell his story) while

the manipulative Shun plays mind games with both of them and waits for his gang to rescue him. The director fills the enclosed space of the ward with numerous characters and stories that unfold in the margins and cross paths in intricate choreography, building to an explosive climax and astounding close-quarters shootout that throws dozens of characters into the beautifully designed slow-motion chaos in an impressive long take (accomplished with plenty of CGI). The clash of compromised heroes and a cocky criminal mastermind is clever without being dramatically resonant and the script is more engineered than written, but the direction here offers a master class in action movie filmmaking. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Underground Kings ★1/2

Breaking Glass, 72 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99

This is essentially the 2014 pilot for a TV series (or miniseries) that did not last beyond four episodes and is now being marketed as a standalone movie, which makes no sense. As with any TV pilot, multiple story threads are introduced for later development, so it's not surprising that much of the material here winds up feeling like a series of blind alleys. Set in Philadelphia, *Underground Kings* centers on a huge array of characters on both sides of the law, with some straddling the divide. Young narcotics detective Carter (Kevin Savage), who is caught between his job and domestic obligations, is recruited by a federal agent to go undercover and weed out police corruption following an ambush of Carter's partner. Meanwhile, a drug kingpin named Smooth (Christopher Mann) navigates his own set of problems with more powerful mobsters, treacherous underlings, and a crooked police lieutenant who is putting the squeeze on him. Also added to the mix is a cartoonish gaggle of *Sopranos*-like made men who have generational conflicts with younger guys in the business. But there are so many characters and locations that it's hard to keep up (or care). Moreover, the show's creator and costar, Skye Dennis, makes it all feel wooden and drab. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

A United Kingdom

★★★1/2

Fox, 111 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, June 6

In London, circa 1947, the future King of Botswana, Prince Seretse Khama (David Oyelowo)—who was studying law at Oxford—met a beautiful Englishwoman, Ruth Williams (Rosamund Pike); soon after, the pair impulsively married. Original opposition to their union came not only from Ruth's racist father but also from the British



government, which had recently introduced apartheid to South Africa, so a biracial couple ruling a neighboring country seemed out of the question. Economically, Britain needed resource-rich South Africa's uranium for their nuclear program and gold-mining rights, which were vital to replenishing depleted reserves following WWII. Plus, there was a strategic threat of South Africa invading Bechuanaland (later known as Botswana). The scandalous marriage precipitates an international crisis that is further complicated by Khama's obstinate uncle/guardian (Vusi Kunene), who—acting as regent—repeatedly urges his people to cooperate with the colonial government. In addition, Seretse's aunt (Abena Ayivor) and sister (Terry Pheto) believe that the prince's marriage to a white woman demeans the black women of their Bamangwato tribe. But when the dignified, defiant, and ultimately persuasive Khama arrives back in his African homeland with resilient Ruth, this changes everything—along with the discovery of diamonds. Based on Susan Williams's 2006 nonfiction book *Colour Bar*, this is a somewhat simplistic and standard historical biopic, albeit sensitively directed by Ghana's Amma Asante, who works well with her superb ensemble, which includes Jack Davenport and Tom Felton as the intimidating bureaucratic villains. Sam McCurdy's stunning cinematography captures the flat, sunbaked landscape of Botswana, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Until Forever ★★★

Vision, 100 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, May 2

Until Forever is a Christian drama based on the true story of Michael Boyum, a 23-year-Minnesotan whose faith, coupled with the love of his girlfriend, Michelle, sustained his spirit during a lengthy battle with leukemia. While the story is essentially a tearjerker, there are a number of inspiring stops along the way. Graced with a strong, extroverted personality and desire to help others, Michael (Stephen Anthony Bailey) has the humility and charisma to persuade others to become their best selves, either through the martial arts classes he teaches or in the hospital where he's confined during chemotherapy. Visiting other patients, he lifts spirits while also keeping the medical staff upbeat. Michelle (Madison Lawlor) joins him in these good acts, while Michael's brother Matt (Jamie Anderson) suffers from depression over Michael's condition. Writer-director Michael Linn manages to keep the material moving, despite the inevitability of the outcome, especially thanks to the romance between Michelle and Michael. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



We Are the Flesh ★★

Arrow, 110 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

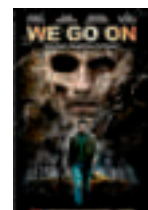
The avant-garde meets exploitation cinema in this Mexican horror film that begins as a post-apocalyptic ordeal and turns into a surreal portrait of an isolated world apart from society. A brother and sister (Diego Gamaliel and María Evoli) emerge from what appears to be an underground passage into an abandoned building occupied by a malevolently-grinning hermit (Noé Hernández) who distills an enigmatic drug that he trades for food. The siblings become prisoners and collaborators, helping him build a strange cave-like habitat out of scraps of wood, cardboard, and packing tape, while he pushes them to continually transgress social boundaries. This surreal, savage, explicit debut feature by Emiliano Rocha Minter belongs to the cinema of transgression, featuring masturbation, orgies, incest, necrophilia, and cannibalism, all of which the gleefully demonic hermit presents as a form of liberation from repression. While it could be considered an allegory for depravities that exist in a so-called civilized world, or a sick perversion of the messiah myth, the explicit imagery and shocking acts will limit interest to fans of extreme cinema and the cult films of Alejandro Jodorowsky and other filmmakers who push the boundaries of cinematic and social taboos. Not a necessary purchase. (S. Axmaker)



We Go On ★★1/2

Lightyear, 89 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray: \$25.98

Jesse Holland and Andy Mitton's supernatural thriller sports an intriguing premise: Miles Grissom (Clark Freeman) is a young man tortured by fears—especially of death—that have led him to work at home editing TV infomercials. Having recently come into a modest inheritance, Miles decides to pay half to anyone who can offer him proof of an afterlife. Despite the concerns of his protective mother (Annette O'Toole), Miles advertises the offer and receives a predictable flood of responses, from which he selects several that are particularly promising. The first brings him to a professor (John Glover) who tries to put him in touch with the spirit world by forcing him to confront past traumatic experiences, while the second connects him with a psychic (Giovanna Zararías) whose pronouncements appear totally bizarre. When Miles encounters Nelson (Jay Dunn), an airport maintenance man, he learns the secret of passing over to the other side, but the result is hardly pleasant, since it brings forth painful revelations about the past history of Miles and his family. *We Go On* grows a mite



confusing in the final stretch, and Freeman is a rather colorless protagonist, but with its emphasis on mood and tension, the film does offer a nice change from gore-drenched horror movies. Still, in the end this is more mildly intriguing than genuinely compelling. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

xXx: Return of Xander Cage ★★

Paramount, 96 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, May 16

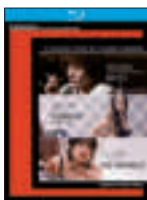


In 2002, Vin Diesel scored an early hit with the goofy spy movie *xXx*, in which he starred as an extreme-sports star recruited into the espionage game by a secret agency's volatile head (Samuel L. Jackson). Diesel left the sequel to Ice Cube, but now returns a decade and a half later as Xander Cage. Louder, dumber, and even more cartoonish than the original, the new plot revolves around a device called Pandora's Box, which can turn orbiting satellites into weapons crashing to Earth, but this is just an excuse for a succession of ludicrous, choppy-edited action sequences. While on his mission to retrieve the box from a mysterious villain, Xander must put up with a scowling NSA chief (Toni Collette), but he is able to assemble a team of reckless oddballs to accompany him first to the Philippines and then to Detroit to make the recovery. The film also features a first-act cameo by Jackson, a surprise reappearance by another past *xXx* agent, a spectacular (but poorly executed) leap from a jet plane, and a thoroughly predictable resurrection. The most imaginative thing about this sequel is the diverse cast, cannily chosen to reflect virtually every segment of the global distribution market. Diesel ultimately dooms the film by playing Cage as such a smugly invincible hero that he becomes a beefy bore. A brainless cacophony of chaotic narrative, risible dialogue, dreadful acting, mediocre effects, and sheer noise pollution, this is not recommended. (F. Swietek)

Classic Films

3 Classic Films by Claude Chabrol ★★★

Cohen, 3 discs, 310 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray: \$49.99

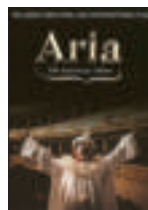


Claude Chabrol has been called the Gallic Hitchcock due to his fascination with the Master of Suspense and because he spent most of his career making thrillers that, at their best, reveal characters with complex psychologies, often involved in destructive and unhealthy relationships. This collection presents three from the 1990s, starting with *Betty* (1992), based on a 1960 novel by Georges

Simenon, which stars Marie Trintignant as the titular boozy, unhappy wife of a lawyer dominated by his controlling mother. Betty sinks into depression when she is banished after being caught in an affair. This is not a crime thriller, but rather a psychological drama woven through with flashbacks and built on an almost Darwinian perspective on social survival. *L'Enfer* (1994), based on an unmade screenplay by Henri-George Clouzot, stars François Cluzet as a happily married man who becomes insanely jealous over his sexy wife (Emmanuelle Béart). Chabrol's empathy for the tormented husband makes him far more interesting than as a mere madman, but this comes at the expense of the wife, who is portrayed as an angelic sexpot with little dimension. Regardless, *L'Enfer* is a riveting psychological portrait of madness and pathological jealousy. *The Swindle* (1997), starring Isabelle Huppert and Michel Serrault as con artists and Cluzet as their clever (possibly duplicitous) mark, is a lightweight thriller in contrast. It builds slowly and is a little precocious, but it twists effectively when the small time players cross big time killers. Extras include audio commentaries and an archival interview with Cluzet. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Aria ★★1/2

Lightyear, 86 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$25.99



The anthology film *Aria* is just as oddball today as it was when first released in 1987, but over the ensuing years several of the participating directors have died, grown old, or graduated beyond their early reputations as young innovators. The quirky idea here was to have 10 distinctive filmmakers each shoot a brief work inspired by one or another aria from various operas. The result was and remains an overall uneven experience that doesn't necessarily make opera any more accessible to non-fans, but does offer stylistic novelties and flashes of inspiration. Australian director Bill Bryden presents wraparound segments starring the late John Hurt as a washed-up virtuoso singing the famous solo from "Il Pagliacci," while French New Wave genius Jean-Luc Godard offers a deconstruction of myth and image set to "Armide." Robert Altman weighs in with an imagined recreation of a decadent opening night for Rameau's "Les Boréades" in 1734, and Nicolas Roeg casts his then-wife, actress Theresa Russell, as the mustachioed King Rog of Albania, who escaped assassination in 1931 (all set to Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera"). Franc Roddam takes on "Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with a hoary if somewhat effective tale of young lovers (Bridget Fonda and James Mathers) who travel to Las Vegas, make love, and then kill themselves. Also on the directing docket

are Charles Sturridge, Ken Russell, Derek Jarman, Julien Temple, and Bruce Beresford. A cinematic curio making its Blu-ray debut with extras including a stills gallery, this is a strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

Battleground ★★★1/2

Warner, 118 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99



Battleground is simply one of the great Hollywood platoon dramas. In December 1944, the 101st Airborne Division was sent to protect the town of Bastogne in Belgium from a German offensive. It was the last major Nazi push of the war and became known as the Battle of the Bulge. This 1949 film, directed by World War I veteran William A. Wellman and written by Robert Pirosh (who fought in the Battle of the Bulge), views the military engagement from the perspective of one American squad in the rugged, snow-covered terrain as they hold out against the Germans. Van Johnson is the ostensible star but he's essentially the first among equals in an ensemble piece, playing a wisecracking soldier who rises to meet the responsibilities when command is passed down to him. John Hodiak is the former newspaper reporter turned seasoned private, George Murphy an older soldier waiting on orders to go home with each mail delivery, Ricardo Montalban a baseball-loving guy from Los Angeles who is delighted by the falling snow, Marshall Thompson the new kid, and James Whitmore the tough but caring Sarge. Shot largely on studio sets, this is war in close-up, with soldiers digging in, holding ground, walking patrols, marching to the next location, and generally trying to survive with dwindling supplies. A film that focuses as much on the way soldiers deal with the waiting as it does on battle, this is a classic built on the camaraderie and personalities of the soldiers. Winning Academy Awards for the original screenplay and cinematography, *Battleground* debuts on Blu-ray in a newly restored and remastered edition, with extras including a vintage cartoon and an archival featurette. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Bells Are Ringing ★★★

Warner, 126 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99



Judy Holliday plays Ella Peterson, a switchboard operator who becomes personally involved in the lives of the clients of a phone answering service, and Dean Martin costars as Jeffrey Moss, a playwright with writer's block who Ella is determined to coax back to work in this 1960 musical comedy. Legendary musical team Betty Comden and Adolph Green (who wrote *Singin' in the Rain*) adapt their Broadway hit and Holliday reprises her stage role as the operator who plays fairy godmother

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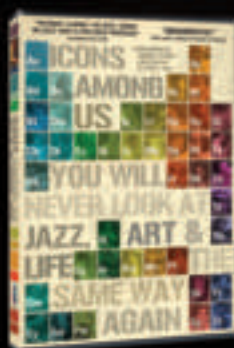
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to a beatnik actor (Frank Gorshin spoofing Marlon Brando) and a dentist songwriter, and becomes the straight-talking muse to Martin's playwright under an alter-ego. More complications ensue when the answering service becomes the unwitting go-between for a gambling syndicate and the police put the business under surveillance, convinced that it is up to no good. This is old school musical comedy, lightweight and silly with harmless criminals and bumbling cops and a slate of entertaining but disposable songs with comic lyrics. Vincente Minnelli directs the colorful Arthur Freed production like an elaborate stage show, with fabulously designed studio sets that are far more like the older 1950s musicals than the changing styles of 1960s musicals to come. André Previn composed the Oscar-nominated score, Jean Stapleton plays the owner of the answering service, and jazz saxophone great Gerry Mulligan appears as Ella's clumsy blind date. It's the final film by the great Holliday and she carries the film with her energy and talent: singing, dancing, and playing multiple characters for her answering service clients. Likely to appeal to fans of classic musicals, *Bells Are Ringing* bows on Blu-ray with extras including a behind-the-scenes featurette, musical outtakes, and an alternate version of "The Midas Touch." Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Black Society Trilogy

★★★1/2

Arrow, 2 discs, 302 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$49.95



Japanese filmmaker Takashi Miike broke out of the low-budget direct-to-video industry with his first theatrical feature *Shinjuku Triad Society* (1995), a violent and energetic gangster thriller about a merciless Tokyo cop who stalks a brutal Taiwanese gang leader (Tomorrow Taguchi) dealing in black market human organs, only to discover that his own younger brother is working for his quarry. The brothers, Japanese orphans raised by Chinese parents, are outcasts in both societies, and that alienation defines the crime drama as much as the sadistic violence and predatory sex. *Rainy Dog* (1997) moves to Taiwan for the story of a Japanese yakuza foot soldier in exile in Taipei, where he survives as a freelance hit-man for a local mobster, living only for himself until he's presented with a son he never knew and hooks up with a young prostitute. When the gangster betrays him and a price is put on his head, he becomes protective of his instant family. And in *Ley Lines* (1999), three mixed-race boys (Chinese father, Japanese mother) become involved with a sadistic Tokyo crime boss. While no characters cross over in the trilogy, all three films are set on the outskirts of society and feature outcast characters and themes of alienation and

abandonment, as well as perverse sexuality, brutal violence, and vicious characters. Extras include audio commentaries on all three films by Miike biographer Tom Mes and new video interviews with Miike and actor Show Aikawa. Likely to appeal to fans of Japanese cult films, this is a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Canoa ★★★1/2

Criterion, 115 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95



Although not well known to American audiences, this 1976 film is a landmark of Mexican cinema. Set during the political unrest of 1968 and based on real life events, the film opens with a news report: four young men killed and another critically injured in San Miguel Canoa, a small, impoverished village located a few miles from the city of Puebla. Director Felipe Cazals uses documentary techniques to illustrate the town's culture and highlight the power wielded by the priest, and more conventional dramatic scenes to introduce the aforementioned young men (all apolitical employees of a university). The measured, sober reportage style and easygoing comic quality of the boisterous boys collide when the townsfolk brutally attack the strangers after being stirred into hysteria by the priest. The setting may not resonate with American viewers but the portrait of a community leader manipulating the ignorant and illiterate through fear, xenophobia, and religion is perennially relevant. *Canoa* is historical drama and political commentary presented as horror film, with bloody scenes of brutal violence as the innocent students are massacred with machetes and rifles. This remarkable drama combines unreliable narrators, documentary style, and primal drama into a powerful portrait of despotism, manipulation, and mob violence in a thoughtful, provocative, and ultimately emotionally affecting manner. Extras include a video introduction by filmmaker Guillermo del Toro and a conversation between filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón and Cazals. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Deluge ★★★

Kino Lorber, 70 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



This original end-of-the-world disaster movie is a curious and often fascinating artifact. Produced in 1933 (pre-Production Code) on a relatively modest budget, the film parses out the special effects spectacle carefully, opening with scientists in a panic as they predict dire storms—alarming news that is communicated over radio reports. Intercut with these voices of authority is the story of Martin (Sidney Blackmer) and Helen (Lois Wilson),

a married couple with two kids whose rural manor is destroyed in the storms, and professional swimmer Claire (Peggy Shannon), who escapes a brutish thug and is rescued by Martin, separated by the havoc from his family and surviving in a remote cabin. The spectacle is all presented during the first act, with primitive, almost surreal miniature effects showing New York City being leveled in an earthquake and swamped in tidal waves, while the remainder of the film is a tale of survival after the end of civilization as we know it. A marauding gang preys upon survivors, raping and murdering women (not shown on-screen but the implications are clear), while a community of survivors tries to rebuild from the rubble of a ruined town. Based on the titular 1928 novel by Sydney Fowler Wright, *Deluge* can lay claim to the title of first disaster movie. For decades the film was only available in an Italian-dubbed print, but is presented here in a fine restoration of the original English language version, with extras including audio commentary by film historian Richard Harland Smith, and the 1934 B-movie *Back Page* (a newspaper drama starring Shannon). Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Film ★★★

Milestone, 22 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.95, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Notfilm ★★★

Milestone, 2 discs, 129 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Playwright Samuel Beckett participated in bringing many of his works to TV but only once engaged in filmmaking, writing the original screenplay for the experimental short *Film* and completely overseeing the direction (attributed to longtime stage collaborator Alan Schneider). *Film* stars Buster Keaton as an unnamed man who keeps his face hidden from people, windows, mirrors, animals, and the roving camera that follows him through a city. It plays like you might expect from a playwright with a minimalist aesthetic, more conceptual than cinematic, and (apart from one absurd sight gag) largely fails to make use of the talents and experience of great silent movie comedian and filmmaker Keaton. But given the meeting of legends in their respective fields, it remains a landmark of sorts. And it inspired film restorer Ross Lipman to make the 2015 documentary *Notfilm*, which Lipman describes as a kino-essay. It's a fitting description for a two-hours-plus production that mixes interviews and historical documents together with observations and philosophical musings on *Film*, as well as the art and inspiration of Beckett. Available in separate editions, extras on *Film* include outtakes and the home video debut of a 1961 TV production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* starring Zero Mostel and Burgess Meredith, while extras on *Notfilm*



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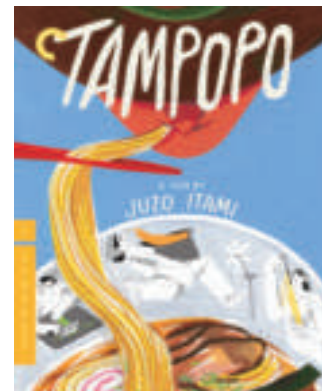
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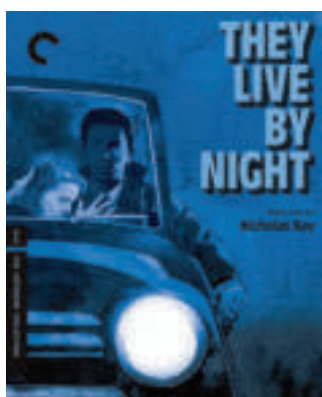
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include bonus interviews (new and archival), audio recordings of Beckett and others, "The Music of *Notfilm*" MP3 recordings by Mihály Vig, and a reconstruction of a lost scene from outtakes. Together, these two entries capture an interesting and largely forgotten chapter in the work of one of the most important playwrights of the 20th century. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Love in the Afternoon

★★★

Warner, 130 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99

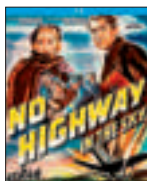


The May-December romance in this 1957 comedy feels more like March-December with the casting of elfin young Audrey Hepburn as music student Ariane Chavasse opposite Gary Cooper as cynical American playboy Frank Flannagan, a globetrotting millionaire businessman who romances women (often married) in every port of call. Ariane is the daughter of a private detective (Maurice Chevalier) who has files dedicated to Flannagan's exploits, which fascinate Ariane. When she breaks into Flannagan's hotel room to warn him of a cuckolded husband with murderous intent, she ends up returning for afternoon meetings as an innocent pretending to be a woman of the world with a history of lovers (using stories borrowed from her father's files) while limiting Flannagan's advances to long kisses. When she suddenly disappears, Flannagan inevitably hires a private detective to find her: naturally, Ariane's father. Directed and co-written by Billy Wilder, this is an American comedy with a continental attitude inspired by the work of Ernst Lubitsch (with whom Wilder collaborated early in his career). The craggy Cooper was 55 at the time but appeared older, while Hepburn was in her late 20s but looked like a teenager. Despite Hepburn's longing glances and swoony performance, there is little chemistry to the romance, but Wilder's light, smooth touch turns what could have been a leering, uncomfortable situation into a playful farce and the Paris locations add romantic atmosphere. Bowing on Blu-ray, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

No Highway in the Sky

★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 99 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.99



In this unusual and engaging 1951 drama, James Stewart stars as Theodore Honey, an American engineer working in a British aviation firm. Honey, an eccentric genius who has disconnected himself emotionally from the world since the death of his wife, is currently conducting a stress test on

the tail section of the company's latest plane, which he believes will fail after 1,440 hours in flight, but sees no urgency in completing the test despite the number of planes in the air approaching that limit. On a flight to Newfoundland to examine a crash site, he discovers that he is on one such plane and it is no longer simply an intellectual exercise. After failing to convince the pilot to turn back, Honey explains his hypothesis to a kindly young and sympathetic stewardess (Glynis Johns) and a famous Hollywood actress in First Class (Marlene Dietrich, playing off her own image), who are convinced by his assurance if not his science. Based on Nevil Shute's 1948 novel *No Highway*, this is a cool, dispassionate mix of disaster film and engineering drama, with Stewart in fine form as a somewhat absent-minded professor who is determined to save the lives of his fellow passengers. Directed by Henry Koster and costarring Jack Hawkins, this minor but interesting film will likely appeal to fans of Stewart and intelligent Hollywood dramas. Bowing on Blu-ray with an audio commentary by film historian Jeremy Arnold and Henry Koster's son Bob Koster, this is a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

One Million Years B.C.

★★★

Kino Lorber, 2 discs, 100 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Raquel Welch became a sex symbol playing a cave-woman pin-up clothed in an animal skin bikini in what is surely the most famous caveman movie ever made. Produced by Britain's Hammer Films, a specialist in horror flicks, this is a 1966 remake of Hal Roach's campy *One Million B.C.* (1940), with John Richardson in the Victor Mature role of Tumak, a young warrior driven from his tribe of hunters by a brutal leader, and Welch as Loana, a woman in a peaceful coastal tribe of fisher-gatherers. This is pure fantasy, with primitive man in fur togas battling dinosaurs that died out millions of years before the arrival of the earliest human ancestors, and communicating in broad gestures and single-word exclamations in a grunting proto-language. But it is also very entertaining and features stop-motion dinosaurs created and animated by the great Ray Harryhausen. Director Don Chaffey plays it all seriously and delivers a fine looking film shot against dramatic landscapes on the Canary Island off of Spain, including a primordial volcanic desert. As the old joke goes, if you only have room for one caveman movie in your collection, this lively cult film should be it. This Blu-ray debut features both the American cut and the longer international version (each on a separate disc), with extras including audio commentary by film

historian Tim Lucas (on the longer edition) and video interviews with actresses Welch and Martine Beswick and animator Ray Harryhausen from 2002. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

What a Way to Go!

★★★

Kino Lorber, 111 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Frothier than a strawberry milkshake, this comedic confection stars Shirley MacLaine as the put-upon and eternally unlucky Louisa May Foster, a sensible gal who wants to settle down with a husband she genuinely loves to enjoy a life of simple pleasures. But every caring and sensitive man she marries suddenly and unexpectedly dies as they fall victim to their own vices and fortunes. Like a fatal cross between a magic genie and a black cat, Louisa brings wealth and fame to her husbands right before they are sent to premature graves, from workaholic store merchant Edgar Hopper (Dick Van Dyke) and obsessive expatriate painter Larry Flint (Paul Newman) to jaded playboy Rod Anderson, Jr. (Robert Mitchum) and effusive song-and-dance man Pinky Benson (Gene Kelly). Will our hapless heroine ever find true love that will stand the test of mortality? The high-caliber cast and posh production values give the film a prestigious sheen, but director J. Lee Thompson keeps the mood light and playful throughout, with MacLaine's character picturing each of her romances as a different kind of "movie" in a series of highly amusing fantasy sequences that span the history of cinema from silent slapstick to foreign art house fare. Although it has a tender message about finding joy in the bare necessities of life, *What a Way to Go!* remains an unabashedly screwball comedy with considerable highlights—including seeing a drunken Mitchum being kicked through a barn wall after trying to milk a bull. Recommended. (J. Cruz)

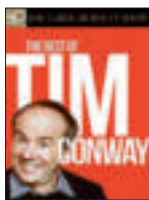
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The Best of Tim Conway

★★★1/2

Time Life, 153 min., not rated, DVD: \$12.95



Tim Conway did not officially join the cast of *The Carol Burnett Show* (1967-78) until 1975 but he was a frequent and favorite guest star ever since the first season and earned five Emmy Awards over the 11-season run. This misleadingly titled release is not a collection of choice sketches but instead four complete episodes featuring Conway in top form. In the first (from season three), Conway plays a doddering old man (one of his most beloved characters) as a race car pit crew mechanic, a prince with a frog curse trying to cure a princess (Burnett) with sleeping sickness, and Charlie Chan. The standout sketch in the second episode (from season four) features Conway transforming into a dog after getting an accidental dose of canine medicine, and it shows Conway doing what he does best: cracking up costar Harvey Korman with his inspired improvisations. The third episode (from season five) features one of the show's most popular sketches, with Conway as a nervous novice dentist who inadvertently injects himself with Novocain while treating patient Korman (who once again cracks up at Conway's shenanigans). The fourth episode, from the show's final season, features Conway as Mr. Tudball, a businessman with a heavy comic accent and an obsession with efficiency who is constantly sabotaged by his distracted secretary (Burnett). Whether or not they actually represent "the best" of Conway on the show, all of the episodes showcase the actor in hilarious skits, and also feature Vicki Lawrence, Lyle Waggoner, and guest stars Martha Raye and Pat Carroll. Extras include bloopers. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Deep Water ★★★

Acorn, 2 discs, 221 min., not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$39.99



Noah Taylor is veteran police detective Nick Manning and Yael Stone costars as his young partner Tori Lustigman in this Australian crime miniseries about the murder of a gay man in Bondi Beach, a suburb of Sydney famous for its tourist beaches and nightclubs. Tori finds similarities in a series of deaths dating back 20 years and uncovers a history of hate crimes either buried or simply ignored (chalked up to suicide or accidental death by the police). She also finds a connection to the death of her younger brother, a gay teenager who kept his identity a secret from their father, who remains in denial. Stone has the more dramatic role and her aggressiveness puts her on a collision course with her boss (William McInnes), who was part of the team that dismissed the earlier deaths. Taylor plays

the slow-speaking old school cop who seems to be part of the network of denial while quietly following the evidence to the truth. This is a well-made police procedural—something Australian TV has been perfecting over the past few years—but while the story is fictitious, it is also inspired by scandalous real-life events recently brought to light. As the show confronts the homophobia and brutal attacks on gay men, it reveals an ugly strain that is still alive in contemporary society even as gay culture has come out of the shadows. American audiences won't have the same geographical connection, but the themes should nonetheless resonate within some communities. Presenting all four episodes of this 2016 miniseries, extras include a photo gallery. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency: Season One ★★★1/2

BBC, 2 discs, 360 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



Douglas Adams wrote his novels about Dirk Gently—*Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* and *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*—in the late 1980s, and like his more famous *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, these are odd, fractured stories, here focusing on a shamus whose unconventional investigative methods presume the fundamental interconnectedness of everything. Created by Max Landis and aired on BBC America and Netflix, this series follows an earlier British radio serial and TV miniseries, but the setting has been moved to Seattle, and while Gently (Samuel Barnett) remains English, he acquires an extremely reluctant American assistant named Todd Brotzman (Elijah Wood), a bellboy who is perpetually low on funds because he spends the little money he earns on treatments for his sister (Hannah Marks), who suffers from a rare (and fictional) disease. The narrative threads are disparate, including: a murdered businessman whose bodyguard is as intent on solving the crime as Dirk, the disappearance of a girl whose soul is trapped inside the body of a dog, an anarchic bike gang called the Rowdy 3, a time-travel device, and a "holistic" assassin named Bart (Fiona Dourif), who feels compelled to kill Gently. It requires serious attention to follow how these elements eventually fit together—especially since the series moves at a frantic pace, with Barnett and Dourif playing their parts with frenzied eccentricity while Wood looks on with dour disbelief at the apparent chaos around him. But everything is sorted out in the finale, which paves the way for a promised second season. While the hectic craziness can be exhausting, this will likely appeal to Adams's admirers. Compiling all 10 episodes from the 2016 debut season, this is a strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Doctor Who: The Power of the Daleks ★★★1/2

BBC, 2 discs, 145 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99



The 1966 narrative arc *Power of the Daleks* was the third serial from the fourth season of *Doctor Who*, featuring the first full episode with Patrick Troughton as the Second Doctor. All six episodes have been lost, but the audio survives, so the BBC has produced an animated recreation set to the original broadcast soundtrack. The story opens with an unconscious young man in the Doctor's clothes on the floor of the TARDIS time machine, who wakes up and starts behaving oddly, spouting nonsensical lines as the TARDIS travels to Vulcan. While the Doctor's companions—Polly (Anneke Wills) and Ben (Michael Craze)—try to deal with the transformation, the Doctor takes the identity of a murdered Examiner to investigate a human colony where rebels believe they can control Daleks to overthrow the Governor. But the Daleks have their own plans: "Exterminate!" This is the first time the series tackled the idea of regeneration, which has since become an essential part of the show's lore and longevity, making this lost serial a landmark of sorts. The limited animation is built on TV screen "telesnaps" taken from the broadcast of the original program, and features thick lines and minimal movements. Presented in both color and black-and-white versions, this is really only for devoted *Doctor Who* fans. Extras include a telesnap version with still photos illustrating the soundtrack, episode commentaries, a behind-the-scenes featurette, additional footage, and stills galleries. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

From Dusk Till Dawn: Season Three ★★★1/2

Entertainment One, 3 discs, 448 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99



Seth and Richie Gecko (D.J. Cotrona and Zane Holtz) are together again in this third season of the south-of-the-border vampire series inspired by the 1996 film directed by Robert Rodriguez (who produces here and also directs an episode). Richie, a one-time hothead who became more focused and crafty after he was turned into a vampire, and his human brother Seth now give orders in the vampire underworld, working for vampire Lord Venganza Verdugo (Ana de la Reguera) after a demon from Hell named Amaru possesses their one-time collaborator Kate (Madison Davenport) and plots to kill the vampire Lords and take over the world. Former enemies (including the Texas marshal on the trail of the Geckos and a rival vampire warlord they fought in season two) join forces to send Amaru back to hell. This

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season adds spaghetti Western style, notably in a showdown in a desert ghost town where the vampires use enchanted bullets to kill the possessed soldiers of Amaru's undead army. Jake Busey and Wilmer Valderrama return and cult horror icon Tom Savini joins the team this season. Produced for the El Rey cable channel, the show features dark humor, lively (if not always witty) banter, and loads of movie references, along with over-the-top violence. Compiling all 10 episodes from the 2016 third season, extras include episode commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a deleted scene. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Grace and Frankie: Season Two ★★★

Lionsgate, 3 discs, 389 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99



In the first season of this naughty-but-nice geriatric Netflix sitcom, Robert and Sol (Martin Sheen and Sam Waterston), husbands of retired cosmetics mogul Grace (Jane Fonda) and artsy free spirit Frankie (Lily Tomlin), announced that they were in love and leaving their wives. The mismatched women then decamped to the couples' shared beach house while all four (and their children) began coming to terms with the new order of things. In this second season, the women continue to develop their unlikely bond while searching for male companionship, Grace taking up with an old flame (Sam Elliott) and Frankie interested in the fellow (Ernie Hudson) who provides the yams for her homemade lube, a product that Grace's daughter and successor at her old company joins forces with Frankie to market. Meanwhile, Robert and Sol run into difficulties when Robert has a heart attack and then becomes enraged over the revelation that Sol has shared a recent night with Frankie. Additional complications involve the children and old friends, including Babe (Estelle Parsons), who enters toward the season's end, forcing all of the characters to reexamine their priorities. *Grace and Frankie* has an old-fashioned vibe despite its cheeky premise, but Fonda, Tomlin, Sheen, and Waterston are masters at making the most of their material, and they here display adept comic timing. Presenting all 13 episodes from the 2016 second season, extras include a gag reel. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Graves: Season One ★★

Lionsgate, 3 discs, 300 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98



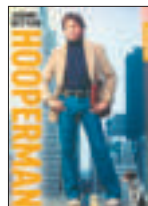
Nick Nolte stars as Richard Graves, a two-term President regarded as "the last great Republican to sit in the Oval Office" (he's kind of a mash-up between Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush). The gruff, crusty curmudgeon

is thrown into a tailspin when he Googles himself and discovers just how disastrous his policies have been for the country. Graves is determined to set things right, early on even offering up his Texas ranch as a safe haven for illegal immigrants threatened—thanks to him—with deportation. As someone who leans left myself, I found this series to be heavy-handed, liberal-wish-fulfillment claptrap. There is not a moment or a supporting character that rings the least bit authentic. Particularly annoying are two broadly-written (and acted) characters, Graves's daughter (Helene Yorke), whose personal life is a mess, and Graves's new assistant Isaiah (Skylar Astin), a true believer who idolizes Graves. Graves's steely wife (Sela Ward) instructs Isaiah to keep Graves from doing something, Graves then does that very thing, and Isaiah frets, "I am so fired." This schtick gets old very quickly. Compiling all 11 episodes from the 2016 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes and a gag reel. Not a necessary purchase. (D. Liebenson)

Hooperman: Season One

★★½

Olive, 3 discs, 528 min., not rated, DVD: \$34.99



John Ritter stars as Detective Harry Hooperman of the SFPD in this half-hour series created by Steven Bochco and Terry Louise Fisher (the team behind *L.A. Law*) that ran for two seasons (1987-89). A mix of police procedural, workplace comedy, and character study, the show focuses on the professional and private life of Hooperman, a savvy cop and smart detective with a sardonic wit. In the opening episode his deceased landlady leaves Hooperman the apartment building, making him the reluctant landlord of a place that is in serious need of expensive repairs. Costar Barbara Bosson is the newly-divorced squad Captain, Felton Perry is Hooperman's partner, and Deborah Farentino is Susan, Hooperman's new apartment superintendent. The attraction between Harry and Susan is palpable from their first meeting, and the tension only builds as they dance around their feelings, flirt, argue, and give in to their impulses. *Hooperman* is essentially a classic squad room cop drama with a light touch, featuring offbeat character humor while also treating the police work and the hazards of the job seriously, especially as Susan contemplates a potential life with a cop. The series also features a gay patrolman (Joseph Gian), making it one of the first American TV shows to include a non-stereotypical homosexual character in the regular cast. *Hooperman* earned good reviews and an Emmy Award but low ratings and was canceled after only two seasons. Compiling all 22 episodes of the 1987-88 debut season, this is a strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

The Level ★★★

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



This Brit crime drama TV series takes the sort of extreme gun and drug violence found in American classics like *The Wire* and *Homicide* and attempts to believably transpose this bullet-riddled environment into peaceful, leafy rural Sussex and middle-class bohemian Brighton. Detective Nancy Devlin (Karla Crome) is assigned to the case of a murdered Sussex drug czar because she's from the area, but her employers have no clue that she has conflict-of-interest nonprofessional ties to one of the mid-level drug smugglers who gets bumped off during a clandestine meeting in the woods—a murder that Devlin unfortunately witnesses. While Devlin knows the faceless mobsters who killed her dodgy acquaintance will soon be coming after her and her friends, she also can't let the department know about her personal involvement. Crome's approach to her character isn't that imaginative: she clearly means to portray crime-solving Devlin as deadly serious, determined, and dedicated to her work, but her demeanor rarely suggests anything beyond aggravation, annoyance, or hopeless resignation (which isn't a particularly wide emotional palette). However, as in a good Agatha Christie murder mystery, *The Level* excels at keeping the viewer guessing about who's doing the killing and who will be plugged next. Compiling all six episodes from 2016, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. (M. Sandlin)

Mercy Street: Season 2

★★★

PBS, 2 discs, 360 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.99, Blu-ray: \$49.99



The second season of this PBS original drama set during the American Civil War continues to explore the collision of cultures in Union-occupied Alexandria, VA, where the white population supports the Confederacy and still believes in the right of slaveholding. The series revolves around a Union army hospital set up in what was once the town's lavish hotel owned by James Green (Gary Cole), a proud Southern businessman who refuses to sign an oath to the Union. The second season opens in the aftermath of a failed assassination attempt by a conspiracy of Confederate sympathizers. As Dr. Foster (Josh Radnor) and the staff deal with the capricious nature of a new hospital chief and Green attempts to negotiate an alliance with England (which abolished slavery decades before—using cotton as leverage), the armed resistance grows under the guidance of Green's son (Brad Koed). Mary Elizabeth Winstead is

the Northern abolitionist nurse assigned to organize the nursing staff, while Hannah James plays Green's Southern belle daughter, a volunteer whose experience tending to both Confederate and Union soldiers begins to shift her understanding of the issues of the conflict. An involving, well-produced drama steeped in American history at a major cultural turning point, the show features intelligent writing and complicated characters who face situations that challenge them to confront their beliefs and prejudices. Presenting all six episodes from the 2017 second season, extras include deleted scenes. Recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Quarry: The Complete First Season ★★½

HBO, 3 discs, 478 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99



Loosely based on a series of novels by Max Allan Collins, this grim Cinemax series focuses on Mac Conway (Logan Marshall-Green), a Marine who is returning to Memphis in 1972 from a tour in Vietnam but is under a cloud: his company is suspected of involvement in a My Lai-style massacre. Mac's wife, Joni (Jodi Balfour), has been engaged in an affair, although it will be some time before Mac realizes this. A more immediately pressing matter is that Mac is forced to become a member of a crew of hitmen led by a master criminal known as The Broker (Peter Mullan)—a job that will not only lead to Joni's kidnapping by one of his targets, but also to Mac being suspected of murder by a police detective. Marshall-Green invests the brooding, angry Conway—rechristened "Quarry" by The Broker—with a generalized angst, and the supporting cast is strong, also including Damon Herriman as Quarry's Broker-appointed partner-in-crime and such stalwarts as Tom Noonan and Ann Dowd in smaller roles. Still, the pervasively cynical portrayal of a society mired in violence and corruption, populated by characters who possess few redeeming qualities, makes for a rather depressing viewing experience. Presenting all eight episodes from the 2016 debut season, extras include audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, and music videos. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Romanzo Criminale—The Series: Season 1 ★★★

Kino Lorber, 3 discs, 660 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99



In the late 1970s, an ambitious young thug hatches a plan to leave petty robberies behind and—partnering with another gang—take over the drug trade in Rome, a city that is divided up

by a number of small, unorganized gangs. Li-bano (Francesco Montanari), the big-thinking criminal with a perpetual scowl, joins forces with Freddo (Vincio Marchioni) to pull off a major kidnapping and put their ransom money into drugs, challenging a big shot whose Mafia connections have made him untouchable until now. Smart but impulsive police detective Scialoja (Marco Bocci) traces some of the marked ransom money to Dandi (Alessandro Roja), a big-spending member of the gang who is in love with an expensive prostitute (Daniela Virgilio), and he figures out that a major criminal power shift is underway, but his investigation is sidelined when the Red Brigade kidnaps Italian politician Aldo Mora (a real-life event) and all resources are focused on squaring off against the Communists. Based on the 2002 novel by Giancarlo De Cataldo, which was inspired by the true story of the Banda della Magliana organization that ran the Roman underworld for over a decade, the story was previously made into a 2005 film. This series takes a much deeper dive into the material, showing the mechanics of the group's criminal activities, their negotiations with the Camorra (centered around Naples) and Mafia (based in Sicily), and the ongoing police investigations. It also explores the political era, including the anxiety over Communists and the police hostility toward students. This well-made series was a major hit in Italy and should appeal to those interested in true crime dramas and Italian culture and history. Compiling all 12 episodes from the 2008-09 debut season, this is recommended. (S. Axmayer)

Vice Principals: The Complete First Season ★★½

HBO, 2 discs, 269 min., TV-MA, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99



This HBO comedy stars Danny McBride and Walton Goggins as Neal Gamby and Lee Russell, vice principals in a California high school who both think they should take over when the well-liked veteran principal (guest star Bill Murray) steps down. Gamby is an arrogant disciplinarian with anger issues who is oblivious to his insensitive remarks, while Russell is an obsequious snake who sweet talks everyone with a honeyed drawl while scheming behind their backs. The pair hate each other, but when they are both passed over for highly-qualified Dr. Belinda Brown (Kimberly Hebert Gregory) they reluctantly team up to sabotage their mutual enemy. Dr. Brown (who insists on being called "Doctor") is accustomed to resistance, but the series—created by McBride and director Jody Hill—takes a quick dive into truly nasty tricks and bad behavior. It's a satire about two white men of dubious talent attacking a more qualified and accomplished black woman hired to fill

a position that the men feel they've earned, which gives the show an edge, although it is more incendiary than enlightening. The gags are broad and juvenile at times—aimed at showing how pathetic the two men are—but the show becomes more conflicted as the guys develop a real camaraderie in their shared scheme and Gamby starts to respect Brown even as he's destroying her career and life. Compiling all nine episodes from the 2016 debut season, extras include episode commentaries, deleted scenes, and a blooper reel. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

Victoria: The Complete First Season ★★★½

PBS, 3 discs, 415 min., not rated, DVD: \$49.99, Blu-ray: \$59.99



Jenna Coleman stars as young Queen Victoria in this British TV drama aired in the U.S. on PBS's *Masterpiece*, which chronicles her life and reign beginning with her ascension to the throne in 1837 at the age of 18. The first season covers the first few years of her rule as she learns about power and politics while fighting to maintain independence from her mother's private secretary, Sir John Conroy (Paul Rhys), and from her uncle, the Duke of Cumberland (Peter Firth). Elizabeth chooses Lord Melbourne (Rufus Sewell), the Whig Prime Minister, as her advisor, weathers scandal and ongoing shifts in the political winds, and marries Prince Albert (Tom Hughes), with the season coming to a close with the birth of their first child. The series deftly explores the politics surrounding Victoria (as powerful old men attempt to control the young queen), Albert's struggle to find a purpose within the kingdom, and Victoria's sharing of responsibility with her new husband. Intelligent and handsomely mounted (with some *Upstairs, Downstairs* melodramatic stories of staff members), the show is built on Coleman's bright, energetic portrayal of Victoria and her early history, which included a scandal that turned the public against her, and anti-German sentiment that led to an assassination attempt. Presenting all eight episodes from the 2016 debut season, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette, a set tour, and cast interviews. Highly recommended. (S. Axmayer)

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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)

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CHILDREN'S

Ada's Ideas ★★★

(2016) 16 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-52004-954-0.

This iconographic-animated adaptation of author-illustrator Fiona Robinson's 2015 picture book provides an interesting look at the life of Ada Lovelace—the 19th-century mathematician daughter of Romantic poet Lord Byron—whose calculations are considered by many to mark the historical origins of computer programming. Narrated by English actress Rosalyn Lander, the short looks at Lovelace's dreams of steam-powered flying horses and ideas that upset her math-minded mother, who encouraged Ava to study music, needlepoint, and arithmetic in order to avoid becoming flighty like her scandalous father. Living in London during the Industrial Revolution helped inspire Ava's mathematical expressions, and while she suffered from measles, her mind never stopped whirling. She was introduced to key figures of the period including Charles Dickens, science writer Mary Fairfax Somerville, and mechanical engineer Charles Babbage (who worked closely with Lovelace). Offering a compelling profile of a little-known early numbers-cruncher, this ALSC Notable Children's Video selection features extras including a read-along option and an explanation of Bernoulli numbers. Recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Mickey and the Roadster Racers ★★

(2017) 68 min. DVD: \$19.99. Buena Vista Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).

This uninspired newest incarnation from the House of Mouse serves up a premise that casts favorite Disney characters as drivers working out of a shop in Hot Dog Hills, with each two-fer episode including speedy races, wacky antics, contemporary animation, and an abundance of annoying sound effects (think: "boing!" "vroom!" and the like). "Mickey's Wild Tire" finds the garage gang gearing up for a visit from famous racer Jiminy, while also competing with antagonist Pete to catch up with a missing special tire in time for a mayoral ceremony. The accompanying tale, "Sittin' Kitty," revs up the pinks and purples as it follows Minnie and Daisy on a wild pursuit across town to keep track of a pet job for their "Happy Helpers" service. Also included are "Goofy Gas! / Little Big Ape" and "Race for the Rigatoni Ribbon / Roaming Around Rome," the latter a stereotypical look at the Eternal City that includes thrown pizzas and olive oil on the track, insulting accents, and the desecration of the Coliseum, Spanish Steps, and aqueducts. Extras include a bonus episode and music videos. Optional. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

The Princess and the Warrior ★★★

(2016) 18 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-52004-947-2.

Narrated by Tim Andrés Pabon, this adaptation of author-illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh's 2016 picture book offers a retelling of a legend from Aztec mythology. Featuring a bonus read-along option and glossary—helpful with the many non-English words—*The Princess and the Warrior* follows picky Princess Izta, who is not really excited over suitors who try to woo her with feathers and turquoise necklaces but is totally smitten when simple warrior Popoca shows up and talks about things like love and honesty. Izta's emperor dad offers Popoca a deal: if he battles the enemy

Jaguar Claw tribe, the pair can get hitched. But like a certain other star-crossed love affair, a misleading messenger and a sleeping potion throw a wrench in the plan. Featuring a wind instrument-laden soundtrack and realistic colors for Tonatiuh's characters, extras for this fine fable include an author's note about the real mountains Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatepetl in the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt. An ALSC Notable Children's Video selection, this is recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Scooby-Doo! Shaggy's Showdown ★★★

(2017) 80 min. DVD: \$19.98. Warner Bros. Home Entertainment (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned.

In this latest addition to the contemporary animated film series, talking Great Dane Scooby-Doo and friends arrive at Shaggy's cousin Tawny's dude ranch after she finds him on a genealogy website. The Crazy Q Ranch in Sorghum City is a pretty cool place, except for the mysterious scary ghost Dapper Jake (a historical robber who did awful things such as "returned his library books late"), who terrorizes the guests with a morphing skull face and fiery green flames emanating from his Yosemite Sam-style guns. The twist here is that Scooby's BFF Shaggy happens to be a descendant of the notorious criminal (and looks like a doppelganger), which freaks out the other visitors to the resort, including two TV producers, prank-playing adult sisters, and a family whose young son is the famous musician Buddy G (think a country-style Justin Bieber), who is preparing to play for an upcoming rodeo. Featuring customary Mystery Inc. gags—Scooby and Shaggy annihilating the buffet and being scaredy-cats, Velma nerding it up with chemistry and historical data, etc.—but with cowboy themes (Scooby does tricks on a horse and lassos a criminal at one point), this solid entry in the series also adds plenty of tongue-in-cheek nuance for adults. Bonus features include additional episodes. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)



Maybe Something Beautiful ★★½

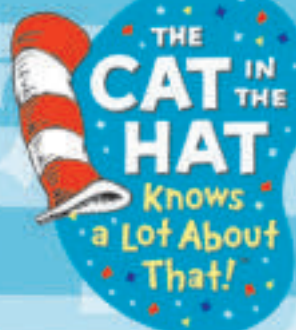
(2016) 11 min. DVD: \$38.99. Dreamscape Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-52006-125-2.

Co-written by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell, this iconographic-animated adaptation of the 2016 picture book features illustrations by Rafael López, who along with his graphic designer wife Candace helped with the real-life behind-the-scenes revitalization of East Village in San Diego. Narrated by Adriana Sananes, and featuring a high-energy salsa/merengue/cha-cha soundtrack, *Maybe Something Beautiful* focuses on a girl who loves to draw, and paint, give her art away to neighbors ("her city was less gray...but not that much"). A muralist with a bouquet of brushes and art supplies is inspired by the girl's work and soon the whole 'hood is working together, putting colors, shapes, shades, mosaics, and designs on walls, sidewalks, utility boxes, and benches. Combining various mediums in a whirl of vivid hues, this lovely story based on actual events features extras including a read-along option and an author's note on the real Urban Art Trail. Highly recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)



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PSYCHOLOGY & SELF-HELP

God Knows Where I Am ★★★

(2016) 102 min. DVD: \$349 (\$799 w/PPR). DRA. Bond Educator.

The life and strange, sad death of Linda Bishop are examined in Todd and Jedd Widener's haunting documentary, which begins with the discovery of a woman's decomposing body in a supposedly abandoned farmhouse in New Hampshire. The authorities finally identified her as the mentally-ill Bishop, who—according to a diary she scrawled while squatting in the unheated house—had been living there for four months, hiding from outsiders and surviving on apples (scrounged from local trees) and rainwater until she died of cold and starvation. Poignant excerpts from the diary are read by Lori Singer as the filmmakers—using footage shot inside the house, combined with interviews of its previous owners, as well as local police—reconstruct Bishop's last weeks. Bishop's larger life is traced through interviews with friends and relatives, including Bishop's sister and daughter, coupled with archival materials, including family photos. What emerges is a melancholy portrait of an energetic and intelligent young girl with a special love of art whose descent into apparent schizophrenia undermined her early promise. The film eventually turns to the question of medical treatment that might have helped Bishop, but was limited by laws designed to protect the rights of diagnosed individuals. Ultimately, however, *God Knows Where I Am* is more personal story than finger-pointing accusation, and under the Wideners' sensitive handling it proves to be a deeply affecting one. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Moving from Emptiness: The Life and Art of a Zen Dude ★★★

(2016) 72 min. DVD: \$29.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$349 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber. Closed captioned.

Depending on one's mood, the enigmatic Zen wisdom of calligraphic artist Alok Hsu Kwang-han can inspire either giddiness or eye-rolling. In his workshops for people looking to connect with something essential within, intuition trumps thought, expressed on rice paper in black watercolor paint. In this alternately moving and mystifying documentary that is largely shot in Alok's studio, the 75-year-old master teaches students to be "present, available, playful, and not-knowing," a state of mind that is very much the opposite of our usual daily distracted, stream-of-consciousness lives. Viewers see the lanky, grey-haired Alok swiftly transform from philosopher to clown, dancing wildly or spouting gibberish (while encouraging his students to do the same) as a way to clear the

head and heart before painting a declaration such as "none of this is me." Although filmmakers Shaeri Richards and Jerry Hartleben can't really capture the way that these exercises feel to the practitioners (viewers just see grown-ups painting squiggles), listening closely to Alok encourages confidence that he is actually imparting something both profound and therapeutic. Beyond the studio, the documentary finds Alok retracing his life as the son of Chinese immigrants who survived Japan's attacks during World War II. Viewers also meet his beloved partner and hear from a couple of Zen masters in the U.S. who help explain the ancient practice. But the star here is clearly Alok, a man with an enviably light spirit born of a long personal journey. Extras include bonus interviews. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Who Am I to Stop It ★★★

(2016) 86 min. DVD: \$79: public libraries; \$95: community colleges; \$300: colleges & universities. New Day Films. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-57448-418-2.

Cheryl Green and Cynthia Lopez's layered documentary focuses on three Pacific Northwest-based individuals who have suffered a traumatic brain injury. Dani is preparing to graduate from high school. Due to a car accident, she is three years older than her classmates. Dani worries about her job prospects since college isn't an option. Instead, she raps, beat-boxes, and dreams of working with Nicki Minaj. Since she has trouble making friends, her mother encourages her to do volunteer work, putting her in contact with other LGBT young people. Kris is a visual artist who wears hats and ear plugs in order to minimize audiovisual stimuli. Her paintings bring in a modest income in addition to her Social Security payments, but she has a hard time making ends meet, and

faces eviction during the course of the film (the co-directors don't provide details about the cause of her injury). Brandon attended Bible college in hopes of becoming a worship leader, but dropped out after a truck driver crashed into a car he was riding in. Now, he lives in a rehabilitation center where he receives the support he needs, but longs for greater independence. Although he has lost some facial mobility, it hasn't hampered his ability to talk and sing. Unfortunately, an attempt to return to college didn't pan out, so he concentrates on making music. For all three subjects, art serves as a saving grace, although it's hard to predict whether any of them will ever be fully self-sufficient, due to memory and concentration issues. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Calvin, Zwingli, and Brother Klaus: Shapers of the Faith ★★★

(2017) 60 min. DVD: \$14.99. DRA. Vision Video (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Rainer Walde's ambitious but overstuffed historical documentary randomly jumps between the three titular figures from the 15th and 16th centuries who played a part in bringing the Protestant Reformation to Switzerland. St. Nicholas of Flüe, better known as Brother Klaus, was a hermit and mystic who left his wife and 10 children (as well as his farm and prior military career) to live a contemplative life, serving as a mediating voice to reduce escalating tensions between Catholics and emerging Protestants. Ulrich Zwingli was a Reformation leader who successfully challenged many Catholic traditions and practices, drawing the favorable attention of Martin Luther but nearly



The Messengers ★★★1/2

(2017) 70 min. DVD: \$17.99. DRA. Vision Video (avail. from most distributors).

To modern mainstream Christians, the early church would be almost unrecognizable, as followers were considered outlaws—persecuted, jailed, and sometimes killed as martyrs, while continuing to worship Jesus. Part of the animated *The Voice of the Martyrs* series, this episode focuses on the period after Jesus's Resurrection and Ascension, as Christians began to organize and the faith took an uncertain but steady hold in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Before leaving, Jesus promised his followers that the

Holy Spirit would soon visit the faithful and ignite their devotion and praise, inspiring believers to speak in tongues (a phenomenon in which a person spontaneously talks in a previously unknown language) during prayer meetings and spread the message to people in the street. But most of the stories here revolve around officials' efforts to stamp out the church and its members, told through the memories of the apostle James as an old man in captivity. James shares stories about his faith, actions, and experiences with his increasingly sympathetic captors. Through this narrative lens, the theme of how faith helped James and others endure persecution is powerfully demonstrated without ever becoming too heavy-handed for the target audience of younger viewers. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)

provoking a Swiss civil war. Finally, John Calvin—the founder of Calvinism and a man who acquired much authority over church matters (altering the liturgy and declaring others to be heretics)—cemented the Reformation in Switzerland. Unfortunately, it's hard to gain more than a few impressions or the most general sense of appreciation from this project that would have been better served if it were divided into several films. Optional. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES

10 Billion: What's on Your Plate? ★★1/2

(2015) 102 min. In English & German w/English subtitles. DVD: \$300. DRA. Film Platform (avail. from www.filmplatform.net). PPR.

Filmmaker Valentin Thurn's sobering, globetrotting documentary asks how will the teeming masses of the world be fed as the population continues to soar. The current mega-corporate domination of agriculture and livestock generates a lot of food—but only in the short term, viewers are told here. Genetically modified crops fail to revive for future harvests (which suits the companies, as desperate farmers must buy the same seeds over and over). And grazing lands must be reserved for cattle and poultry in wasteful and waste-producing large-scale operations. Possible answers include small de-centralized organic and sustainable farms and urban gardening (pro basketball player Will Allen's efforts are showcased), but aside from the high-tech hydroponics practiced in farmland-deficient Japan, corporations do not seem interested in being part of these solutions, and famine may well lie in the planet's future. Somewhat hobbled by miniscule subtitles that make non-English speakers hard to understand (along with the crucial points they make), this should still be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

The Abortion Hotline ★★★

(2016) 57 min. DVD: \$99.95: public libraries & high schools; \$350: colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 0-7815-1547-5.

Filmmaker Fernando López Escrivá's *The Abortion Hotline* offers a reminder that even where there is no avenue available for safe and legal abortions, some women will seek them out while others try to help. This tough-minded documentary focuses on Chile, where laws against abortion are the most extreme. Once liberal concerning abortion, Chile changed under the dictatorship of Pinochet, and those restrictions have remained absolute, outlawing abortions even in cases of rape, incest, or the compromised health of the mother. The documentary follows the work of pro-choice activists in an organization called Lesbians



Accidental Courtesy ★★★

(2016) 96 min. DVD: \$19.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Matt Ornstein's documentary profiles Daryl Davis, an African-American musician who performed alongside Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, among others. While the film features a few clips of his talented playing, the emphasis here is on his interesting avocation: inviting dialogue with white supremacists—such as Ku Klux Klan members—in order to encourage changes in attitude through personal contact and discussion. Background biographical information is presented largely through lengthy interviews with Davis: raised abroad, he became aware of racial animosity only after his return to the United States as an adolescent, and accidentally began his mission when, following a band gig, he was invited for a drink with an impressed listener who admitted that he had never talked to a black person before. That incident set Davis on the road to engaging members of white supremacist groups, some of whom—interviewed here, often with Davis—have left the movement, even donating their KKK robes to a collection that Davis proudly exhibits, sometimes at motivational speeches. Davis is not always successful, of course, and Ornstein includes footage of those who reject his approach (not just determined white racists but also representatives of the Southern Poverty Law Center, who consider his methods overly conciliatory, and adherents of the Black Lives Matter movement, who angrily describe his strategy as ridiculous). Regardless, it's hard to dismiss Davis's gregarious affability, and his plea for civility is certainly refreshing in our uncivil times. Extras include deleted scenes, interviews, cable news clips, Q&A clips, and a featurette on the film's SXSW Festival screening. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

and Feminists for the Right to Information, where young women put their lives at risk by running an underground hotline that serves thousands of desperate women who are inquiring about where to can get an illegal abortion or induce one at home. The group advocates the use of a drug called misoprostol, which is commonly proscribed for treating ulcers but can also induce abortions. In addition, the film captures acts of public advocacy, as well as guerrilla tactics such as plastering city walls with instructions for women about how to self-terminate a pregnancy. A sidebar on the black market for misoprostol offers an interesting look at the criminals and con-men providing relief, while Chile's ongoing debate over abortion gives some insight into the country's presidential politics. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Against the Tide ★★★

(2016) 52 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Nathalie Loubeyre's *Against the Tide* is a powerful documentary about European organizations that are dramatically drawing attention to the mass drownings of refugees from Senegal and Tunisia in the Mediterranean Sea. As feelings harden in Italy, Sicily, and elsewhere in Europe toward immigrants, official laws governing "boat people" (i.e., refugees attempting to reach Europe via overcrowded vessels) have become more inhumane, threatening anyone who gives travelers assistance—no matter how grave the circumstances—with possible criminal charges. The film focuses on a coordinated

effort by various activist groups, led by Boats4People, to make the world aware that at least 20,000 migrants have died at sea since the mid-1990s, sometimes under the eyes of coast guard ships or surveillance patrols that won't lend a hand. Here, the camera crew boards a Boats4People voyage that sails a typical route for refugees in anticipation of encountering some in need of aid. Along the way, viewers learn about the heartbreaking realities—including desperation and death—of people in search of a better life. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

All Eyes and Ears ★★★

(2015) 75 min. DVD: \$29.99: individuals; \$325: institutions. DRA. Outcast Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Jon Huntsman, former governor of Utah and a 2016 Republican presidential candidate, is reportedly slated to be Donald Trump's ambassador to Russia. Filmmaker Vanessa Hope's documentary centers on Huntsman's ambassadorship to China under Barack Obama from 2009-11, which was a natural fit since Huntsman speaks fluent Mandarin (he was once a Mormon missionary in Taiwan). *All Eyes and Ears* also emphasizes the experience of his daughter Gracie Mei, an abandoned infant whom the Huntsmans adopted from a Chinese orphanage in 1999. Gracie returned to her Chinese homeland with her parents, and the film offers fly-on-the-wall footage both of the ambassador fulfilling the duties of his post—negotiating with leaders, interacting with people on the street, taking a trip to Tibet—and of Gracie

reacquainting herself with the country of her birth. The juxtaposition of the political and the personal makes for a diverting portrait of a family in often challenging circumstances that they all handle quite deftly. One of the major demands of diplomatic service in China involves maintaining good relations with the government while also acknowledging protestors, a balancing act addressed here in the case of Chen Guangcheng, a blind dissident jailed for bringing legal action against the regime's one-child policy and kept under house arrest even following his release in 2010. Guangcheng eventually escaped, took refuge in the American embassy, and emigrated to the U.S.—although not until 2012, after Huntsman's resignation. *All Eyes and Ears* sometimes feels like a panegyric, but it's certainly an appealing portrait. Extras include additional scenes. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

All of Me ★★★

(2014) 90 min. In Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.99. Strand Releasing (avail. from most distributors).

Shot in the Mexican village of La Patrona, the haunting documentary *All of Me* centers on the region's semi-resigned, semi-rebellious women known as Patronas. Raised with hopes and dreams of their own, these women—generation after generation—have become lost in the quagmire of marriages to men they barely know, saddled with all-consuming child-rearing and exhausting field work (e.g. picking coffee beans) on top of domestic chores. One might expect them to be completely drained, but there's a fire inside the Patronas that comes from an unexpected sidebar to their lives: feeding a never-ending flow of Central American and Mexican hopefuls riding the rails in boxcars on their way to illegal immigration to America.

Cooking up large amounts of food that can be packed into plastic bags, the Patronas are caught on camera several times in a surreal drama, repeatedly handing off those bags to outstretched arms reaching from speeding trains. There is obvious danger to everyone involved, and flawless timing is required to get the meals to long rows of hungry migrants in this passionate political and humanitarian balancing act. Filmmaker Arturo González Villaseñor makes the point that thousands of such would-be immigrants disappear during their efforts to get to America, but for the Patronas, doing their bit for weary travelers keeps the fighting spirit alive inside them as well. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

Bars4Justice ★★1/2

(2015) 9 min. DVD: \$50: public libraries; \$150: colleges & universities. DRA. Third World Newsreel. PPR.

Hakeem Khaaliq and Queen Muhammad Ali directed and edited this short documentary, narrated by rapper Jasiri X, examining efforts to raise awareness in the wake of the killing of Michael Brown by a police officer in 2014. An opening title notes that since Brown's death, some 1,100 people in the United States have been killed by police. The Brown killing incited protests in Ferguson, MO, that lasted for several weeks, and garnered international attention. Jasiri X traveled to Missouri on the first anniversary of the incident to perform at a benefit concert organized by Talib Kweli (formerly of the hip-hop group Black Star). Other performers included activists such as Dr. Cornel West, and rappers Common and Pharoahe Monch. The concert attracted hundreds of attendees, who helped raise money to support Brown's family (the show was free but donations were solicited). Jasiri X also reflects on the subsequent St. Louis march during which

participants spoke out against police brutality and racial injustice. He says he knew arrest might be a possible result, and the police do indeed charge him with obstruction, place him in handcuffs, and transport him to a holding cell. The film abruptly ends at that point, with no further information about the money raised or whether additional protests took place, but this still serves as a good discussion starter about social justice. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennesy)

Defendant 5 ★★★1/2

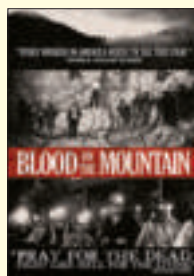
(2014) 30 min. DVD: \$26.95: public libraries; \$69 w/PPR: high schools; \$99 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Told from the perspective of filmmaker Heidi Douglas—who is the titular “Defendant 5” of the so-called Gunns 20 (a group of activists sued for \$8 million by the Gunns Limited logging company of Australia)—this documentary illustrates how the camera can serve as both a tool of activism and a trap. In 2001, Douglas began filming the harvest of some of the oldest-growth trees in the world (in Tasmania), documenting the health effects of logging on nearby communities, including respiratory issues reported by residents from the fine wood dust that was created by processing operations. Along the way, Douglas crossed the line from simply being a documentarian to becoming an activist. She was hired by Australia's The Wilderness Society to help build an emotional case against logging operations, including capturing scenes of clearcutting, the burning of large swaths of land, and the poisoning of wildlife. Her film work caught people's attention, sparking a familiar battle of environmental concerns vs. industry and jobs. Gunns launched a lawsuit that accused activists of conspiracy to harm the company—targeting members of The Wilderness Society and a local politician, among others. The protesting of logging operations brought people together, but the legal proceedings took on more of a personal nature—with many lacking the financial resources for an ongoing legal battle. In the case of Douglas, her footage was used by Gunns as evidence in their lawsuit against the 20. A powerful look at the personal costs of committed activism, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Block)

Blood on the Mountain ★★★1/2

(2016) 93 min. DVD: \$19.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Filmmakers Mari-Lynn Evans and Jordan Freeman's compelling documentary details the economic, ecological, and human damage created by reckless coal mining operations in West Virginia. Using a mix of archival footage, in-depth interviews with miners, and news reportage on the coal industry, the film looks at what happens when corporate ruthlessness is allowed to run amok. Much of the information here on the generational poverty that exists within coal country and the efforts by the mining companies to dilute the power of local unions will be familiar to those who have seen similar documentaries, most notably Barbara Kopple's Academy Award-winning masterwork *Harlan County USA* (VL-11/06). The filmmakers are especially skilled at documenting the occupational health problems that afflict the miners, as well as the wreckage that excessive mining has created on the state's environment—most tragically, the 1972 Buffalo Creek dam failure disaster that killed 125 and left more than 4,000 homeless. Also called to task here are West Virginia's politicians, whose allegiances are seemingly forged in coal company suites. A justifiably angry film about a continually debated subject, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)



From Flint: Voices of a Poisoned City

★★★1/2

(2017) 25 min. DVD: \$79: public libraries & high schools; \$149: colleges & universities. DRA. The Video Project. PPR. Closed captioned.

The factors that caused the recent water crisis in Flint, MI, are fairly well-known: Flint's government decided to save money by switching from a treated-water source to the untreated Flint River. The result was devastating, pushing contaminated water—full of lead and toxins—through taps and

Breaking Point ★★½

(2016) 98 min. In English, Ukrainian & Russian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$139; public libraries & high schools; \$289: colleges & universities. DRA. Dark Hollow Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Filling in many blanks for non-Ukrainians about what exactly happened in that perennially besieged nation over the last few years, filmmakers Mark Jonathan Harris and Oles Sanin's astonishing documentary presents edge-of-your-seat, you-are-there footage as thousands of protestors in Kiev gather in the city's center day and night for an extended period in 2014 to demand the removal of pro-Putin Ukraine president Viktor Yanukovich. The protest, sparked by a Facebook post and the pent-up frustration of Ukrainians who felt betrayed by Yanukovich's tilt toward Russia (an old oppressor and adversary of the country), was eventually met by violent security forces and bullets. Yet in the end, after much loss of civilian life, Ukraine's patriots prevailed, only to be attacked by the Russian military in Crimea and elsewhere. Harris and Sanin seem to be everywhere: in Kiev's bloodied Maidan Square, in a bombed-out airport where five Ukrainian soldiers attempt to fend off a larger group of heavily-armed Russians, and in a field where a Malaysian airliner mistakenly shot down lies in a pile of rubble. Footage from cell phones and dashboard cameras add to the sense of omnipresence. Along the way, viewers watch as a nation reinvents itself with a new army and police force, and they see ordinary people—an investigative reporter, a children's theater director—rising to meet the demands of a new era. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



fountains into homes, schools, and elsewhere. While children and adults found themselves mysteriously afflicted with rashes, seizures, hair loss, and problems affecting newborns, the city and Michigan state government maintained that Flint's water was safe, and evaded responsibility for poisoning residents while officially covering up data and test results. Filmmaker Elise Conklin's stinging documentary *From Flint* quickly reprises the situation before getting to its real purpose: meeting and hearing the story from ordinary people among Flint's population of 100,000. These are folks whose families were made seriously ill; whose households received one rationed case of bottled water per day from the city for drinking, cooking, and bathing; and who can't move away from Flint because the homes they own no longer have value. Watching this film is like going to a community meeting and encountering your flesh-and-blood neighbors instead of reading about faceless victims of an unconscionable scandal. Viewers hear from a handful of individuals who are either struggling or trying to help on a number of fronts, a mix that leaves one sickened and outraged, yet also heartened by the organized goodwill of ordinary people. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

I Voted? ★★★

(2015) 76 min. DVD or Blu-ray: \$75; public libraries & high schools; \$250: colleges & universities. DRA. Tugg. PPR.

The case of Alvin Greene—an unknown candidate who won the South Carolina Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate in 2010—led documentary filmmaker Jason Smith to look into allegations made by Vic Rawl, his primary opponent, that the result had been tainted by faulty voting machines.

Interviews with Rawl, along with state officials and proponents of election reform led Greene to broaden the investigation to include similar irregularities nationwide, and his findings are troubling. After the brouhaha surrounding Florida's "hanging chads" in the 2000 presidential election, Congress passed legislation encouraging states to modernize the process by purchasing new voting equipment, but the machines that vendors sold (and their software) were already outdated and unreliable. Smith interviews state and federal officials who acknowledge the need to ensure the integrity of the electoral process but seem unable to provide the resources needed to fix it, or even to agree that federal oversight would be appropriate. Even more tellingly, he visits technical experts who doubt that any machine can currently be devised that would completely eliminate the possibility of hacking (they also doubt the potential for Internet voting). Presented in the genial-essay style of Michael Moore and Morgan Spurlock, *I Voted?* addresses a serious and timely national issue in an agreeably homespun, non-hectoring way. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

Out Run ★★★

(2016) 75 min. DVD: \$95; public libraries; \$325: colleges & universities. New Day Films. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-57448-426-7.

According to this documentary, the Ladlad political party in the Philippines is globally unique for being formed and run by LGBT individuals. But the struggles of Ladlad captured here prove to be a cautionary tale about trying to finesse an election by papering over issues that divide one's base from everyone else. Having failed to secure any wins in a 2010 congressional election, Ladlad regrouped and

runs three nominees for 2013—among them a gay man (or "bakla," as gays are sometimes called in the conservative Catholic country) and a transgender woman. Attempting to form alliances with political centrists while assuming that the LGBT community will automatically unite behind Ladlad, the party's candidates eschew controversial issues such as marriage equality and bathroom rights in order to push a more generically appealing anti-discrimination platform. *Out Run* follows the campaign as this dubious strategy plays out, although filmmakers S. Leo Chiang and Johnny Symons are often distracted by the glittery, self-congratulatory identity politics of transgender and transsexual Ladlad supporters. While the nominees are met with a fair amount of goodwill on the street, anti-LGBT bigotry is never far away, and certain traditions of small-scale election season corruption (such as paying poor people for their votes) are an obstacle. In the end, the election results remind both the Ladlad bosses and the audience that when it comes to politics, a platform that tries to appeal to everyone rarely inspires loyalty. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Political Animals ★★★

(2016) 86 min. DVD: \$16.99, Blu-ray: \$19.99. Gravitas Ventures (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Once the camel's nose got into the tent, says former California legislator Carole Migden, the rest of the beast began to follow. In this case, the "camel" was anti-discrimination laws in California protecting gays and lesbians from biases that today seem unconscionable, but were standard not that long ago. *Political Animals* is a powerful documentary about four lesbian members of the California assembly who united to take on discrimination and faced a long, uphill battle to success, gradually accelerating progress for gay rights as the movement gained wider acceptance. Director Jonah Markowitz reunites Migden with the indomitable Sheila Kuehl, a former actress who lost her role on the 1950s-'60s hit television sitcom *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* due to her sexual orientation, reinventing herself as a Harvard Law School graduate with political aspirations. Along with Christine Kehoe and Jackie Goldberg—the latter a veteran of the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley, and still suffering from a permanent back injury from a police beating—Migden and Kuehl led the way during the 1990s to gain legal protection for gay kids who were bullied, beaten, and humiliated at schools. Archival footage of floor speeches in the assembly over a decade show all four lawmakers making the case again and again to give gay children some shielding, only to be rebuffed by opponents who linked homosexuality with pedophilia and bestiality. But over time, viewers witness the emergence of straight allies in the assem-

Fire at Sea ★★★

(2016) 108 min. In Italian w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$349 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber.

The tiny Mediterranean island of Lampedusa—lying midway between Libya and Sicily—is the setting for Gianfranco Rosi's Oscar-nominated documentary, which contrasts the plight of desperate refugees from Africa (who are rescued from leaky boats and brought to island camps) with the quiet lives of local residents. Although *Fire at Sea* includes footage of Italian naval operations launched to save those clinging to sinking vessels, together with recollections from some refugees in the camps, much of the focus is on Samuele Puccillo, a 12-year-old boy who gets seasick on his father's fishing boat, and spends most of his time with his best friend, playing games involving slingshots and imaginary guns—seemingly untouched (like most of his elders) by the catastrophe occurring around him (a reflection of many for whom the refugee crisis seems remote). The film also spotlights another local: Dr. Pietro Bartolo, who has taken on the duty of treating not only his regular patients like Samuele, but the refugees as well. The photos that he shares with the filmmaker—one of a boy not much older than Samuele covered with burns—along with his sorrowful stories of the horrors he has witnessed bring home the reality of a disaster that the West has largely chosen to ignore. Still, there are rays of hope here, such as when the doctor shows a pregnant refugee a sonogram of her unborn twins. Doctor and patient have trouble communicating, but the information—and the film's larger message—is conveyed quite effectively. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



bly, leading to the passage of a student bill, ultimately followed by domestic partnership protections bills, and more. Throughout the film, the four women look back on how they patiently played the hard ground game to change hearts and minds. A stirring, encouraging film reminding viewers that it sometimes takes a long painful time for social change to happen, this is recommended. [Note: this is also available with public performance rights on DVD for \$125 for public libraries and \$350 for colleges and universities from The Video Project, www.videoproject.com.] Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

A Small Good Thing ★★★

(2016) 72 min. DVD: \$29.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$349 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber. Closed captioned.

Filmmaker Pamela Tanner Boll's initially tepid but ultimately meaningful documentary focuses on a handful of people who are trying to live more principled lives in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts. Boll introduces us to several military veterans who left the service either damaged or yearning for family and community; one finds relief through cycling and revisiting his Native American roots, while another takes up sustainable farming along with his wife. A pastor's spouse overcomes her introversion by working with kids in a program called Youth Alive, while a yoga teacher conquers his restive nature through his practice and becomes a better father in the bargain. There are a few others in the mix, and while the film seems weak early on at making these folks seem three-dimensional, it becomes increasingly

relevant when they begin to intersect in each other's lives. Eschewing the "more is better" philosophy, the interviewees here also struggle with finding a balance between values and survival. When a vegetarian farmer, who is visibly anxious but in need of chickens, goes to a poultry grower, Boll doesn't shrink from capturing the moment when several free-range birds are slit across the throat. But this same chicken farmer wrestles with his conscience when it comes to killing pigs. And there's an inspiring sequence in which some of the interviewees volunteer to go to Rwanda to teach updated farming techniques. Extras include deleted scenes. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

The Stand-By Generation ★★1/2

(2016) 19 min. In Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$60; public libraries; \$200: colleges & universities. DRA. Third World Newsreel. PPR.

In 2006, Puerto Rico suffered an economic crisis more severe than any in the country's history, adding up to a national debt estimated at 73 billion dollars in 2016. This has created a bleak situation for the titular "stand-by" generation, many of whom—despite a college education and advanced degrees—have put their dreams on hold. This brief documentary offers a glimpse into the lives of two affected young people who are trying to find their way despite hardships. One is director Juan C. Davila, an employee of a Sam's Club, who struggles with a work schedule that may be 20 hours one week and just a handful the next. His employers told him, "you signed a contract and now your time has become ours." The other is Dávila, a weightlifter, who is also politically active as

a municipal legislator in Moca as a member of the Puerto Rican Independence Party. The individual sketches are compelling, but the film only hints at vital topics (student strikes, attempts at organized labor formation, and other protests) that would have presented a deeper understanding of the wider effects on the stand-by generation. A strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (C. Block)

Sunú ★★★

(2015) 85 min. In Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.95; individuals; \$100: public libraries; \$250: colleges & universities. EPF Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-930545-87-8.

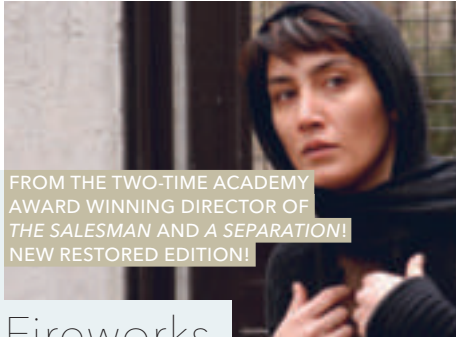
Americans aren't the only ones with a grudge against NAFTA. Filmmaker Teresa Camou's low-key yet revealing documentary *Sunú* takes viewers into the hardscrabble world of corn (or "maize") growers in Mexico. The focus is not on factory farms that grow cheap yellow corn to be imported to the U.S. and sold back, after processing, to Mexican consumers (an ironic twist courtesy of trade agreements), but rather on the narrow world of indigenous family farmers in Mexico who raise, against great odds, multi-colored, healthy corn for their own consumption. While much of the story is told without comment or only a few words from the sometimes self-conscious farmers, the personal relationship between the people and their homegrown food source is clear and powerful. The farmers, their spouses, and children are all involved in growing corn to turn into tortillas—a huge part of their diet. This practice has gone on for eons, but as with many traditions regarding food, this one is under threat from climate change, an infestation of GMO seeds, and a consumer culture that has become so fixated on processed foods that the Mexican government regards hand-to-mouth family farmers as irrelevant. *Sunú* serves as both a celebration of our essential relationship with the Earth and a warning that we have ceded food production to corporations. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Surire ★★★

(2015) 80 min. In Spanish & Aymara w/English subtitles. DVD: \$100; public libraries; \$250: colleges & universities. EPF Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-930545-42-7.

Set in the Surire Salt Flat in the high desert of Chile, this often mesmerizing documentary serves up a fever-dream study of old and new worlds on the country's border with Bolivia. The Chilean side is a UNESCO biosphere reserve in which flamingos, rheas, some sort of jackrabbit, and other exotic animals pass before the camera. On the other is a borax mining operation that leaves the land bald, constantly assaulted by earth movers and trucks. The entire region shared by the two countries spreads endlessly—as far as the eye can see—and filmmakers Bettina Perut and Ivan Osnovikoff present it through lengthy scenes with no cuts. Flattened by the enor-

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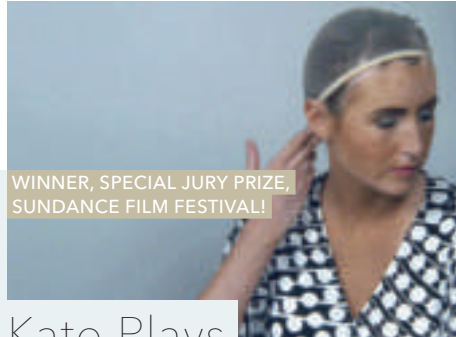
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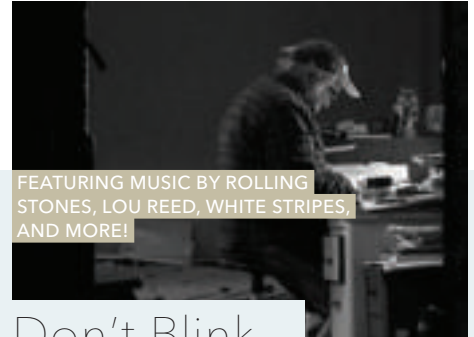
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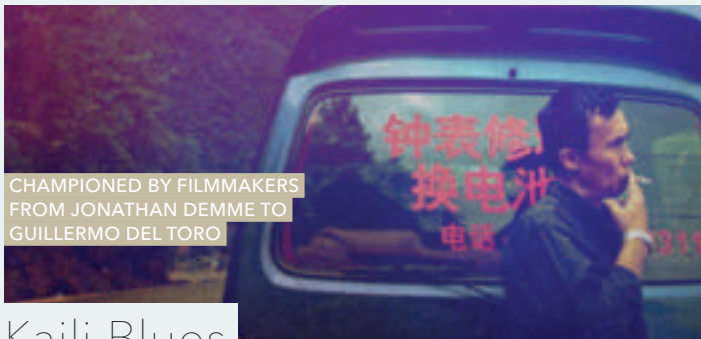
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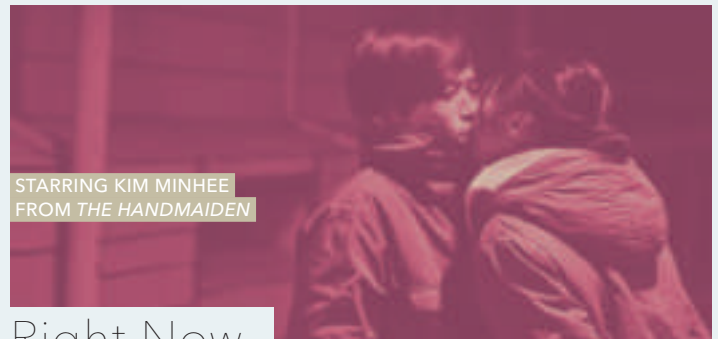
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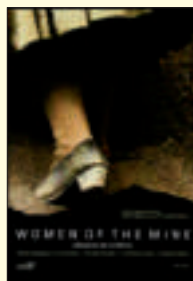
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Women of the Mine ★★★

(2014) 63 min. In Spanish & Aymara w/English subtitles. DVD: \$100; public libraries; \$250; colleges & universities. EPF Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-930545-32-8.

Filed against the grey and chalk-white backdrop of Cerro Rico—a cold and forbidding mining community in Potosi, Bolivia—the harsh life of widows and other lone women trying to survive and care for their children is at the center of *Women of the Mine*. Filmmakers Malena Bystrowicz and Loreley Unamuno begin with a slow and deliberate orientation into a world in which young kids weave their way downhill and through narrow passages between boulders to get to school. Mothers are up before sunrise to take care of housework before spending their days seeking rocks that they can strip-mine for tin. About midway, the narrative expands to tell a history of the miners' labor union and its struggles during Bolivia's hellish years of military authoritarianism. It turns out that some of the women of Cerro Rico were deeply involved in keeping the union strong, and when it was time to lead a protest that helped topple the government, those same women were on the frontlines. Yet, as powerful and moving as that victory was, life isn't easier for the survivors living in perpetual chill and dust. The men still die in mining accidents or from lung disease, and their wives have no choice but to take up shovels and hammers. A tale of personal courage on the part of people who are trapped in a generational cycle of poverty, illness, and death, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)



mous distance, these images effectively reveal the scale in which life and activity play out: the mining vehicles look tiny, almost alien, while desert creatures parade through waves of rising heat. Above all are the minuscule human subjects, elderly members of the Aymara who walk the crooked dusty paths to find wood for burning or to watch the miners. The local Aymara are reportedly roughly 2,000 in number, living quite remotely while shepherding their llamas and barely surviving in stone and stucco huts. When an invitation comes for two Aymara to join an elder's council on New Year's Day in Putre, Chile, the subsequent effort to compensate a Bolivian boy for looking after their llamas adds a ripple of drama. *Surire* reminds us that there is so much otherworldliness in this world we think we know—it captures a haunting landscape filled with strange beauty and mystery. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

EDUCATION

Tested ★★★

(2016) 73 min. DVD: \$79; public libraries, \$299; colleges & universities. Bull and Monkey (avail. from www.testedfilm.com). PPR. Closed captioned.

New York City has over 400 public high schools, three of which are “world class” with graduates including a large number of famous achievers who’ve won loads of awards in their professional lives. It’s no wonder that parents clamor to get their bright children into these places, or at least into one of a secondary group of specialized schools that recognize a student’s emerging skill set. All of the other schools—the “ordinary” ones—are where everyone else goes. The navigation of

this educational food chain is at the center of filmmaker Curtis Chin’s *Tested*, a documentary about the brutal process of preparing thousands of potential enrollees in New York’s middle schools for tests to gain admittance to top-drawer high schools. While the film focuses on several families from a variety of neighborhoods reflecting racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural diversity, it also demonstrates how numerous factors come to bear on the prospect of earning a great education. For parents who were prevented from meeting their own educational goals as kids, the opportunities for their own children represent balance and redemption. For moms and dads who believe that one should simply choose the best school program for sons and daughters, testing forces them to recognize that competition leads to quality. Chin follows his subjects over months of preparing for the big exam, and catches up afterwards, when acceptance and rejection letters start to roll in. Although the issues of immigration, segregation, and economic inequality hang over the film, it also holds out hope that things will change for the better with a well-prepared next generation. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

LAW & CRIME

Murder Rap: Inside the Biggie and Tupac Murders ★★½

(2016) 114 min. DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$27.99. FilmRise (avail. from most distributors).

Since the murders of hip-hop stars Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur have already been explored extensively in films like Nick Broomfield’s 2002 *Biggie & Tupac* (VL Online-7/03),

Mike Dorsey’s documentary feels somewhat redundant. Still, armchair investigators are sure to find plenty of interesting evidence here, including emergency calls, surveillance footage, and interrogation recordings. Dorsey draws from retired LAPD homicide investigator Greg Kading’s 2011 book *Murder Rap: The Untold Story of the Biggie Smalls & Tupac Shakur Murder Investigations*, briefly sketching out the artists’ careers before proceeding through the events that exacerbated their rivalry, many involving Sean “Diddy” Combs (Bad Boy Entertainment), Suge Knight (Death Row Records), their bodyguards, and gang members who floated around the periphery. The artists also made defamatory statements about each other at awards shows and on studio tracks such as Biggie’s “Who Shot Ya?” and Tupac’s “Hit ‘Em Up.” Tupac attended the Mike Tyson fight at Las Vegas’s MGM Grand in 1996, and was murdered later that night. A year later, after the Vibe Awards, Biggie was killed. At the time, off-duty cops were implicated in both deaths, but Kading offers insights that contradict that theory, suggesting that Tupac was murdered by a member of the Crips and that Biggie was killed by a Knight associate. Other interviewees include author Cathy Scott (*The Murder of Tupac Shakur*) and Reggie Wright Jr., former head of security for Death Row. Since the cases remain unsolved, more books and documentaries seem likely to materialize in the future. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four ★★★

(2016) 91 min. DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95. FilmRise (avail. from most distributors).

Deborah S. Esquenazi’s film about a miscarriage of justice tells the story of the so-called San Antonio Four: lesbian couple Anna Vasquez and Cassandra Rivera, along with their friends Elizabeth Ramirez and Kristie Mayhugh. After Ramirez babysat her young nieces, the children accused all four of sexually abusing them. Despite a complete lack of physical evidence, the quartet were convicted in a trial in which homophobia, as well as some highly dubious medical testimony and suspicions of Satanic practices, played a role. The women were incarcerated for years before an independent Canadian researcher took an interest in their case and referred his findings to the Innocence Project of Texas. New evidence, along with a recantation by one of the girls, led to their ultimate release, although they still had to go through a torturous legal process to be fully exonerated. Esquenazi has smoothly edited extensive interviews with the women, their supporters, and other experts—along with archival footage—to tell the story. Viewers might wish that Esquenazi had been more forceful in questioning Javier Limon—Ramirez’s former brother-in-law—who probably coached the girls into making the original accusations because Elizabeth

had rejected his advances, and that the documentary had included interviews of the judges and prosecutors who conducted the trials. But while it fails to cover all sides, the film nevertheless presents a powerful and compelling brief on behalf of the San Antonio Four. Extras include additional courtroom footage and later interviews with the freed women. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Antarctica: Ice and Sky ★★★

(2016) 89 min. In French & English w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95. Music Box Films (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Luc Jacquet (*March of the Penguins*) takes viewers to the Antarctic for this portrait of French explorer Claude Lorius, whose six-decade exploration of polar glaciers, conducted over 20-plus expeditions, is credited with first demonstrating that climate change must be attributed to human activity. Combining English narration in the "voice" of Lorius (actually Michel Papineschi) with new and archival footage, the film recalls how a 23-year-old Lorius jumped at the oppor-

tunity to join a research team bound for Antarctica, subsequently spending a year in an underground chamber from which he mapped the land beneath the ice. Over the years, Lorius began to study snow crystals, which led to drilling into the ice and discovering that core layers revealed historical temperatures, which proved that while cycles of warm and cold eras occurred predictably until about a century ago, the rate of warming over the last hundred years markedly departed from the pattern and must therefore be ascribed to increased activity on the part of humankind. By allowing Lorius to recount his long polar adventure, Jacquet not only celebrates the man's contribution to the scientific understanding of the climatic realities that threaten the future of the planet but also captures his enthusiastic devotion to his life's work. Extras include a "making-of" featurette, a film festival Q&A with Jacquet, and a stills gallery. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

Baobabs: Between Land and Sea

★★★

(2015) 56 min. DVD: \$49: public libraries; \$99: high schools; \$225: colleges & universities. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Kids and adults who have enjoyed the

animated *Madagascar* movie series over the past dozen years know that the island of Madagascar—located off the Southeast coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean—is a scientific curiosity. That is because the remote nation harbors various species of animals and plants that evolved there exclusively, independent and apart from the influence of the nearby continent. Filmmaker Cyrille Cornu's documentary *Baobabs: Between Land and Sea* centers on a French ecological survey of the baobab, an upside-down-looking tree with a crown of branches that reminds one of entangled roots. The baobab appears in several varieties, but all share a bulbous trunk that, in some cases, is enormous and hollow. (At one point, a scientist, his translator, and a film crew step inside a gigantic trunk, where an entire family found shelter for a while.) Here, Cornu and Wilfried Ramahafaly explore Madagascar's coast by boat—relying on sailors from among the indigenous Vezo people to take them over rough currents—finding that not every baobab site is a happy one. Slash-and-burn agricultural policies in some regions have left a number of the trees deprived of their bark and suffering premature death. An intriguing, visually appealing ecological travelogue, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

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Planet Earth II ★★½

(2016) 2 discs. 350 min. DVD: \$35.99; Blu-ray: \$44.95. BBC Worldwide Ltd. (avail. from most distributors).

A decade ago, the BBC landmark series *Planet Earth* (VL-5/07) set a new bar for nature documentaries with its extraordinary scope and heretofore-unseen close-up footage of animals, birds, and insects all over the globe. While not quite the game changer that the first series represented, this sequel filmed in 40 countries over the course of 2,000-plus shooting days serves up oodles of amazing scenes. Where the original series ran for 11 episodes, *Planet Earth II* only has six—again geographically-themed, including “Mountains,” “Deserts,” “Grasslands”—and is once more narrated by Sir David Attenborough. Although the series features numerous (and mostly predictable) predator/prey sequences, it also regularly surprises viewers with interesting factual tidbits (saiga antelopes always give birth to twins, sea-going iguanas can hold their breath underwater for half an hour, etc.). Ultimately, however, the draw of *Planet Earth II* lies not in the words but rather the images, which include an eye-popping march of millions of red crabs, snow leopards in the Himalayas, flamingos (literally) on parade, flying draco lizards, a new species of river dolphin in a flooded forest in Brazil, luminescent fungi, a huge locust swarm, and the railroad worm (which is actually a caterpillar-like beetle with yellow and red lights on its body that it strategically controls). Perhaps the most interesting episode is the final one, “Cities,” which explores how animals have infiltrated and adapted to urban areas, including hand-fed hyenas in Ethiopia, and an Australian bowerbird whose nest—designed to attract potential mates—features human-made objects such as a shiny toy car and a cloth red heart. Each episode concludes with a “*Planet Earth Diaries*” featurette taking viewers behind-the-scenes of one or more of the filmed sequences. Also available in a 4K UHD edition for \$59.99, this is highly recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (R. Pitman)



a communal form of social organization. The second episode, “Into the Americas,” describes species that arose after cats crossed the land bridge that once joined Asia to North America and then went south—the lynx, ocelot, mountain lion, and many curious types of wild South American cats—before looking at the subject of domestication, which is traced to ancient Egypt. The skill for which cats were most prized—as mousers—has preserved their hunting instincts down to the present day, while their aloofness and cuteness has made them a YouTube sensation. Sure to appeal to cat fanciers, this is recommended. Aud: P. (F. Swietek)

Tulare: The Phantom Lake ★★½

(2014) 24 min. DVD: \$39.95. DRA. Green Planet Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Once the largest freshwater lake in the Western United States, Tulare Lake in California’s Central Valley at one time boasted 700 square miles of open water, but began shrinking during the 1860s in the wake of land reclamation and irrigation projects. By the early 1900s, the lake had disappeared completely, save for unusual weather events, such as a 1997 flood that reclaimed a number of fields (hence the “phantom lake” moniker). Now called the Tulare Lake Basin, the region is a patchwork of farming fields where some areas remain barren due to irrigation projects in the clay soil that leached salts to the surface, making the land uninhabitable for plants. With the rise of salt and heavy metals to the surface, some sections are no longer a haven for wildlife—or people. While there are presently no enduring solutions for the issues plaguing Tulare Basin, one land owner is engaged in a promising project to restore part of the lake and create a marsh. Ultimately, the film makes viewers think about the unintended consequences of decisions made a hundred years ago—and by extension how today’s decisions may affect things in the future. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Block)

Planetary ★★½

(2015) 2 discs. 84 min. DVD: \$350. Bullfrog Films. PPR. SDH captioned. ISBN: 1-941545-58-0.

Made as a contribution to the Earth Day events of 2015, Guy Reid’s documentary concerning the dangers posed to the planet by climate change is often visually stunning, but the accompanying talking-head interview excerpts grow increasingly repetitive and banal. Reid begins with observations by astronauts who attest that their view of Earth from space—shown in NASA footage—impressed upon them not only its fragility but the common mission of all humans to preserve it. This sense of responsible interconnectedness becomes the film’s motif as a large roster of commentators, scientists, and explorers (as well as others identified as “eco-philosopher,” “mindfulness teacher,” and “futurist”) offer bite-sized pronouncements about how we must all work together to reverse environmentally dangerous practices. Zen Buddhist teachers are prominent here, and their admonitions—along with those of Native Americans and yoga instructors—take *Planetary* further from the realm of scientific analysis and more into the area of spiritual exhortation. While the interviewees’ earnestness is genuine, the stream of “we are the world” platitudes ultimately grows tedious. While it likely served its purpose of rousing true believers on Earth Day, *Planetary* taken by itself comes across more as a combination of stern lecture and heartfelt sermon than a serious argument aimed at the unconverted.

Presented in its full-length version, along with 52-minute and 43-minute editions, extras include the short film “Overview” and a PDF study guide. A strong optional purchase. Aud: H, C, P. (F. Swietek)

The Story of Cats ★★★

(2016) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR), Blu-ray: \$29.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-875-1 (dvd), 978-1-62789-909-3 (blu-ray).

Filmmaker Anwar Mamon’s two-part PBS-aired *NATURE* documentary traces the evolutionary history of felines from their origin in Southeast Asia tens of millions of years ago to their current status as most-owned pet in America. But only the final minutes are devoted to various breeds of domestic cats; the lion’s share concerns the 40-plus species of wild cats that have adapted to different environmental circumstances over the centuries. The first episode, “Asia to Africa,” begins with the emergence of felines in the forests of Asia and their development of survival traits, including extraordinary agility, that have persisted throughout their evolutionary history. Employing gorgeous wildlife footage, often shown in slow-motion, the film briefly examines the various surviving types of Asian cats before following their movement over a once-existing land bridge into Africa, where new species evolved. Special attention is paid to lions—the only species of cat that abandoned a solitary mode of life and developed

HEALTH & FITNESS

The C Word ★★★

(2016) 93 min. DVD: \$24.99. Virgil Films (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Although Meghan O’Hara’s documentary was inspired by her own successful struggle with breast cancer, it is Dr. David Servan-Schreiber who emerges as the hero of this film. Diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor at 31, French physician Servan-Schreiber underwent surgery but, after a recurrence, he became a proponent of “Anticancer”—an integrative mode of prevention standing in contrast to common medical practices that emphasize drugs and radiation to combat disease. As presented in interviews with Ser-

van-Schreiber and footage of his TV lectures and book tours—as well as narration delivered by O'Hara and Morgan Freeman—the approach has four basic elements: nutrition, exercise, stress management, and avoidance of toxins. While some of the discussion sounds like common sense (the dangers of a sedentary lifestyle seem obvious), the film also deals with subjects such as the obesity epidemic triggered by overdependence on processed foods containing sugar and other ingredients that might be potential carcinogens. The notion that further governmental regulation of the food industry should be resisted on the grounds that it represents an infringement of individual liberty is countered by the Mississippi lawyer who was instrumental in ultimately forcing the tobacco industry to admit the dangers of their product (and led major tobacco companies to invest, ironically, in processed foods). Using graphs, animation, and pop culture clips (including excerpts from comic Jim Gaffigan's standup routine), *The C Word* combines Servan-Schreiber's story with O'Hara's to make a powerful argument regarding contemporary health hazards. Extras include related featurettes. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Is Sugar the New Fat? ★★ ★

(2016) 44 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199.99 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

Eating a fun-size Butterfinger candy bar was maybe a mistake while watching filmmaker Cameron Bennett's New Zealand-produced documentary on the perils of sugar. Presented by psychologist and author Nigel

Latta, the film features expert Robert Lustig, who vehemently denounces processed foods as being "poisoned" with sugar, noting that "it's time to change the paradigm." Vignettes find Latta visiting a store and examining labels to see just how much sugar is in foods he normally buys (with some surprises); talking with food technologists who say that sugar helps offset other costs; interviewing a young urban sugar addict; and getting his own health checked (with unexpected results). A nutritionist, a dentist, and Katherine Rich of the New Zealand Food and Grocery council (who doesn't think government should step in but that people should step up because "the choice you make will have an impact on your life") weigh in, while personal stories are also included touching on a school offering better food choices to their students and a woman whose health improved with moderation. Offering an eye-opening but not terribly shocking look at the link between sugar and health, this is recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Mimi & Dona ★★ ★

(2015) 56 min. DVD: \$95; public libraries; \$199; community colleges; \$350; colleges & universities. New Day Films. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-57448-423-6.

Sophie Sartain's PBS-aired *Independent Lens* documentary looks at elder care from one family's perspective. Sartain's 64-year-old aunt, Dona, who has an intellectual disability, lives with her 92-year-old mother, Mimi. Sartain, who resides in Los Angeles, suspects that Dona might also have undiagnosed au-

Hero with a Thousand Faces ★★ ★

(2016) 89 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

The 2014 Ebola crisis in West Africa and the world's response are addressed in filmmaker Joel Clark's documentary, which celebrates the heroism of those who endangered themselves to fight the epidemic, and praises the efforts made by some in the political and medical communities to educate people about the global implications of the outbreak, as well as marshal needed international resources. Numerous individuals are interviewed here, including brave locals who initially fought the spread of the disease with very limited means, but the emphasis is placed on Carrie Jo Cain, an American nurse who went to Sierra Leone—the center of the epidemic—and Dr. Kent Brantly, who became infected and was brought back to the United States for treatment (which was ultimately successful). Their comments are integrated into expertly edited news footage that provides context for the outbreak, including relevant scientific data. Brantly's reaffirmation of his dedication to his responsibility as both doctor and human being is unquestionably inspiring, and the comments of Cain's husband and daughters, who obviously regretted her long absence but supported her decision (and are shown in home movies enjoying her occasional return visits), are also uplifting. As counterpoint to these profiles in courage, Clark periodically includes clips from alarmist commentators on cable news programs (as well as segments from satirists such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert ridiculing them). The Shakespeare quotations that serve as transitions feel a bit intrusive, but overall the film effectively illustrates how a crisis can bring out the best and worst in people, while also noting that similar outbreaks are likely to recur—so we would be wise to learn the lessons of this one. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



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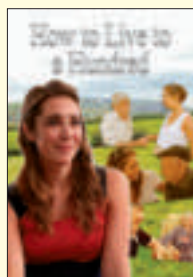
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How to Live to a Hundred ★★

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

Sunny Welsh-Italian cook Michela Chiappa hosts this documentary in which she visits her ancestral lands to explore the reasons behind longevity for a variety of interviewed centenarians. In Wales, Chiappa attends the birthday party of 105-year-old Doris (whose favorite breakfast is "a bit of toast"), meets two other 100-plusers, checks in with 31-year-old overweight Lee (who describes his health as a "ticking time bomb"), and talks with aging expert Professor Vanessa Berholt. Chiappa also heads to Sardinia (home to many 100-year-olds), visits with molecular biologist Gianni Pes, tours a rustic peasant farm, and eats with a traditional family who create everything they consume from scratch. Along the way, Chiappa explores reasons for longevity that include more strenuous work, wholesome nutrition, and having a purpose in life, although the most important facet noted here is good social support. As Doris says, "if you got your family with you, you got some backbone." True dat. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)



tism. Sartain also believes that her son could be on the autism spectrum (a suspicion that is confirmed during the film). Although Mimi is doing well, the family worries about what will happen to Dona after Mimi passes away. Sophie's brother, Bo, is concerned that Dona has never learned to do anything for herself, because Mimi has always seen to every detail. Bo also worries about the potentially long wait lists for care facilities that Mimi initially disdains but reconsiders once Dona's condition worsens. The family chooses the Denton State School, which admits residents with IQs of 72 or less, and they help Dona to prepare for the move, but question whether she understands what's going on (after they get Dona settled in, she tries to leave with them). Once back home, Mimi has regrets, but visits regularly. At first the women make adjustments, but then Dona's health deteriorates further, and doctors diagnose her with Alzheimer's. After Mimi breaks her hip, she also moves to a residential facility, and the rest of the film tracks the family's involvement in their care. This is an undeniably sad film, but it would be considerably more so if Mimi and Dona didn't have such a caring support system. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Mission to Lars ★★1/2

(2015) 78 min. DVD: \$24.99: individuals, \$99: high schools & public libraries; \$349: colleges & universities. First Pond Entertainment. PPR.

For most of his life, Tom Spicer, who has Fragile X Syndrome (a form of autism), has lived in a British care facility. His siblings, Cathy, a journalist, and Will, a filmmaker, decide to document Tom's quest to meet Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich in a bid to get to know their brother better (Cathy produced the film, while Will directed with James Moore). Their parents are encouraging, but warn them that Tom doesn't deal well with change. Cathy eventually establishes the necessary connections, but things get off to a bad start when Tom goes missing on the day they

plan to pick him up; since they didn't arrive on time, he changed his mind about the trip. Once their stepmother Jane talks Tom back into it, the siblings fly to Los Angeles and rent an RV for the drive to Las Vegas. But once there, Tom doesn't feel up to meeting Lars, so Cathy goes to the show, while Will and Tom watch TV and attempt to do laundry. Next, they're off to Sacramento. After talking to Jane and a Fragile X expert, Tom does go to the second show, watching with headphones from the back of the stage, since he doesn't do well with crowds or excessive volume. They finish up in Anaheim where Tom finally feels ready to meet his hero. This is the fulfillment of a 10-year dream, so the film ends on a positive note, although it's hard to tell if the siblings are closer than they were before. As they all return to their separate lives, there's a sense that nothing has really changed. Still, this feel-good road trip doc should be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

We Regret to Inform You ★★★

(2015) 12 min. DVD: \$79. National Film Board of Canada. PPR.

This Canadian documentary short wittily takes on Canada's national pension plan, specifically the program's penchant for rejecting 60% of disabled applicants who are trying to receive disability benefits. At the center of filmmaker Eva Colmers's *We Regret to Inform You* is co-director Dr. Heidi Janz, a university professor with profound disabilities who was recently released from her teaching position because of budget cuts. Demoted to an adjunct professor (she keeps an office for writing but receives no income), Janz undergoes a complicated regimen every morning in preparation for her day that involves a couple of assistants who get her through the most basic self-care functions. From there, Janz meets with a dramaturge about a play she is writing, and then heads for her office computer. Janz's level of ambition and accomplishment (despite enormous problems

speaking clearly) underscore the preposterous irony of the government's rejection of her disability claim: Canada has decided that Janz is too smart and too functional to get the help that she so obviously and desperately needs. An insightful short about inadequate definitions of disability, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

CHILDBIRTH & PARENTING

Future Baby ★★★

(2016) 91 min. In English, German & Spanish w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$300. DRA. Film Platform (avail. from www.filmplatform.net). PPR.

Filmmaker Maria Arlamovsky takes a low-key, global-picture look at modern, medical-assisted baby-making. As one interviewee puts it, what would have been considered science-fiction a few decades ago is now commonplace. Potential mothers who seem to be past birthing age, same-sex couples, or practically anyone, can now achieve offspring, via in-vitro fertilization, paid surrogate mothers, and agencies claiming to represent premium-quality sperm and ovum (donors look like showroom-supermodels in their computer profiles; most are struggling students earning their way through college). People now behave as though reproduction is an entitlement, says bioethicist Carmel Shalev. The overall impression given here is of a union between business and science that is advancing too fast for laws, healthcare, and an understanding of the consequences to keep pace. Some grown children resulting from such treatments now find themselves stonewalled as to the identity of their biological parents—who might even have been long dead at the time their frozen seed was purchased. Also interviewing authors Anna Smajdor and Miriam Zoll, the film travels from the U.S. to Vienna, Israel, and Mexico to offer an interesting look at the science and ethics of cutting-edge human reproduction. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

Growing Up Coy ★★★1/2

(2016) 82 min. DVD: \$29.99: individuals; \$325: institutions. DRA. Outcast Films. PPR. Closed captioned.

Coy Mathis, a 6-year-old transgender girl living in a conservative Colorado town, just wants to live a normal life. Her parents, Jeremy and Kathryn, are doing everything they can to help her. Filmmaker Eric Juhola's *Growing Up Coy* documents their efforts to ensure that Coy's school treats her like any other girl. Since Coy, born a boy, identified as a girl from an early age, they encouraged her to move in that direction, especially after their attempts to do otherwise were met with extreme discomfort. They also take her to a child psychologist and a support group, where they find more encouragement than judg-

ment. At first, Coy's school is supportive, but later decides that Coy can't use the girl's bathroom. Jeremy and Kathryn, who have four other children, then begin to home school the whole group. And they reach out to the Transgender Legal & Defense Education Fund in New York, which files a complaint with the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, since discrimination against transgender people is illegal in the state. Fund founder Michael Silverman helps them prepare for the fight, beginning with a press conference, which leads to appearances on news programs across the world. Some pundits praise the family, others do not (CNN goes so far as to remove the more hateful comments from their website). But after awhile, the negative attention begins to grind the family down. Says Jeremy, "You shouldn't have to move somewhere to have basic rights," but circumstances will force their hand. The marriage suffers, but the case establishes a precedent that will benefit other transgender children in Colorado and beyond. A sobering documentary about the challenges and rewards involved in the transgender struggle for equal rights, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennesy)

RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY

Memories of a Penitent Heart ★★★

(2016) 72 min. DVD: \$99; public libraries; \$349: colleges & universities. DRA. Good Docs (avail. from www.gooddocs.net). PPR.

Documentary filmmaker Cecilia Aldarondo courageously explores a forbidden family secret in *Memories of a Penitent Heart*, which tells the story of her uncle, Miguel Dieppa, a gay man who died of AIDS complications in the 1980s. Having met Dieppa only once

while she was young, Aldarondo has only the sketchiest of memories regarding his partner, a man named Robert. Pressing her mother, Nylda (Miguel's sister), for details, Aldarondo fills in a few blanks about Dieppa's life and eventually locates Robert, who is now a priest named Father Aquin. Aquin speaks with the director about Dieppa and the "hatred" that his dead lover's family harbored because they felt shame, given their conservative Puerto Rican and Catholic roots. To her credit, Aldarondo wants to know more than just what happened to her uncle and Robert; she also tries to better understand her grandmother, Carmen (with whom Miguel frequently argued—via letters—about his sexuality and God's love), her grandfather (who might have been a closeted gay man himself) and Nylda, who walked a fine line when Dieppa was alive, trying to save him and herself at the same time. Even as Aldarondo relentlessly probes this buried tale, she never forgets that she's making a film, drawing on strong visual metaphors to comment upon the universality of Dieppa's tragedy. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Oriented ★★★

(2015) 80 min. DVD: \$375. Grasshopper Film. PPR.

What is it like to be a gay Palestinian living in occupied territory where people are already seen as the "other"? Filmmaker Jake Witzenfeld's interesting, fly-on-the-wall documentary centers on a trio of gay Arabs for whom life under Israeli rule is a mixed bag: one can choose to be free of ideology, but there is no escaping the fact of occupation. The three twentysomething friends—Khader, Fadi, and Naim—cope with this issue while trying to enjoy their lives and grow. The most extroverted, Khader, speaks

publicly about gay rights while living with a Jewish boyfriend and enduring air raids together. The more introspective Fadi worries that he might fall for a Jew who could seem oblivious to the Palestinian situation. Naim, the only one of the three who hasn't come out of the closet to his family, vaguely but insistently tries to tell his pained, confused parents that he needs to move all the way to Tel Aviv to attain a "freedom" that he can't explain. Between these dramas, the guys hit nightclubs, party, and attend a rock concert in Jordan, and Khader and his partner decide on a long holiday in Berlin—only to be reminded by Fadi that Islamophobia is rampant in Europe as well. For some, true freedom can still only be a state of mind. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

FOOD & SPIRITS

Cooking at the World's End ★★★

(2017) 94 min. In Spanish w/English subtitles. DVD: \$24.95. Film Movement (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Director Alberto Baamonde's Spanish-language culinary documentary explores the world of the chef collective Grupo Nove, a charismatic group of experts with numerous Michelin stars between them, all centered in the Galicia provinces of Spain. Combining interesting shots of food preparation, bubbling dishes, dribbled sauces, eagle-eyed workers, and grinning patrons, *Cooking at the World's End* features a meeting of members to discuss their mission and mull over the requirements for new inductees, as well as trips to sources for the local products that gastronomes hold dear, including a rustic cattle ranch, a nighttime farm stop for perfect pea pods, and grape harvesting along craggy rocks. Other subjects include a Fraga Do Eume High School competition and the group's Decimo Anniversario. Cuisine devotees will likely appreciate this colorful and upbeat look at an association that shows respect for food culture, uniqueness, and quality. Recommended. Aud: P. (J. Williams-Wood)

Sustainable ★★★1/2

(2016) 92 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Among the many documentaries about the relationship between humans and our food sources, *Sustainable* stands out for being particularly optimistic. Filmmaker Matt Wechsler reminds viewers—through interviews with a number of agriculture experts—that it was only a half-century ago when nearly all food sources for Americans were locally grown on family farms, largely free of toxins and bio-engineering. Those traditions are therefore within living memory, and are being revived by today's "conven-

My Transgender Life: Male or Female? I Am Who I Am

★★★

(2017) 47 min. DVD: \$44.95. DRA. TMW Media Group. PPR.

The personal stories of seven transgender individuals ranging in age from 25 to 73 are at the center of this Canadian-produced documentary. *Male or Female? I Am Who I Am* places each interviewee in a "hot seat" as they explain their experiences of being transgender, seamlessly touching on topics including upbringing, stereotypes, challenges, family dysfunction, and being an outsider. While the takes are different (one says "I see it as a rebirth," another admits "I never knew I was 'trans' until someone put that name on me," and a third notes that "I believed I was mentally ill"), the stories carry similarities, including confusion, curiosity, family and partner reactions, coping skills (and not so great coping skills, including prostitution, black market street hormones, suicide attempts, and substance abuse), and physical changes to the body through chemistry and surgery, all shedding light on the many struggles involved. From a radio newscaster, to a retired teacher, to an aspiring nurse, nearly everyone winds up with some sort of positive note and hope for the future. A slice-of-life doc on a timely topic, this is recommended. [Note: also newly available from the *My Transgender Life* series at the same price is *Paul Wears Dresses*.] Aud: H, C, P. (J. Williams-Wood)



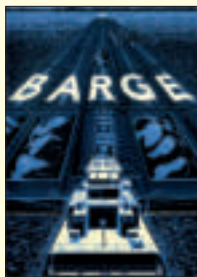
tional" family farmers. Although Wechsler enlists several famous chefs (including Rick Bayless and Dan Barber) and former *New York Times* food writer Mark Bittman to help build the case for small, organic farms playing a stronger role, most of the film focuses on the work of congenial Illinois farmer Marty Travis, whose success with a mere 160 acres is a model of remarkably productive, versatile, and profitable farming that begins with good stewardship of the soil and intelligent seasonal rotation of crops. But even more interesting is Travis's dedication to the needs and desires of food consumers in his own community and nearby Chicago. When Bayless loses a longtime source for a particular type of corn, for instance, Travis starts growing it for him. When Travis's son asks if they can revive the cultivation of maple syrup—a lucrative practice abandoned by Travis's parents during a hard time—the answer is yes. It's that kind of responsiveness that results in Travis supplying 300 restaurants and markets with his yields, and encourages him to create a cooperative with other struggling family farmers in the area. Wechsler's interviews with various researchers undercut myths that organic farming can never feed the entire world, while a scientist who had been a proponent of "big agriculture" in the 1960s now admits that it was a disastrous, community-destroying idea. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

How They Did It: Pathways to Amazing Jobs ★★★

(2016) 17 min. DVD: \$149.95 (teacher's guide included). Human Relations Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62706-083-7.

Geared towards grades 7 through college, this short features four real-life young professionals who offer information about the steps they took to achieve their current career goals. Pediatrician Sasha Gaglani decided early on that she wanted to be a doctor, tailoring her courses and internships to her chosen field, with an eye towards staying close to home and family. A composer of advertising spots, musician Gene Back relies on freelance assignments for his livelihood, which affords some flexibility but also carries the inevitability of rejection. A web editor for *Harper's Bazaar*, Chrissy Rutherford is basically on call at all times in order to quickly report on current events and trends. And investment manager Ted Shuey acknowledges that his work as a bond trader requires that he live in major financial hubs, but he enjoys networking and learning from coworkers. Topics covered include college experiences (including how a broader degree may help a person fine-tune their goals down the road), finding career services resources, and pros and cons of various jobs, along with other



Barge ★★★

(2016) 71 min. DVD: \$50 (\$125 w/PPR); public libraries; \$295 w/PPR; colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films. Closed captioned.

Do we not appreciate barges enough? A case for these 200-foot, flat-bottomed vessels playing an essential role in civilization is made by the captain of the *Mary Parker*, a towboat, which pushes along a dozen or so tightly-packed barges down the Mississippi River in filmmaker Ben Powell's low-key documentary. "When you get in your car, and you leave your driveway, guess what?" says the captain. "Concrete was probably in a barge. The tires you're rolling on, the petroleum to make them was in a barge.

Asphalt...that stuff was in a barge." He goes on to suggest that just about anything we can buy or use was once, in its original materials form, delivered somewhere by barge, and without these sometimes ugly carriers society would grind to a halt. Life as a captain or crew member has its insular pleasures: the men (and they are all men) aboard the *Mary Parker* submit to a rhythmic life of shift work with the hum of a powerful boat engine beneath their feet. Powell quickly recognizes that not a lot happens aboard a barge, aside from tasks designed to keep a lot of barges from drifting apart or crashing together. The workers live simply and leave behind domestic problems at home while on month-long trips. And the possibility for advancement is real: a six-figure income is not out of line for a veteran worker with a high school diploma. Powell doesn't make any statement here, but he is a good cultural anthropologist telling the story of a little noticed cog in the global wheel of commerce. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

helpful advice. Also featuring a PDF teacher's guide with activities, fact sheets, and learning objectives, this info-packed career guidance title is recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

COMPUTERS & TECHNOLOGY

Silicon Cowboys ★★★

(2016) 87 min. DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95. FilmRise (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Jason Cohen here recalls pioneers in the home-computer revolution who do not share the celebrity status/infamy of Bill Gates or Steve Jobs. Houston-based Compaq Computers was formed by a quartet of former Texas Instruments employees in 1981 who just wanted to strike out on their own (partnering on a Mexican restaurant was briefly considered). Their insanely great idea: making a "luggable" suitcased-sized portable PC that, like industry-leader IBM, ran Microsoft software—and, thanks to careful engineering, did it better than IBM. Leading the "clone" offensive, Compaq challenged IBM in the business marketplace, David-vs.-Goliath fashion, over a 10-year rollercoaster ride—at the end of which the original founders, despite their meteoric success, had either left the company or, in the case of media-friendly CEO Rod Canion, been fired (Compaq apparently lagged behind rivals like Dell in outsourcing manufacturing to cheap overseas labor, a footnote not really explored here). Viewers with fond memories of the 1980s digital revolution—when William Shatner, John Cleese, and even a Charlie Chaplin impersonator were pitchmen for the marvelous new machines—will find this to

be an agreeably nostalgic and entertaining (if also selective) slice of PC history. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

SPORTS, GAMES & RECREATION

Let's Get the Rhythm ★★★

(2014) 53 min. DVD: \$89; public libraries, \$350; colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

Girls worldwide play hand-clapping games using different rhymes to tell a wide array of stories. Director Irene Chagall speaks with participants and observers in America to solicit their thoughts on the subject. Nine-year-old Eve from New Jersey says, "I think clapping games are really fun, because you don't need anything but your hands." In these games, girls roughly aged 6-to-11 face each other and clap hands in groups of two, four, or more. In conjunction with modern-day scenes, Chagall includes grainy footage of girls from the 1930s through the '70s engaging in the same sort of games. Anthropologist Rafael Pérez Arroyo says that these clapping games have been around at least since the Paleolithic era. Kids appreciate the fact that they learn from each other rather than parents or teachers (nowadays some also study YouTube videos). Khadijah Shaheed, a community liaison, notes that there is no financial barrier to participating in clapping games, which for girls attending schools with scarce resources provide a constructive way to pass the time during recess. Although some songs reinforce gender stereotypes, the girls interpret the material as they choose, and many have endless variations. Enduring favorites include "Rockin' Robin," "Miss Susie Had a Steamboat," and "Miss

Mary Mack." Author Ellen Disayake points out that these games prioritize cooperation over competition, because things fall apart if one girl tries to sing or clap faster than the other (and that is one of the reasons, among others, that girls are more likely to gravitate towards clapping games than boys). Poets and musicians are also on hand to praise the musical and lyrical complexity of clapping games. An intriguing look at a longstanding cultural phenomenon, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (K. Fennessy)

We Must Go ★★★

(2016) 94 min. DVD: \$59.95 (\$250 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Dave LaMattina and Chad Walker's documentary focuses on the unlikely common ground between the Arab Spring political uprising and soccer mania. At the center of the film is Bob Bradley, the former U.S. Soccer manager recruited in September 2011 to take over leadership of the Egyptian National Soccer team. The hiring of an American manager was highly unusual from a sports perspective and a bit dicey from a political one—especially after unrest in Egypt saw the toppling of Hosni Mubarak's dictatorship in favor of a Muslim Brotherhood leadership that, in turn, was ousted in a military coup. Bradley avoided getting involved in politics and, to his credit, seemed to rise above the growing level of anti-Americanism that permeated Egypt during this tumultuous time. (Many Egyptians admired that he chose to live in their country and learn their language and customs.) Bradley's efforts were instead concentrated on bringing the Egyptian team to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the film details the training and strategies behind this difficult goal. Unfortunately, Egypt was eliminated by Ghana in the third-round playoffs of the qualification matches. But Bradley's insights regarding soccer and Egypt offers a unique perspective on contemporary Egyptian society. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Wizard Mode ★★★

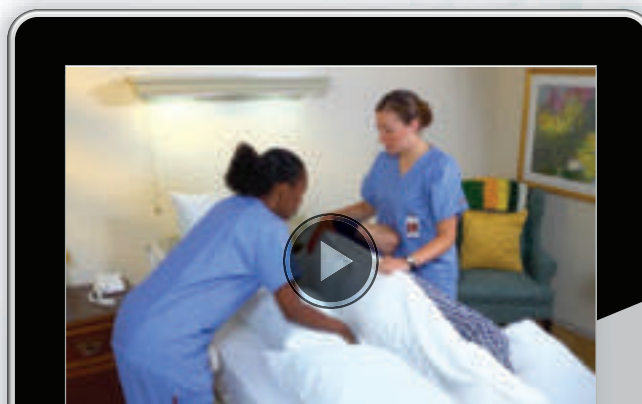
(2016) 97 min. DVD: \$50 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films. Closed captioned.

In the world of competitive pinball, Robert Gagno, a Canadian youth, is ranked among the top players, and here the camera follows him as he competes furiously in "Pinburgh"—the world's largest silverball face-off, held in Pennsylvania—to maintain or better his scores. Gagno's backstory is particularly interesting: born autistic, Robert did not even start speaking fully until the age of seven. A loner child, pinball has become his chief method of interacting with the world (although as a boy he did develop a habit of spontaneous hugging). Robert's nurturing parents have gifted him with

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The Business of Amateurs ★★★1/2

(2016) 89 min. DVD: \$29.95. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Director Bob DeMars, who played football for the University of Southern California but was forced to quit after suffering a serious neck injury in 2001, is clearly the right person to helm this documentary on the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the business of college sports. DeMars outlines how the NCAA generates billions of dollars annually while being largely indifferent towards the health risks faced by college athletes—particularly the degenerative brain disease “chronic traumatic encephalopathy” (CTE), which was detailed in the recent Will Smith film *Concussion*. DeMars profiles late CTE victims Scott Ross and Junior Seau—the latter died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound following the severe deterioration of his health. Also interviewed are Robert Cantu and Chris Nowinski of the Concussion Legacy Foundation, who provide cogent explanations of sports-based brain injuries. The film also examines how the NCAA ruthlessly prevents college athletes from having any share of the massive profits generated by college sports, and looks at the legal victory of UCLA basketball player Ed O’Bannon, who sued the NCAA for using his likeness without permission. Both harrowing and enlightening, this documentary should spark discussion about the ethical aspects of profit-based academic sports. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)



on a live stage presentation, “Harmontown,” that blended unrehearsed monologues, guests, and *Dungeons & Dragons* sessions—rallying even more self-declared misfits to his side. Here Harmon, despite being on TV-script deadline, takes girlfriend Erin, “Dungeon Master” Spencer Crittenden, and other hangers-on on a national “Harmontown” tour. Unfortunately, despite filmmaker Neil Berkeley’s efforts, this comes across as a you-had-to-be-there marathon of quasi-standup schtick and road diary. Harmon drinks to excess (even genuine Tennessee moonshine), discloses details of his ugliest fights with Erin, and enjoys the support of simpatico nerds. Harmon claims that he’s just trying to make people happy, but also acknowledges the paradox of his own chronic misery and dysfunctional relationships (traced to an abusive childhood). While this portrait of a complicated, prickly entertainment personality would have benefited from tighter editing, it should still be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (C. Cassidy)

several full-sized machines for training and fun, but they worry about him being able to live independently. Robert himself says that he refuses to be defined by autism, and there is a not-so-subtle parallel made by Canadian filmmakers Nathan Drillot and Jeff Petry between Gagno striving to maintain focus in pinball tournaments and facing day-to-day challenges of applying for jobs and maintaining relationships (the obvious connection with The Who’s fictitious disabled pinball maestro/messiah Tommy is only made during the closing credits). The excitement of world championship pinball is hard to capture in narrative form, but Gagno’s human-interest story effectively provides the film’s spark. An uplifting portrait, this is recommended. [Note: this is also available on home video from Gravitas Ventures on DVD for \$16.99 and Blu-ray for \$19.99 from www.amazon.com.] Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

stopped selling and he couldn’t get a record deal. But he never stopped recording, wound up overspending on touring, and eventually went into debt. His father, Tony Webb, who managed his career, warned him that the elaborate and expensive tours couldn’t continue indefinitely. Father and son had a falling out, which contributed to Numan’s move to the U.S. (fortunately, the pair make up before film’s end). In 1997, Numan married longtime fan Gemma, but she was unable to conceive until undergoing IVF treatments. Now, they have three daughters, including two who Gemma dubs “lucky accidents.” In 2013, the family moves to Los Angeles, where Numan sets up his studio and works on the new album *Splinter*, trading files with producer Ade Fenton in Nottingham. The rest of the film tracks his re-entrance into the active music scene. If the documentary sometimes feels like a promotional vehicle, Numan is candid to a fault, although fans may regret the lack of information about his early years. Extras include bonus scenes. A strong optional purchase. Aud: P. (K. Fennessy)

Hieronymus Bosch: Touched by the Devil

★★★

(2016) 88 min. In English & Dutch w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$349 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber. Closed captioned.

One might expect this documentary to be either a biography of the titular Dutch painter or a scholarly study of his phantasmagorical depictions of peasant life and Hell, some of which are so bizarre that they have been described as forerunners of surrealism. While Pieter van Huystee’s film touches on these matters—offering a sketch of Bosch’s life and commenting on the symbolism of the owls in his paintings—the primary focus is on the effort of a group of experts to arrange an exhibit of Bosch’s work at the museum in Den Bosch, the artist’s hometown, in recognition of the 500th anniversary of his death in 1516. Their mission involves trips to repositories where most of the 20-odd identified (but undated) paintings, as well as drawings, ascribed to Bosch are housed—including museums in Venice and Vienna, but particularly the Prado in Madrid. (King Philip II of Spain assiduously collected Bosch’s works, including *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, likely his most famous painting.) Fraught negotiations to arrange the loan of the precious artwork to Den Bosch’s Noordbrabants Museum take up considerable running time here, but while the back-and-forth is intriguing, the team’s investigation of individual works—closely examining brushstrokes and using infrared cameras to peer beneath the surface paint—is truly fascinating, leading to debates about whether some items should be considered collaborative efforts that involved other members of Bosch’s workshop (a trip to Kansas City to assess the authenticity of a painting

THE ARTS

Gary Numan: Android in La La Land

★★★1/2

(2016) 85 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Steve Read and Rob Alexander’s documentary examines British musician Gary Numan’s career, beginning with a look back at Numan’s work in the late-1970s. Other electronic artists had come before him, such as Kraftwerk, but few enjoyed the same degree of chart success, most notably for his New Wave mega-hit “Cars.” Numan (born Gary Webb) describes himself as a synth-rock star. But while his first three albums conquered the charts, he felt isolated by his fame, due in part to Asperger syndrome. And then his music

Harmontown ★★1/2

(2016) 101 min. DVD: \$24.95 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Dan Harmon is a TV comedy auteur, respected by his peers—here including Ben Stiller, Sarah Silverman, Patton Oswalt, and Jack Black—despite his oddball, domineering personality (and possible alcoholism). Harmon is perhaps best known for creating the NBC sitcom *Community*, which during a low-rated run amassed cultish fans who were desperate to keep it on the air. At one point, Harmon was fired from his own show after a public tiff with cast member Chevy Chase. Harmon later started podcasts and embarked

sometimes attributed to Bosch is a highlight). Extras include deleted scenes. Sure to appeal to those with an interest in art history, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Wall Writers ★★

(2016) 78 min. DVD: \$29.95. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Taki 183, Stitch 1, Cornbread, Bama... these are just a few of the noms-de-plume adopted by young taggers in big American cities such as New York and Philadelphia in the late 1960s and early '70s. Their stories and ambiguous ethics are revealed in this alternately dull and illuminating documentary, narrated by cult filmmaker John Waters, which centers on the rise of graffiti and its evolution from narcissistic teen pastime to art world acceptance. Many now-60-ish artists are interviewed in *Wall Writers*, recounting the origins and flourishing of the tagging subculture, which began as ego-boosting vandalism. Filmmaker Roger Gastman, sometimes relying on archival footage of national newscasts decrying graffiti's vulgarity, fails to make a strong case for how this earliest and "purest" form of wall-writing added up to more than vanity practiced by kids who stole spray paint from stores. And the story certainly gets worse before it gets better, as taggers were pressured to join gangs embroiled in

drug use and street violence. But a different graffiti culture emerged in Brooklyn, one more artistic, organized, and enterprising, and by the early '70s, urban graffiti—while officially reviled—was celebrated by the art world, although the story told here about a City College of New York student who created a workshop space for taggers and wound up being violently assaulted by the taggers is both harrowing and disheartening. Ultimately, one's personal views about graffiti are not likely to change after watching this film, but it is interesting to meet some of these people in the autumn of their lives. Optional. [Note: this is also available with public performance rights for \$349 from Bond Educator at www.bondeducator.com.] Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)


HISTORY & CURRENT EVENTS

The Battle of Chosin ★★½

(2016) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-62789-924-6.

Following the successful American landing at Inchon in September 1950, it appeared that the Korean War could be over by Christmas. Riding a wave of optimism, General Douglas MacArthur continued with the aim of uni-

fying Korea, pressing towards the Yalu River, the country's northern border. Ignoring warnings from China, MacArthur persisted until suddenly—in late November and early December—"volunteer" Chinese troops encircled the First Marine division, acting on orders from China's Chairman Mao to cut off and annihilate the division. Filmmaker Randall MacLoury's PBS-aided *American Experience* documentary, narrated by Michael Murphy, describes the hellish conditions and incredible valor of the "Chosin few," so named after the nearby reservoir. Much of the fighting was done at night, in hand-to-hand combat, with temperatures reaching 35 degrees below zero. To demoralize the Americans, the Chinese often began their attacks with shouts and screams, followed by the blowing of whistles and bugles. Outnumbered by almost 10 to 1, the Marines embarked on a slow fighting retreat, hampered by the cold, rugged terrain, and a lack of food, sleep, proper clothing, and equipment, as well as a blown bridge that blocked a timely exit. Wounds were sometimes cauterized by the frigid cold, while other soldiers bled or froze to death, sometimes stripped of their clothing to supply the needs of the living, and then buried in mass graves. Veterans here remember feelings of isolation—looking out for their buddies, yet not wanting



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to get too close to anyone. Meanwhile, an alarmed American public followed each day's events while holding their collective breath. Combining vivid footage with harrowing comments from vets, this powerful tribute to the courage of average soldiers trying to fight and survive in a remote land is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Homeland: Iraq Year Zero ★★ ★

(2015) 2 discs. 334 min. In Arabic w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors).

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq was extensively covered from the American perspective in contemporary news broadcasts and subsequent documentaries, but filmmaker Abbas Fahdel here offers a remarkable five-hours-plus view from the perspective of ordinary Iraqis. Fahdel, long a resident of France, decided to visit relatives in Baghdad early in 2002, when tensions following 9/11 were reaching a peak. In the first half of *Homeland* he records his brother, sister-in-law, and their three children as they attempt to live normal lives under the threat of war and a barrage of patriotic propaganda lauding Saddam Hussein. Fahdel also shows the family visiting a memorial to the victims of an earlier aerial attack, foretelling a tragedy that the family will suffer—a revelation that hangs over the rest of the film like a ticking time bomb. In the second half, Fahdel documents the family's life under American occupation. People in the streets now speak more openly of the brutality of Saddam's rule, but they also complain bitterly about the lack of security and the insulting fashion in which they are often treated by U.S. soldiers. Only at the close is the family's loss fully covered, and it comes to represent in microcosm the suffering endured

by the entire population. *Homeland: Iraq Year Zero* is a quietly devastating portrait of the toll that war takes on those who are often considered mere collateral damage. Extras include a New York Film Festival Q&A with Fahdel. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Pearl Harbor: Into the Arizona ★★ ★ 1/2

(2016) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-62789-994-9.

Prior to 9/11, Pearl Harbor represented the deadliest foreign attack in American military history. On December 7, 1941 the Japanese air force bombed Pearl Harbor's battleship row. The USS *Arizona* was ground zero, with 2,000 pounds of explosives blowing the battleship apart and sending it to the bottom of the harbor—killing, trapping, or drowning over 1,700 men. Seventy-five years later the ship remains on the sea floor, a military grave and monument to the sailors who died there. Filmmaker Carsten Oblaender's PBS-aided documentary concerns National Park service efforts to determine the long term stability of the sunken ship. No divers are permitted inside what is considered a shrine and cemetery, requiring remote controlled cameras to navigate the interior. The film describes pre-war life around the Hawaiian island of Oahu, where a sunny, tropical, relaxed atmosphere prevailed, which was most welcome to the Depression-weary sailors who tried to ignore the gathering war clouds between Japan and America. The USS *Arizona*, officially commissioned in 1916, was dubbed the "pride of the fleet." On that peaceful Sunday morning, Pearl Harbor became a hell of bombs, smoke, and burning bodies. An elderly *Arizona* survivor is here given a view of the sonar as it traverses the battleship levels, evoking both tears and pride from the old veteran. Later,

the camera captures a ghostly view of a military uniform, still swaying on a hanger in the officer's quarters. Cups, dishes, and other artifacts abound, but no human remains are seen (200 bodies were recovered shortly after the attack). Although the bombing greatly damaged the fleet, the horrific event only stiffened America's resolve in winning total victory over Japan. A fine historical documentary, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)

Projections of America ★★ ★

(2015) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-62789-983-3.

As World War II raged on, some visionary filmmakers saw a need to explain American values to liberated territories, while also anticipating what the post-war world could look like. Thus began the little known *Projections of America* series, which aimed to spread a "propaganda of truth" in short films that were often shown in bombed out theaters in areas often recently occupied by the Nazis. Filmmaker Peter Miller's PBS-aided documentary, narrated by John Lithgow, looks at these idealistic films that provided a positive view of American life. One of the driving forces behind the project was screenwriter Robert Riskin (*It Happened One Night*). Taking time off from Hollywood, enduring long separations from his actress wife, Fay Wray (*King Kong*), Riskin and his crew crafted short documentaries, usually meant to accompany a feature film. One of the most popular, *The Autobiography of a Jeep* (1943), was "narrated" by the vehicle, describing its journey from assembly line, to training ground, and finally onto the battlefield. Another film, *The Cummington Story* (1945), shows a real New England town, charting the citizens' journey from suspicion to acceptance as they encounter refugees from war-torn lands. Surprisingly, one of the most successful films was the seemingly esoteric subject of the Library of Congress, not simply depicting the functions of the library, but also providing a stirring tribute to intellectual freedom. Of course, some members of Congress opposed the overall program, detecting a pro-Roosevelt bias. Although these films have remained mostly unseen since the war, they are being preserved and slowly restored by (appropriately enough) the Library of Congress. While more film clips would have been welcome, this is an interesting documentary that sheds light on an inspiring and little known subject. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (S. Rees)

Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise ★★ ★ ★

(2016) 2 discs. 240 min. DVD: \$29.99 (\$59.99 w/PPR), Blu-ray: \$34.99 (\$59.99 w/PPR). PBS Video (avail. from most distributors). SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-806-5 (dvd), 978-1-62789-807-2 (blu-ray).

Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. presents this PBS-aided four-part series chronicling the African-American struggle for equality, beginning with the passage in 1965 of the Voting Rights Act, after which blacks found that merely having the vote wasn't enough. Following the devastating murders of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., America's cities burned, reflecting feelings of anger and hopelessness. For African Americans, integration wasn't enough without accompanying economic opportunity. The series discusses the rise of the Black Panthers, white flight from the cities, the school busing crisis of the 1970s, black feminists, and the black cultural awakening in music, TV, movies, fashion, and literature. As the song in the hit show *The Jeffersons* put it, blacks "finally got a piece of the pie," and a new generation of black political leaders would emerge. However, old problems such as poverty and new scourges like drug addiction took a toll. Gates deftly explores the O.J. Simpson murder trial for insights into black-white relations, and the coverage of Obama's election is inspiring, celebrating hope and possibility. Examining a wide range of issues (although, surprisingly, no mention is made of the gun violence epidemic), *Black America Since MLK* features powerful archival footage, sharp editing, and keen insight. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



A Promise to My Father ★★ ★ 1/2

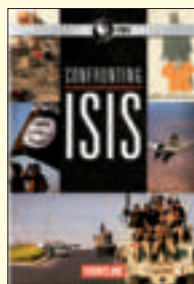
(2016) 60 min. DVD: \$19.99. DRA. TMW Media Group. PPR.

When Polish Jew Israel "Izzy" Arbeiter was a teenager, he and his two brothers were separated from their parents and a 7-year-old brother by the Nazis. The last words he heard his father say were, "If you survive,

Confronting ISIS ★★ ★

(2016) 120 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-905-5.

In June 2014, the Islamic State in Syria shocked the world by routing the Iraqi army, taking control of the northern Iraq city of Mosul, establishing strict Islamic law, and declaring an Islamic caliphate in large parts of Iraq and Syria. Using a sophisticated system of social media messaging, they broadcast videos of beheadings, destruction of historic sites, and other atrocities. Martin Smith hosts this PBS-aided *Frontline* documentary, presenting an in-depth look at the struggle of the West and moderate Middle Eastern countries in the fight against ISIS, a battle that is as much about ideology as military victories. Initially, residents of Mosul welcomed ISIS since they distrusted Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite Muslim who clearly favored the Shiite branch of Islam over Mosul's Sunni population. When the Iraqi army hastily quit the battlefield, they left millions of dollars in American military equipment that fell into the hands of ISIS, a group that skillfully exploits the Internet to encourage disaffected Muslims to come to Syria to fight the brutal regime of Syrian Shiite President Bashar al-Assad. Some in the Obama administration urged the West to "contain" ISIS, but Obama eventually decided on a strategy to "degrade and destroy," which proved easier said than done. The situation is endlessly complex, with Saudi Arabia more concerned with confronting Iran (an ISIS ally) than the terrorist group itself. While Russia and Iran pile on in support of Assad, Turkey is fighting the best anti-ISIS forces, the Kurds, who they oppose because of their desire for independence in Turkey. And enveloping everything is the problem of sectarianism, which dates back at least a thousand years. Featuring testimony from government and military leaders, this documentary—produced before the 2016 presidential election—offers no easy answers and no hopes of an early end in sight, noting that the situation has arisen from a "once in a century" perfect storm of regional and religious rivalries. An informative and timely review, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



remember to carry on with Jewish life and Jewish tradition." Seventy years later, the camera follows 87-year-old Holocaust survivor Albeiter (accompanied by his grandson Matt) on his return to Eastern Europe to face his past—and to find items that his family buried to protect them from Nazi plunder. Albeiter locates his old home near the ghetto (still standing but now condemned) and heads to the basement area, but subsequent digging is in vain. Although the physical remnants are gone, the memories remain. Albeiter—when young and strong—worked in several Nazi camps, eventually landing in the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was told that the only way out was "through the chimneys." His visit here to Auschwitz is chilling (walking into the yard he keeps looking back to make sure the gate is still open) as he serves as a sort of grim tour guide—sharing his memories about one of the most horrific events in human history. A powerful Holocaust documentary, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (C. Block)

Tanks: A Century of Dominating the Battlefield 1916-2016 ★★ ★

(2016) 38 min. DVD: \$19.95. Hoch Productions (avail. from www.amazon.com).

Written and directed by Clyde Hoch, a former tank commander who fought during the Vietnam War, *Tanks* is largely aimed at armchair military fans interested in the tech

specs of battlefield equipment. But it also serves up a general history of a weapon that was initially envisioned as a battleship on dry land. The first generation of tanks produced toward the end of World War I by the U.S., Britain, and France, were sluggish vehicles that had limited mobility, were vulnerable to attack, and were internally dangerous for crews (bits of metal within the tank could suddenly go flying). These tanks were made by automobile companies (Ford, Renault) and ran on similar engines and fuel as cars. After the war concluded, interest in tanks waned, but when the U.S. Army infantry sought out a smaller, lighter tank during the 1930s, technological evolution suddenly took off, improving tank utility over the decades to fight in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and beyond. Tanks ultimately expanded their capabilities to be able to shoot flames, bulldoze, and travel in near silence at rapid speeds. With the ascension of drones in modern warfare, the place of tanks is now questionable, but they certainly made a notable mark over the past century of military history. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (T. Keogh)

USO: For the Troops ★★ ★

(2016) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-926-0.

Directed by Peter Schnall and narrated by David Strathairn, this PBS-aided documentary centers on the USO—or United Service

Organizations—which sprang into action during World War II, and has over the years served some 24 million American soldiers. For lonely soldiers far from home, the USO provided a comforting reminder of civilian life, while the WWII-era Stage Door Canteens offered a safe place with lots of pretty girls available for a dance, a chance to talk, or perhaps help with writing a love letter to the soldier's girlfriend. Of course, Bob Hope put the USO on the map, traveling to countless countries, armed with corny jokes, skits, and in later years performances by celebrities including Ann-Margret and Raquel Welch (both interviewed here). Hope performed in every conflict from WWII to the Persian Gulf War. The USO was disbanded in 1947 in the naïve belief that there would be no more wars, but it was quickly reactivated during the Korean War. The troupe has a lot of moving parts, with transportation staff and equipment needing to be shipped to far-flung locations. The documentary covers the USO in the years of a segregated military and during the time of Vietnam anti-war protests, while also looking at the new challenges posed by an all-volunteer armed forces, with an eye towards increasing importance of aiding and connecting families in the Internet age, helping the returning wounded, and even comforting loved ones when bodies are shipped back home. Other interviewees include Jay Leno, Jon Stewart, and Senator Al Franken. Noting that the USO evolved along with America's military, this entertaining and inspirational documentary is recommended. Aud: P. (S. Rees)

We Were There ★★ ★ 1/2

(2017) 103 min. DVD: \$19.99. DRA. Vision Video.

An oral history of World War II told by veterans (with a bit of stock footage thrown in), *We Were There* is a remarkably moving documentary that eschews facts and figures for personal anecdotal accounts of battle, with many men unburdening themselves of painful memories for the first time. Presented in loose chronology, the film begins with recollections of what these interviewees were doing when they received news about Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, and how each of them—barely more than boys—wound up in one or another branch of the military, often for precise reasons such as possessing a skill set (truck mechanics, engineering) that was useful to the U.S. Navy, Army, Air Force, or Marines. From there, the stories diverge as combat action took different forms. A former pilot talks about being shot down over Italy, and—badly injured and attacked by locals—being rescued by German soldiers who placed him in a hospital where he was hidden by a doctor. A D-Day survivor recalls the thousands of men, including his captain, killed even before reaching the shore in Normandy (the memory of his fear still brings him to the brink of tears). And various ex-sailors speak

Tower ★★★★★

(2016) 69 min. DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95 (avail. from most distributors), \$349 w/PPR (avail. from www.kinolorberedu.com). DRA. Kino Lorber. Closed captioned.

In an age when school shootings are depressingly frequent, Keith Maitland's powerful documentary takes a look at the first major incident, when a sniper on the observation deck of the University of Texas Tower took aim at pedestrians below, killing 14 and wounding another 31, on August 1, 1966. The identity of gunman Charles Whitman is eventually revealed, but the emphasis here is on the victims, along with the police and other individuals who tried to assist or made their way toward the tower to confront the shooter. Maitland uses an impressive variety of techniques to capture both the immediacy and poignancy of the tragic event, including dramatic re-enactments that morph into rotoscope-animated images (both black-and-white and color), accompanied by voiceover reminiscences (new and archival) of those trapped amidst the carnage. A remarkable amount of contemporary footage is edited into the material, with radio and television reports, punctuated by a steady stream of gunfire, added to the mix, while a group of police and one civilian (a bookstore manager) recollect how they worked past the bodies of Whitman's first victims to reach the deck and end the siege. This portrait of courage in the face of terror is capped by newly-shot interviews and reunions, including one between Claire Wilson, who lay wounded on the concrete beside the corpse of her dead boyfriend for hours, and John Fox, a young man who came out of hiding to help carry her to safety. *Tower* is a remarkably moving re-creation of a traumatic episode in America's history that also serves as a reminder of how ineffective we have been at preventing similar tragedies over the past half-century. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



of the horror of Japanese pilots crashing their warplanes into American ships. Spirited defenses are also made of why it was necessary (so the argument goes) to drop two atomic bombs on Japan to prevent the many more deaths that would have occurred had America and its allies launched a conventional invasion. Serving up powerful testimonials from WWII survivors, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

BIOGRAPHY

An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story ★★★★★

(2017) 60 min. DVD: \$24.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

Filmmaker Martin Doblmeier serves up a solid portrait of American Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), an activist Midwestern pastor who espoused socialism and pacifism while also showing concern for the downtrodden and minorities (including religious ones). Niebuhr joined the faculty of New York's Union Theological Seminary as Professor of Christian Ethics in 1928, becoming one of the country's leading public intellectuals as he applied moral principles to politics, economics, and international affairs (Niebuhr also originated the serenity prayer adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous). The film combines archival footage from Niebuhr's speeches and TV appearances (with interviewers such as Mike Wallace) together

with narration by Doblmeier, quotations from Niebuhr's work read by Hal Holbrook, and interviews with political figures (Jimmy Carter, Andrew Young), scholars (Andrew Bacevich, Stanley Hauerwas, Cornel West), and journalists (David Brooks), as it traces changes in Niebuhr's thought over time, from unqualified idealism to what came to be called Christian realism. The result is a positive but nuanced depiction of an important thinker who influenced a wide range of individuals, including anti-Nazi German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and political figures as diverse as Barack Obama and John McCain. Extras include bonus interview segments. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

Casablancas: The Man Who Loved Women ★★★★★

(2016) 86 min. DVD: \$19.95. First Run Features (avail. from most distributors).

A spirited documentary about the legacy of John Casablancas, the founder of modeling agency Elite Model Management and inventor of the "supermodel" phenomenon in the 1970s and beyond, director Hubert Woroniecki's film grew out of a recording that Casablancas made in 2011 (two years before he died of cancer at age 70) in which he told his story. That posthumously-released narrative serves as the guide for what turns out to be a winning portrait of a likable pioneer in the fashion world. A youthful rogue, Casablancas was born in Manhattan to a financially successful couple who fled Spain

during its civil war and then abandoned France just before Hitler's occupation. After his early years in New York, Casablancas attended an elite boarding school in Europe, where his teenage sexual relationship with a maid resulted in expulsion and a gradual path towards the world of managing models. *Casablancas* grows increasingly engaging as the subject recounts his hard work and the daring involved in building a nascent, entrepreneurial enterprise already overshadowed by titan Eileen Ford. The ups and downs of Casablancas's relationship with Ford over many years is just one of the recurring story threads here, but what is fascinating is how often he reinvented his business, ultimately reaching stratospheric success with the introduction of celebrity models in popular culture, including Cindy Crawford, Christie Brinkley, Stephanie Seymour, and Naomi Campbell. Casablancas's honesty about failures in his private life and certain business decisions help negate any easy assumptions that he lived a charmed existence. Drawing from a wealth of archival footage, including film and video of Elite's clients, this engaging portrait is recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

Eero Saarinen: The Architect Who Saw the Future ★★★★★

(2016) 68 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. SDH captioned. ISBN: 978-1-62789-796-9.

One of the most influential figures in post-World War II architecture was the Finnish-born Eero Saarinen (1910-1961), whose neo-futuristic vision produced some of the most striking design accomplishments of the 20th century. Filmmaker Peter Rosen's PBS-aided *American Masters* documentary offers a respectable overview of Saarinen's career. The son of acclaimed architect Eliel Saarinen, Eero first gained attention in 1948 when he won the competition to create the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis with a concept that became known as the Gateway Arch. Saarinen's later designs for the TWA Flight Center at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport and the main terminal at Washington's Dulles International Airport were boldly modern, while his General Motors Technical Center in Warren, MI, turned the corporate campus into a work of intelligent art. Saarinen's interior design concepts—most notably the "tulip chair"—offered an imaginative spin on office and home décor. Eric Saarinen, this film's co-producer and director of photography, also serves as an onscreen presence, visiting many of his father's famous buildings. But the younger Saarinen appears somewhat uncomfortable plumbing the more sour aspects of his father's life—Saarinen divorced Eric's mother, sculptor Lilian Swann, and mostly ignored Eric and his sister in favor of the vivacious writer Aline Bernstein, whose tireless promotion of Saarinen's projects made him better known. Presenting a solid

appraisal of Saarinen's influential architectural achievements, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Forced Perspective: The Story of Artist Derek Hess ★★★

(2015) 95 min. DVD: \$29.95. Kino Lorber (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.

Cleveland poster artist Derek Hess is the subject of Nick Cavalier's documentary profile, which takes on an increasingly autobiographical tone as Hess talks about his life and career in extended interview excerpts. Hess's recollections cover his childhood fascination with comic-book illustrators such as Gil Kane (whose work introduced Hess to his favorite technique of forced perspective, which emphasizes an object by increasing its size relative to others surrounding it) and his early studies with, among others, his father (a teacher of industrial design). Hess created posters and promo materials for bands he encountered at a bar where he worked in Cleveland—efforts that not only gained him recognition in the music scene but also led him to produce work for galleries and museums, as well as designs for a clothing line. On the more personal side, Hess offers frank observations about his struggles with bipolar disorder and alcoholism. His remarks throughout are supplemented by well-chosen examples of his artwork, along with interviews with friends, colleagues and admirers, who not only comment enthusiastically on Hess's talent but also talk candidly about how the artist's medical problems have impacted his productivity. An insightful portrait of a man who has overcome major obstacles to create a body of work that is widely rec-

ognized as exceptional in his field, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)

My Love Affair with the Brain: The Life and Science of Dr. Marian Diamond ★★★

(2017) 56 min. DVD: \$295. Luna Productions. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-63587-860-8.

Dr. Marian Diamond may be the world's best known neuroscientist, having made countless appearances in person and been widely covered in the press. According to this affectionate profile, which features narration by Mayim Bialik—an actress (*The Big Bang Theory*) and neuroscientist herself—Diamond is the second most popular professor on YouTube, where her Berkeley lectures are accessible to all. Other neuroscientists, including her husband, UCLA professor Arne Scheibel, credit her for helping to found the field by challenging conventional notions. In 1953, Diamond earned the first doctorate in anatomy at Berkeley. By her early 30s, she was a mother of four working as a part-time researcher and lecturer. She joined a team to study the effects of the environment on the brain, a project that would last for 15 years. In comparing the brains of rats living in enriched and impoverished environments, the group found significant differences in brain size over time, ultimately concluding that brain plasticity disproved genetic determinism as an immutable phenomenon. The paper they published in the 1960s met with some resistance before becoming widely accepted, and it inspired Diamond's catchphrase, "Use it or lose it," coined to underscore the fact that the brain atrophies in the absence of ongoing stimulation. Diamond made headlines again

in the 1980s when she studied Einstein's brain, and while her resulting paper was controversial due to methodology and results, she helped scientists to see glial cells in a new way. More recently, she has been working to educate children in Cambodia who are victims of the same kind of environmental impoverishment that she once studied in a lab. An engaging portrait of a neuroscience pioneer, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Paolo Soleri: Citizen of the Planet ★★★

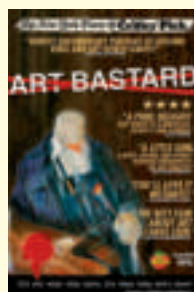
(2016) 50 min. DVD: \$50 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films.

One of the more colorfully eccentric figures of the 20th century was Paolo Soleri (1919-2013), whose theories on urban redesign earned him a devoted cult-like following during his lifetime. Geoffrey Madeja's documentary offers a positive view of Soleri's work and vision, which was striking for its audacious plan of hyper-dense human habitation but was perhaps a bit too utopian for practical purposes. Born in Turin, Italy, Soleri grew up influenced by and drawn to urban settings. He was briefly a student of Frank Lloyd Wright in the late 1940s, but the film claims that Wright became upset when Soleri outshone him in a bridge design competition. Soleri returned to Italy in 1950 to oversee the construction of a ceramics factory, but came back to the U.S. in 1956 to pursue the concept of "arcology"—a melding of architecture and ecology—through the construction of an experimental community dubbed Arcosanti. But this project, worked on by students and volunteers over several decades, never achieved completion, and it is primarily used today as an educational forum to highlight Soleri's theories and celebrate his design skills. The documentary combines archival footage with interviews of admirers to serve up an entertaining portrait of a charismatic architectural outsider. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Art Bastard ★★★

(2016) 84 min. DVD: \$24.95 (\$299 w/PPR from edu.passionriver.com). Passion River (avail. from most distributors).

Victor Kanefsky's documentary centers on iconoclastic American artist Robert Cenedella, whose paintings famously include a 1988 depiction of a crucified Santa Claus that was quickly removed from its original placement in an ad agency lobby and later caused an outcry when it was finally exhibited in the window of Manhattan's Art Students League in 1997. The painting's mixture of provocation and humor is characteristic of Cenedella, who readily admits in the autobiographical interviews here that he was a rebel from the start, studying at the Art Students League—after being thrown out of a prestigious public arts high school—with its drawing teacher, German Dadaist George Grosz. Cenedella's most famous works, colorful canvases crammed with riotous crowds of cartoonish people, are prominently featured, but Kanefsky also gives the artist lots of opportunities to excoriate the art establishment for its commercialism and faddishness. The film's title refers to his defiant status as a populist outsider who is largely shunned by gallery owners and museum directors, but it also carries a secondary meaning: Cenedella's mother confessed he was not the biological son of Robert Sr., a writer blacklisted during the McCarthy era, but of an English professor—a domestic matter that the artist discusses with his customary outgoing geniality. Kanefsky punctuates Cenedella's entertaining ramblings with observations from friends and admirers. *Art Bastard* has a bit of a ramshackle quality, but that seems to mirror its subject's gruffly exuberant personality. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)



The Passionate Pursuits of Angela Bowen ★★★1/2

(2015) 73 min. DVD: \$89: public libraries, \$395: colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

The Passionate Pursuits of Angela Bowen tells the story of a onetime dancer and dance teacher who was suddenly catapulted into the public eye as a lesbian-feminist activist, and then recruited into academia, becoming a professor. Shot over several years, Jennifer Abod's documentary profile begins with its African-American subject's childhood in inner-city Boston during the Jim Crow years. Bowen's father died when Angela was two, forcing her mother to work two jobs to raise her seven children, while also finding time to support the Civil Rights movement. Tall, stiff, and afflicted with bad posture, Bowen

Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise ★★½

(2016) 114 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$54.99 w/PPR). PBS Video. ISBN: 978-1-62789-987-1.

A dancer, actress, activist, and writer, Maya Angelou (1928-2014) was committed—as one observer here puts it—to living a “life on the stage.” Directed by Bob Hercules and Rita Coburn Whack, this PBS-aided *American Masters* documentary examines Angelou’s eventful life and the impact that she had on America. Raped at the age of seven by her mother’s boyfriend, Angelou became mute for five years. She was sent to live with her grandmother in a small Arkansas town, where she discovered school libraries and reading. After becoming pregnant at age 16, Angelou danced in strip clubs (although she did not disrobe), eventually earning the title of “Miss Calypso.” She had a better than average singing voice, and worked her way into stage shows and low-budget films, but money was always a concern. While living in Harlem, Angelou discovered her activist voice, becoming acquainted with James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Although Angelou had written some for the stage, she didn’t seriously pursue writing until her friend Jules Feiffer suggested that she write about her life. This led to 1969’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which became a publishing phenomenon, cultural touchstone, and staple of college American literature classes and discussion groups. Angelou talks about the misuse of language, the “curse” of vulgarity (after dressing down Tupac Shakur for his profanity, she humorously confesses that she didn’t know Tupac from a six-pack), and, of course, race relations in America. With tributes from Oprah Winfrey, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Common, John Singleton, and others, this film offers a rounded portrait of an African-American feminist and literary pioneer. Extras include behind-the-scenes footage. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)



was enrolled in a dance studio and gradually found her natural talent, becoming the company’s prima ballerina as well as an instructor. Moving to New York, Bowen encountered severe racism as she auditioned for dance companies and Broadway shows, eventually joining an all-black dance revue that toured Europe. The film traces Bowen’s reluctant marriage and the terrible death of her toddler son, which left a pain that she buried during two decades of work running her own dance school in New Haven. Throughout, archival footage of Bowen’s own dancing and that of her students is presented to accompany Bowen’s recollections. When the narrative abruptly changes to Bowen coming out as lesbian during the 1970s height of the feminist movement—she gave up dance for a new role as an outspoken advocate of women’s rights—the shift feels seismic. Viewers also meet Bowen’s partner and her grown children, who speak honestly about the difficulties they experienced in childhood adjusting to their mother’s radical changes. Offering a compelling story of one woman’s remarkable journey through 20th-century turbulence in racial and sexual politics, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

This Kind of Love ★★½

(2015) 43 min. DVD: \$295. DRA. Documentary Educational Resources. PPR.

Aug Myo Min is one of the most compelling figures among Burmese human rights activists, not only for his commitment to the establishment of democracy in Myanmar but also for being a pioneer in calling for LGBT rights in his country. Filmmaker Jeanne

Hallacy’s documentary details his tumultuous life, starting with his role as a student leader in the 1988 anti-government uprising and his subsequent escape into the Burmese jungle to join a rebel army commanded by the ethnic Karen minority (no mean feat for an urban youth with no previous experience in either a jungle or a militia). Min avoided capture by his country’s junta regime and fled to Thailand—not returning to Myanmar for 24 years. Once back home, Min became a prominent advocate for ensuring that LGBT citizens were guaranteed equal protection, an effort that presented two huge challenges: mounting a legal assault on a law that criminalized “unnatural sex” with the threat of fines and prison sentences, and breaking down a historic taboo in Burmese society regarding the open acknowledgement of homosexuality. *This Kind of Love* is a remarkable tribute to a bold man who has helped broaden the concept of civil rights in a nation that has only recently begun to re-enter the family of democracies. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)

Video Librarian Online

Visit Video Librarian Online (www.videolibrarian.com) for more reviews during May and June, including: *The Age of Consequences*, By Sidney Lumet, *Dirty Old Wedge*, *Fly By Light*, *For Grace*, *The Great Human Odyssey*, *My Congo*, *Playing with Fire*, *The Return*, *Searching for Augusta: The Forgotten Angel of Bastogne*, *The Story of Chocolate*, and much more!

Series Update

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

Wild Kratts: Panda-Monium

(120 min., DVD: \$14.99) is the latest entry in PBS Distribution’s combination live-action and animated series featuring animal expert brothers Martin and Chris Kratt in nature-themed episodes. See review of *Wild Kratts: Creature Adventures* in VL-7/11.

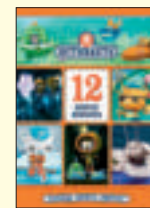


Also recently released by PBS is **Craft in America: Nature** (60 min., DVD: \$19.99), the latest episode of the Peabody Award-winning series, which here focuses on craft in the natural world and features sculptor Patrick Dougherty and woodcarver Michelle Holzapfel. See review of *Craft in America: Messages* in VL-11/11.

The newest addition from Universal Studios Home Entertainment’s creepy animated series, **Monster High: Electrified** (72 min., DVD: \$19.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$22.98) finds Clawdeen and Frankie working on their idea of a monster and normie beauty salon with the help of the Boogey Man’s daughter. See review of *Monster High Clawesome Double Feature: Fright On!/Escape from Skull Shores* in VL-9/14.

Paramount Home Media Distribution has released **PAW Patrol: Pups Save the Bunnies** (94 min., DVD: \$14.98), featuring the animated PAW Patrol, who are busy working in Adventure Bay in this springtime compilation that includes “Pups Save the Easter Egg Hunt” and “Pups Save the Mayor’s Tulips.” See review of *PAW Patrol* in VL-7/14.

Newly available from NCircle Entertainment is **Octonauts: 12 Rescue Missions** (140 min., DVD: \$9.99), from the computer-animated series featuring the Octonauts, on the job here in episodes including “Mariana Trench Adventure,” “Lion’s Mane Jellyfish,” and “Loggerhead Sea Turtle.” See review of *Octonauts: 15 Underwater Adventures* in VL-11/16.



Aquarion Logos, Part 1

★1/2

(2015) 4 discs. 325 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



In this latest anime series from the *Aquarion* franchise, the supreme villain is a corporate wizard who has become obsessed with the collapse of language—using his powers to turn words into extraordinary monsters called M.J.B.K. (Menace of Japanese with Biological Kinetic energy—and yes, the acronym is a bit off, but that's the least of problems here). The good guys and gals are the youthful members of the Verbalism Club, a quasi-governmental entity, all of whom have exaggerated personalities. Their leader is the humorless Akira, who refers to himself as the “savior,” but most of the attention seems to fall on the aggressive antics of would-be comedian Tsutomu. While the animation is often imaginative—particularly in the embodiment of the M.J.B.K.—the story is a sprawling mess and the characters are disappointing. Presenting the first 13 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include the special episode “Genesis of Aquarion EVOL.” Not a necessary purchase. [Note: *Aquarion Logos, Part 2* is also newly available.] (P. Hall)

Beautiful Bones—Sakurako's Investigation: Complete Collection

★★★★1/2

(2015) 300 min. In Japanese w/English subtitles. DVD: 3 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$59.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



Although a set of illustrated mystery novels actually inspired this forensics-oriented anime series, there's some resemblance to the Fox TV crime show *Bones*. A daughter in a family of pathologists and coroners, the beautiful but eccentric and macabre Sakurako Kujo is a brilliant osteologist who enthusiastically collects skeletal remains in the Hokkaido region and turns sleuth when confronted with the (frequent) signs of homicide. Although she's engaged to a (never seen) police officer, her Dr. Watson-like companion here is a high-school boy who serves as a surrogate for her own deceased little brother. The cases they handle include a young family man who is certain he is targeted by curses, an elderly corpse clad in hiking gear, and a widow who is seemingly planning suicide. Despite the morbidity and occasional violence, the narrative is handled with exceptional heart and brains (not in the autopsy sense), backed by striking visuals. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2015 in separate DVD and Blu-ray editions, rated TV-MA, and presented in Japanese

with English subtitles, this is highly recommended. (C. Cassady)

Bikini Warriors ★1/2

(2015) 48 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



An anime series sporting the title *Bikini Warriors* is unlikely to offer much in the way of cerebral entertainment, especially one promising “warriors skilled at battling questionable slimes and taming tumescent tentacles.” Unfortunately, anyone hoping for a jolly bit of camp will likely feel cheated by this offering that feels like a cut-rate version of *Barbarella* mixed with a half-dozen other anime sci-fi romps. The title characters are a quartet of Russ Meyer-worthy heroines who search for villains and monsters, although their heroic abilities are sometimes lacking and they often wind up being victims of remarkably poor judgment. The lady fighters also have a strange habit of landing in dungeons where they are held up as figures for lecherous amusement—something that happens far too often to be funny. To its credit, one very surprising plot twist occurs roughly two-thirds of the way through the series that suggests *Bikini Warriors* could have been more than just fan service. But, alas, the series ends up taking a too-easy way out. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, this is not recommended. (P. Hall)

Busou Shinki—Armored War Goddess: Complete Collection ★★

(2012) 2 discs. 325 min. In Japanese w/English subtitles. Blu-ray: \$59.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



A line of Japanese female action-figure toys (and tie-in video games) inspired this series, set in a future Japan, centered on “Shinki”—she-robots that are only six inches tall. Fiercely devoted to their male “masters,” they work as servants, alarm clocks, and so on, but are also weaponized and frequently duel. Young Rihito is master to four Shinki, who compete among themselves to please him, their diminutive size prompting high-speed action, as the Shinki battle a live octopus they must cut up to serve as Rihito's sushi, and try to keep up with Rihito's travels. Episodes grow more interesting as rogue and abandoned Shinki form an anti-master movement, and evil “collector” masters steal and brainwash Shinki based on production-line rarity. Still, this is the kind of toy story in which even Lilliputian machine-girls do fan-service communal bathing and chirp about cleaning out each other's “screw holes” (and they are so artificial-life-realistic that they can even catch colds!). Compiling all 12 episodes from 2012

in a new Blu-ray edition, rated TV-14, and presented in Japanese with English subtitles, this is an optional purchase. (C. Cassady)

Castle Town Dandelion

★1/2

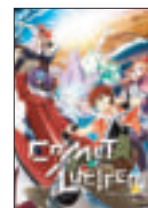
(2015) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



The Sakurada clan are a royal family headed by a king with nine children who each have a distinctive super power. In a reality-TV-like scenario, the kids' actions are televised with the aid of thousands of surveillance cameras, and the citizens of the kingdom will be asked to vote on which child will become the next monarch. The unlikely hero is fourth-eldest Akane, who is able to manipulate gravity for herself and others. Akane is shy and she only wants to win the competition in order to ban surveillance cameras in the kingdom. While *Castle Town Dandelion* could have offered sharp satire on celebrity and the ubiquity of cameras in contemporary society, the series eschews cogent commentary in favor of a sitcom style characterized by obvious jokes and predictable plots. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-PG, extras include episode commentaries. Not a necessary purchase. (P. Hall)

Comet Lucifer: Complete Collection ★★1/2

(2015) 300 min. In Japanese w/English subtitles. DVD: 3 discs, \$49.98; Blu-ray: 2 discs, \$59.98. Sentai Filmworks (avail. from most distributors).



Despite some striking introductory artwork, this series serves up old anime clichés of mecha and super-cute mystery girls floating down from the sky. On an advanced Earth-like planet called Gift, young mineral prospector Sogo finds a strange, mute, otherworldly young maiden dubbed Felia. A guardian-spirit, she is protected by a small, bug-like companion that can morph into a fearsome giant humanoid. A longstanding conspiracy of military and underground types vie to capture and exploit Felia for the hidden power she represents. A few bystanders and not-so-innocent background players are also swept up in the skulduggery, but it's the mecha-on-mecha slugfests that dominate and tend to stand out (the series features some seriously bloody violence). A surprise climactic twist explains where hitherto-unmentioned planet Earth fits into all of this (involving elaborate mythology). Compiling all 12 episodes from 2015 in separate DVD and Blu-ray editions, rated TV-MA, and presented in Japanese with English subtitles, extras include related shorts and music videos. A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassady)

Death Parade ★★★1/2

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



A Japanese TV original, this moody series depicts a postmortem existence—usually resembling an empty saloon—in which newly deceased humans arrive sans memories of their deaths, to be judged by “arbiters,” powerful immortals who determine the destiny of human souls. Some souls are reincarnated and others are discarded—based on their true natures, which are revealed under stress when the simple recreational games they are made to play become nightmarish. A stoic arbiter called Decim, disguised as a bartender, presides over these trials. Despite his stolid demeanor, Decim agonizes over rendering correct judgments, and he has made the unheard-of decision to take a mildly goth-like human girl (a soul he found himself unable to determine) as an assistant. As different casualties—a pop idol and an adoring fan, newlyweds, a vigilante detective, a reality-show star—enter to be judged, a larger backstory emerges involving the arbiters and their ethics (or lack thereof). Striking, poetic, and sometimes violent imagery accompanies the provocative themes here, and if the logic is never quite as clear as one might hope, the effect is nevertheless transfixing. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include episode commentaries, a behind-the-scenes featurette, and “Death Billiards”—the one-off cartoon that became the basis for the series. Highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Heavy Object: Part One ★★

(2015) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).

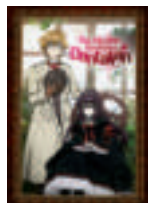


This anime series is set in a dystopian future where warfare has been revolutionized by extraordinary machines called Objects. As a result of this advanced military invention, the world finds itself in never-ending war. One of the governing philosophies here is that only Objects can destroy other Objects, but that logic is confounded when rookie soldiers Qwenthur Barbotage and Havia Winchell—fighting for the “Legitimate Kingdom”—manage to outwit an Object and bring it down. Because of their innovative bravery, the pair are sent on missions to destroy Objects from rival governments. They are assisted in their adventures by Milinda Brantini, an Object pilot who regularly gets into situations that require Qwenthur and Havia’s intervention, and they operate under the command of the harsh lady commander Frolaytia Capistrano. While the series’ vision of a futuristic world in

constant war makes a compelling statement on the madness of militarism, the stories are relatively dull and the characters somewhat quotidian. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-MA, extras include episode commentaries. Optional. [Note: *Heavy Object: Part Two* is also newly available.] (P. Hall)

The Mystic Archives of Dantalian: The Complete Series ★★★1/2

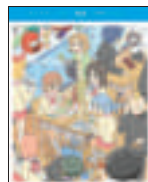
(2011) 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



This anime series set in England during the post-World War I years centers on young aristocrat Hugh Anthony Disward—called “Huey”—who is heir to his grandfather’s estate. As part of his grandfather’s will, Huey is given a key and charged with being the custodian of the Bibliotheca Mystica de Dantalian. Huey also meets Dalian, a strange little girl who lives on the estate and is responsible for guarding dangerous texts known as Phantom Books. Over the course of this series, Huey and Dalian encounter various characters in possession of Phantom Books, but their inability to master the power of these tomes creates bizarre and sometimes tragic situations. This anime offering deserves credit for its focus on a genteel upper-class European past rather than a dystopian future, its Rod Serling-worthy storylines that push the boundaries of intellectual terror, and its wonderfully subversive message about the potential damage that books can create when placed in the wrong hands. Not all of the stories entirely click and some of the animation is rather quotidian, but the series’ originality and offbeat personality make it well-deserving of attention. Compiling all 12 episodes from 2011 in a DVD edition, rated TV-MA, and presented in Japanese with English subtitles, extras include a bonus OVA. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Nichijou: My Ordinary Life ★★★1/2

(2011) 7 discs. 650 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$69.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



Nichijou is a high school slice-of-life comedy with slices that are razor thin—each episode features vignettes that range from minutes to seconds long, usually taking place in the town of Tokisadame but traveling as far away as outer space. Most revolve around two groups of characters: 1) high school students Yuuko (the wacky one), Mio (the nice but violent one), and Mai (the deadpan one), and 2) child genius Hakase, her robot Nano, and the (sort of) talking cat Sakamoto. While cute, each is also terribly flawed. The small, ordinary events of life,

such as ordering coffee, are meticulously rendered here. But despite an utter lack of overarching plot, life in Tokisadame does move along, and the characters grow and change: Nano becomes a student, Mio succeeds as a skilled manga artist, and the Igo Soccer Club gains new members. What makes this mad pastiche of humor cohere is the beautiful and carefully rendered animation. Presenting all 26 episodes from 2011 in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, in Japanese with English subtitles, and rated TV-14, extras include a bonus episode. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (L. Martincik)

RWBY: Volumes 1–3—Beacon ★★★

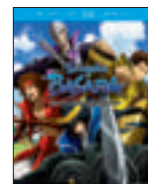
(2016) 3 discs. 439 min. Blu-ray: \$49.98. Cinedigm Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Rooster Teeth—an Austin-based team—concocted this fantasy-action online saga that imitates Japanese animation. Rendered in stylized, video-game-esque CGI artwork with Nippon character designs, *RWBY* is initially striking but bland over the long haul. The action takes place in a mystic land besieged by monsters, where members of the Beacon school for young “hunters” and “huntresses” are trained to fight such entities. A quartet of color-coded maidens—Ruby, Weiss, Blake, and Yang (hence the title)—are the principal students/warrior princesses from divergent backgrounds who face off not only against marauding monsters, mechas, and mystery outlaw-terrorists, but also become involved with a subculture of formerly oppressed cat-eared animal-people whose grassroots equal-rights activism has led to militant hatred of all humans. Much of the narrative centers on boss fights, either in prolonged campus practice sessions or in extracurricular conspiracies, with the premise finally becoming more interesting and morally complex in the battle-royale third season. Presenting all 41 episodes from the 2013-15 first three seasons on Blu-ray, suitable for ages 13-up, extras include audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, live-action cosplay, and Rooster Teeth convention panel discussions. Recommended. (C. Cassidy)

Sengoku Basara: End of Judgement ★★★

(2014) 4 discs. 300 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).

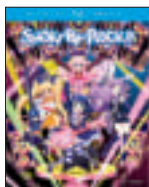


End of Judgement, the latest entry in the *Sengoku Basara* franchise, begins 100 days prior to Japan’s Battle of Sekigahara during the 17th-century, with rival warlords and their respective armies trying to gain domination in a fractured landscape. The drama heats up when clan leader Ieyasu Tokugawa unexpectedly kills clan head Hideyoshi Toyotomi. And

the violence escalates as old alliances fray, new pacts are hastily made, and Hideyoshi's loyal followers plan an elaborate revenge for their slain chief. Viewers without any previous acquaintance with the *Sengoku Basara* series may find themselves utterly baffled by the number of characters and thorny plot twists involving the complicated military maneuvers. But even if the story may sometimes seem opaque, there is no shortage of action, presented in increasingly vivid animation. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2014 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries. Serving up a pure anime adrenaline rush, this is recommended. (P. Hall)

Show by Rock!! The Complete Series ★★

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



Inspired by a Japanese music video game, this shrill action-fantasy anime series features characters designed in the super-cute "moe" style who occasionally become 3D CGI. Schoolgirl Cyan dreams of rock-music fame but is too shy to audition. Suddenly, she is sucked by her cell-phone video game into the amazing Midi City, a place of folkloric Japanese spirit-creatures unrecognizably morphed into pop-music archetypes. After her guitar heroics destroy a marauding monster at a concert, Cyan (now sporting catlike features) becomes the fourth member of the girl group Plasmagica, who sign with a small-but-honorable indie record label that is run by an egg-shaped promoter. Along with fierce battle-of-the-bands rivalries with other divas and drama involving a handsome boy-band of poseurs, there is also background menace in the form of the demonic Dagger, who through the power of rock is able to manipulate performer egos and enslave a top songwriter in his scheme to conquer Midi City (or something). While for otaku this may chart higher (real-life Japanese bands guest star on the soundtrack), general anime viewers may want to pump down the volume, even with the occasionally amusing riffs on teen idols, fans, and A&R men. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries. Optional. (C. Cassidy)

Sky Wizards Academy ★★1/2

(2015) 4 discs. 325 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.98. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



An average to mildly diverting adventure-fantasy that is loaded with "harem" elements, *Sky Wizards Academy* (drawn from a series of light novels) is set in a

world where—after monstrous flying "Devil Beetles" ravage civilization—humanity can only survive by taking to the air in floating cities (which are, somewhat against common sense, easier to defend). Brave young warrior Kanata risks his life valorously defending against a Devil Beetle assault only to be labeled a coward and "traitor." Kanata is demoted to teaching a squad of misfit young girls (one of whom claims to be a goddess) to rally as "Sky Wizards" against the regular onslaughts. After getting some tiresome anime-cliché business out of the way (breast-size comparisons, accidental boob gropes), Kanata proves his courage and resourcefulness, although he never takes credit or otherwise tries to redeem his tainted reputation. There is a decent boss-battle showdown, but much of this is overly familiar. Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries, and an OVA episode. A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

Snow White with the Red Hair ★★★1/2

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



In a medieval-European-style setting, a headstrong girl named Shirayuki (literally "snow white") is a skilled young herbalist and healer. But to many males her most striking feature is her bright red hair, which makes her an object of both fascination and scorn. Fleeing her home after a spoiled minor prince demands that she be his concubine, Shirayuki meets and befriends Zen, another royal heir who lives in a more powerful neighboring kingdom. Zen shows great potential to be a more enlightened ruler, but his sheltered, aristocratic upbringing leaves him surrounded by class-bound treacherous nobles who view innocent commoner Shirayuki as an interloper and opportunist—or someone they can use as a tool for their own ends. The episodes frequently involve the heroine striving to surmount palace snobbery and intrigues, while slowly (very slowly, at times) coming to realize her true love with Zen. Derived from manga, this is an engaging old-school fairytale-like romance narrative, more grounded in common sense than many fantasies (with paranormal elements here played down). Presenting all 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries. Highly recommended. [Note: *Snow White with the Red Hair: Season 2* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)

Ultimate Otaku Teacher: Part 1 ★★★

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

Adapted from manga, this comedy series

centers on a young man named Junichiro Kagami, who while educated in science is also the Japanese cultural archetype of a "NEET" (Not in Education, Employment or Training)—a guy who devotes all of his time to video games, comics, anime, and blogging about same. His exasperated sister forces Junichiro (at the point of a baseball bat) to take a real-world job as a public high-school teacher. Surprisingly, Junichiro finds that he can use gaming, social media, and anime philosophies to reach his students, and while a misunderstanding with a semi-delinquent girl soon gets him fired (which the otaku teacher doesn't mind at all), news of his unorthodox methods also results in him being recruited to lead a classroom at an exclusive academy. Here, Junichiro learns that one of his new students is, in fact, a leading manga creator going incognito; he reforms a fearsome bully jock nicknamed "Cyborg"; and he takes the entire class into a virtual-reality online fantasy RPG for character-building lessons. Obviously, the "real-world" high-school settings are barely more authentic than those found in typical anime fare, but there are plenty of amusing moments and insider references here for genre fans. Presenting the first 12 episodes from 2015 in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include episode commentaries. Recommended. [Note: *Ultimate Otaku Teacher: Part 2* is also newly available.] (C. Cassidy)



Wolf's Rain: The Complete Series

★★★1/2

(2003) 9 discs. 750 min. Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$64.99. Funimation (avail. from most distributors).



The 2003 anime series *Wolf's Rain* is set in a typically dystopian future, with humankind living in domed cities and nearly all wildlife extinct for centuries. But wolves have managed to survive the transition by using a hitherto unsuspected ability of making themselves appear to be human. Wolves with the ability to pretend to be people here join with sympathetic humans—including someone known as the "Flower Maiden," who was artificially created from a "Lunar Flower"—in a search for a distant utopia known as Paradise. *Wolf's Rain* goes to wild extremes with its brash mix of ecological drama, pseudoscience, conspiracies, and aversion towards military-government authority. The characters have remarkable depth of emotion, and the artwork, particularly the action sequences involving wolves, is nothing short of stunning. Presenting all 26 episodes in a dual-language Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, rated TV-14, extras include cast and crew interviews, and promo films. Highly recommended. (P. Hall)

Arcade Fire: The Reflektor Tapes ★★1/2

(2017) 2 discs. 265 min. DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Kahlil Joseph, the filmmaker behind Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade*, directed this kaleidoscopic look at the making of Arcade Fire's 2013 album *Reflektor*, which the Grammy Award-winning Montreal art rockers recorded in Jamaica. Joseph combines rehearsal, recording, and concert footage with interview excerpts and scenes of island life. Most of the spoken-word sequences come from front couple Win Butler and Régine Chassagne. Although the voiceover tends towards the opaque, Chassagne adds a few introspective moments by way of her Haitian heritage and its influence on the record. The look of the material here varies widely, from saturated color sequences to abstract imagery to black-and-white footage processed to appear silvery grey, making for a visually attractive film, but also one that feels more like an extended highlights reel, particularly since most of the 23 songs here are presented in truncated form. For those who aren't already on the band's wavelength, *The Reflektor Tapes* will likely leave them cold, while fans may want to play it on an endless loop like a tuneful screensaver. The second disc, which captures a 20-song 2014 concert at London's Earl's Court, should have wider appeal since the band draws from all four of their studio albums and the show includes the favorites "Rebellion (Lies)," "Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels)," and "Wake Up." Although Joseph uses some of the same techniques featured in the documentary, the effect during the concert proves less distracting since the band's famously intense performances come to the fore. Presented in DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, and DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, extras include promo videos and alternative cuts of various tracks. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

Armida ★★

(2015) 162 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Dynamic (dist. by Naxos of America).



The tale of the Saracen sorceress Armida who bewitches the courageous Crusader Rinaldo, first told by Italian poet Torquato Tasso in the 16th century, has been a favorite with composers from Monteverdi to Dvorák (it is estimated that more than 50 operas have been based on the story). Rossini's 1817 version was largely forgotten until it was revived for Maria Callas (more recently, Renée Fleming has triumphed in the lead role). While it was heroic of the Opera Vlaanderen of Antwerp/Ghent to mount

this demanding work in 2015—requiring six ringing tenors and two rock-steady basses, as well as a coloratura soprano—the result is sadly undernourished. Rossini specialist Alberto Zedda conducts the score energetically but without much elegance, and although Enea Scala is a more than adequate Rinaldo and Dario Schmunck, Robert McPherson, Leonard Bernad, and Adam Smith handle the remaining male roles adequately (sometimes doubling up), Carmen Romeu simply cannot compete with Callas or Fleming as Armida, though she improves as the performance proceeds. Mariame Clément's staging does the work no favors, merely having the chorus meander about during the ballet music, and Julia Hansen's sets are overly sparse, especially for the scenes set at the sorceress's garden of delights, while her costumes are decidedly odd, with the Crusaders often dressed in what look like soccer outfits. Presented in DTS-HD 5.1 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, and Dolby Digital 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, this is a workmanlike effort that does not measure up to better productions. Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)

Ballet Hispánico ★★★

(2015) 104 min. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99. C Major (dist. by Naxos of America).

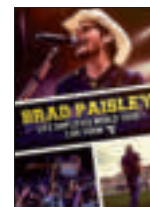


The latest release in the *Lincoln Center at the Movies* series showcasing American dance focuses on New York's Ballet Hispánico, founded in 1970 by Tina Ramirez to present works reflecting Latino and Hispanic culture in the United States. The longer of the two signature pieces that are presented here, Gustavo Ramírez Sansano's *Carmen.maquia* draws on orchestral selections from Bizet's opera (slightly altered and embellished) to offer an abbreviated take on the romantic conflict involving gypsy seductress Carmen, smitten soldier Don José, bullfighter Escamillo, and José's hometown girlfriend Micaela. Set against plain white boxes and walls, and featuring simple white costumes—only Carmen's black gown and a bit of color on Escamillo's outfit stand out—Sansano's ballet (the first full-length narrative piece in the company's history) is far too abstract to coherently reflect the opera's plot (newcomers would be lost without the occasional written summaries here), but it does offer the opportunity to create sequences that effectively express character emotion, and the company responds exuberantly to the changing moods. The shorter *Club Havana*, choreographed by Pedro Ruiz to songs by various composers, recreates the elegant, vivacious atmosphere of a nightclub in the titular Cuban capital before the Castro revolution. The series of dances allows the principals and corps to show off their moves without the confines of narrative. Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and

DTS-HD 5.0 and PCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include a behind-the-scenes featurette. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

Brad Paisley: Life Amplified World Tour Live from WVU ★★★

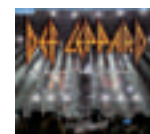
(2016) 95 min. DVD: \$16.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Closed captioned.



In this PBS-aided *Great Performances* special, Grammy Award-winning country star Brad Paisley performs for a 20,000-strong crowd at West Virginia University. Showing his hometown pride by way of the WVU jersey he wears with requisite cowboy hat and jeans (he is later joined by the local Mountaineers cheerleaders for a number), Paisley is backed by his band, the Drama Kings, which includes players on fiddle, guitar, steel guitar, keyboards, bass, and drums. Paisley kicks off with the celebratory "Crushin' It" in this energetic 20-song set during which he frequently communes with the audience, dazzling them with quicksilver guitar solos played on a succession of glittery guitars. During the song "Water," Paisley spots a fan with a guitar, calls him over, signs it, and returns it while Justin Williamson saws away on the fiddle. During "Mud on the Tires," Williamson gets his own solo spotlight (but it's nearly impossible to hear him). If most of Paisley's songs revolve around simple pleasures, he also addresses social media in "Online," quipping that "I grow another foot and I lose a bunch of weight every time I log in." He also relaxes the crowd with slower songs such as "Letter to Me," switching from electric to acoustic guitar, and duets with Chris Young on "I'm Still a Guy." Presented in DTS 5.1 and stereo, this is also available in a DVD/CD Combo edition. Recommended. (K. Fennessy)

Def Leppard: And There Will Be a Next Time... Live from Detroit ★★★

(2016) 112 min. DVD: \$21.98 (2 audio CDs included), Blu-ray: \$26.98 (2 audio CDs included). Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



Veteran metal band Def Leppard plays a pleasing mix of old and new material in this 2016 engagement at the DTE Energy Music Theatre in Clarkston, MI. The title comes from singer Joe Elliott's promise at the show's conclusion: "See you next time—and there will be a next time." The band members are in fine form, although Elliott's voice isn't quite as prominent in the mix as it could be. The video wall behind the Sheffield quintet provides the most notable special effect, changing visuals from song to song, including a collection

of neon signs. The band starts the nine-song set with "Let's Go" and winds up with "Man Enough," both off their 2015 self-titled album. Elliott introduces "Fool-in'"—a highlight of their multi-platinum *Pyromania* CD—as a song for those who've been "as far back with us as 1983." Def Leppard don't sound much different than they did 34 years ago, even if they look unsurprisingly (but not dramatically) older. Guitarist Phil Collen has less hair, but he couldn't be in better shape as his toned shirtless torso attests. Collen is joined by Rick Allen on drums, Vivian Campbell on guitar, and Rick Savage on bass. Def Leppard has always leaned toward the glam end of the spectrum, which comes through in their slow-burn cover of David Essex's "Rock On." Presented in DTS-HD 5.1 and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, and DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, extras include bonus music videos and two audio CDs. (K. Fennessy)

Frankenstein ★★1/2

(2016) 130 min. DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99. Opus Arte (dist. by Naxos of America).

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel has been adapted for stage and screen many times, but this co-production of London's Royal Ballet and the San Francisco Ballet appears to be the first related major dance work. This inaugural 2016 London mounting is visually lavish, with elaborate period sets and costumes by John Macfarlane. The ballet itself, however, is a curiously meandering, unfocused affair, choreographed in an unimaginatively conventional style by Liam Scarlett to an old-fashioned, ersatz romantic new score by Lowell Liebermann. It can be applauded for trying to shoehorn Shelley's entire convoluted plot (with some omissions, of course) into a space of little more than two hours, but in reality the first act wastes a good deal of time on the domestic lives of the Frankenstein family and Victor's studies in anatomy (including a bizarre ensemble dance with severed limbs) before ending with the re-animation of the Creature. The second act returns to Victor's estate in Geneva, where his monster comes to demand fatherly affection and, when refused, targets Frankenstein's friends and family before confronting his creator himself. On the plus side, Liebermann's music is well-played by the company orchestra under Koen Kessels, and the production features excellent dancing by Federico Bonelli (Victor), Laura Morera (his childhood sweetheart and later wife), Alexander Campbell (his friend Clerval), and Steven McRae (the Creature), as well as the large supporting cast and corps. Presented in DTS 5.1 and PCM stereo on DVD, and Dolby Atmos, Dolby TrueHD 5.1, and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, extras include



an introduction to the ballet and behind-the-scenes featurettes. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Mumford & Sons—Live from South Africa: Dust and Thunder ★★1/2

(2016) 94 min. DVD: \$15.98, Blu-ray: \$24.98. Eagle Rock Entertainment (avail. from most distributors).



International superstar band Mumford & Sons, hailing from the U.K., cap a tour of South Africa from 2016 with a two-night stand in Pretoria in this 17-song concert. Those who find Mumford & Sons' music to be a colorless mush of a sound, whether from their country-folk days or their revised, more driving, electrified material, will witness little here to change their minds. Despite a passionate crowd of Pretorian fans who know the group's lyrics and respond well to African guest musicians who turn up, Mumford & Sons rarely frame a song as anything more than a murmured, undistinguished series of cyclical rhythms at modulated speeds. The opening track "Snake Eyes" (following a curiously diffident "hello" to the audience by Marcus Mumford) is a rumbling engine that shifts from slow to fast. "I Will Wait" offers tuneless bluegrass and folk-rock, while "Awake My Soul" fares better, starting as a prayerful, meditative piece that shifts to a slightly more celebratory, rocking tempo. "Lover of the Light" is the centerpiece of the show in many ways, breaking open as a Coldplay-like exciting anthem driven by Mumford's thrilling turn on a drum kit. Presented in DTS HD 5.1, Dolby Atmos, and LPCM stereo on Blu-ray, and DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo on DVD, this is a strong optional purchase. (T. Keogh)

Un Ballo in Maschera

★★★

(2016) 149 min. In Italian w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99. C Major/Unitel (dist. by Naxos of America).



Verdi's 1859 opera was originally beset by censorship problems because it dealt with a royal assassination—the 1792 murder of King Gustav III of Sweden—which was considered an unsuitable subject for the stage. The composer was therefore forced to shift the locale to 17th-century Boston and change the victim to its governor, Riccardo. The Boston version is followed in this 2016 production from Munich's Bayerische Staatsoper, and the geographical location is the least controversial element in Johannes Erath's peculiar staging, which situates all of the action on a single set: a bedroom with a huge curving staircase. And it apparently presents the plot—Riccardo is

stabbed (or in this case, shot) by his friend and advisor Renato, who has learned of the governor's affair with Renato's wife Amelia—as the governor's nightmare, in which a fortune-teller named Ulrica plays a major role. The concept is frankly bewildering: a puppet appears occasionally to mouth lines sung by Riccardo, and it sometimes turns into a real boy, while Riccardo mounts the staircase at the close after supposedly being shot dead. But while the visuals—presented virtually in black-and-white, often through screams—are strange, the musical performance is superb. Zubin Mehta leads the Bayerische Staatsorchester in a weighty but exciting account of the score, and the vocalism of Piotr Beczala (Riccardo), George Petean (Renato), Anja Harteros (Amelia), Okka von der Damerau (Ulrica), and the supporting soloists is uniformly first-rate. Although a more traditional reading might be preferred—such as the 2011 Teatro Regio di Parma staging (VL-11/13)—this one certainly shines when it comes to the music. Presented in DTS 5.1 (DTS-HD 5.1 on the Blu-ray edition) and PCM stereo, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Winterreise ★★1/2

(2014) 138 min. In German w/ English subtitles. DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$34.99. C Major/Unitel (dist. by Naxos of America).



Franz Schubert's 24-number song cycle, based on the poems of Wilhelm Müller, is one of the unquestioned masterpieces of 19th-century lieder, understandably attracting noteworthy male singers—both tenors and baritones. Perhaps its most celebrated contemporary exponent in the lower range is Matthias Goerne, who has recorded the cycle no fewer than three times in audio-only format with different accompanists and now offers a "staged" version of the complete cycle with pianist Markus Hinterhäuser, filmed at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in 2014. Vocally, this is a magnificent performance, with Goerne capturing the myriad nuances of the narrator's "dark night of the soul" as he takes his winter's journey, despondent over unrequited love. And while Hinterhäuser might not be as famous as Goerne's earlier collaborators (Graham Johnson, Alfred Brendel, and Christoph Eschenbach), he proves here to be an equally insightful interpreter. Viewers will either be enthralled or irritated with the "visualizations" by artist William Kentridge—animated drawings projected behind the performers that offer impressionistic counterpoint to the verse—but regardless this is an outstanding version of *Winterreise*. Presented in PCM stereo on DVD and Blu-ray, extras include the "making-of" documentary *A Trio for Schubert*. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

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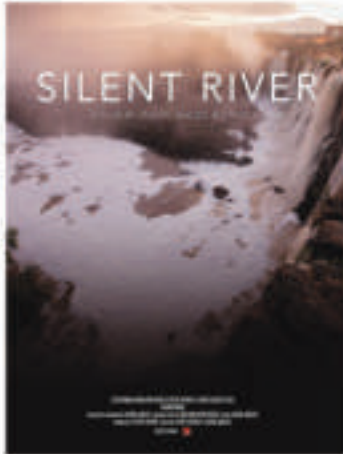
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(Los Años de Fierro)
51 mins. CAT # - EPF16007
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Cesar Fierro, the oldest Mexican prisoner on death row in the United States, has been languishing in a Texas prison for over thirty years. Cesar continues to await execution by lethal injection for a murder that evidence shows he did not commit. This documentary is a reflection on justice, imprisonment and brotherly love, through the eyes of Cesar and his brother, Sergio. **Invitation Toronto International Film Festival, Mexican Academy Award Nomination for Best Feature Documentary**

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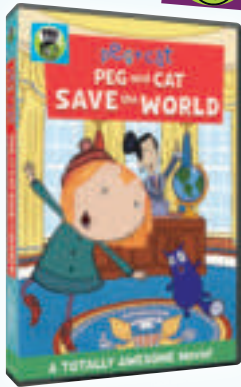
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In 1915, civil rights activist Monroe Trotter waged a battle against D.W. Griffith's notorious blockbuster, *The Birth of a Nation*, which unleashed a fight about race relations and the influence of Hollywood. Includes interviews with Spike Lee, Reginald Hudlin, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and DJ Spooky.



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The century old tradition of paper folding is at the heart of a scientific revolution as engineers and designers are now adopting origami designs to conquer space or reshape the world around us.



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Yosemite was forged by time and shaped by water. But as climate change makes water scarcer and the threat of wildfire grows, see how critters survive in this great wilderness.



DARK ANGEL

Based on a true story, a troubled woman (Joanne Froggatt, *Downton Abbey*) is drawn ever deeper into causal murder while her loved ones and friends, who were also her victims, never suspect a thing.

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We Will Survive

As I write, it is April 15, the final day of National Library Week. Two days ago, Ivanka Trump tweeted “This #NationalLibraryWeek, we honor our libraries and librarians for opening our eyes to the world of knowledge, learning and reading!”

That is a wonderful sentiment, but not one shared by her father, who as President continues to display a marked aversion to “knowledge, learning and reading!” Trump’s proposed budget will eliminate the only federal-funded program for libraries, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which at a cost of \$230 million helps support libraries and museums across the country—particularly in the rural areas that backed Trump’s presidential run.

Not content with severely impairing library services nationwide, Trump also wants to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), budgeted at \$148 million each, as well as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which receives \$445 million. To put those figures in perspective, the suggested defense budget is \$54 billion.

The general theme here seems to be: Killing Art & Culture (which almost sounds like

a Bill O’Reilly book title).

Naturally, the idea of Big Bird going the way of the dodo has rightfully spurred a hue and cry amongst parents who depend on PBS Kids programming to help educate and entertain their children amidst the vast wasteland of Saturday morning cartoon dreck that is primarily meant to sell toys. Actually, Big Bird would likely survive Trump’s budget cuts. HBO has contracted for new *Sesame Street* episodes (which would premiere on its premium cable channel before airing on regular PBS stations). And larger metropolitan areas have the numbers to sustain successful pledge drives to keep stations running. But those living in rural areas would likely see less PBS programming because smaller stations depend on funding from the CPB.

Of course, PBS is so much more than *Sesame Street*. Ken Burns could probably find a home on Netflix, but what about the many other *American Experience* documentaries that tell fascinating stories about our history? Would commercial networks or premium cable channels clamor for *The Mine Wars*, *The Abolitionists*, or *The Amish*? Not likely. Ditto for *Frontline*, *NOVA*, and *Nature* documentaries, among others.

The April 6 cover for *Rolling Stone* has a picture of Trump as a cartoon tornado for reporter Matt Taibbi’s story “Trump the

Destroyer.” A mindless, destructive force of nature strikes me as a fairly apt metaphor, although I doubt that Trump has the understanding, interest, or attention span to personally engineer devastating budget cuts.

But regardless of who orchestrated these proposed cuts, the fates of the IMLS, NEA, NEH, and CPB should concern both major political parties. Democrats and Republicans alike use libraries for education, entertainment, job hunting, research, and more. Democrats and Republicans enjoy science, nature, and history documentaries that teach us about the world we live in. Democrats and Republicans both carry a torch in their hearts for Elmo.

Despite the indiscriminant swath of destruction that Trump appears to be hell-bent on laying to American arts and culture, I have hope, because I believe that the informed citizens of a democracy constitute a stronger force. We see it in the protest marches. We see it in the packed town hall meetings. We see it in the skyrocketing subscription numbers for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

To paraphrase Gloria Gaynor, we will survive.

Randy Pitman



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The Boston Globe

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(Midnight Express, Scarface)



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Additional Media Coverage By:

The New York Times
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A surprising number of Americans make their living off vast rivers of trash. They are America's unseen. Dismissed as scavengers and pests, these "pirates of trash" come to life in DOGTOWN REDEMPTION, the story of an underclass of shopping cart recyclers, poor entrepreneurs who defy Darwin every day, cheating death and despair by seeking redemption in trash. We follow the lives of three recyclers: Jason Witt, the titan of recycling, Landon Goodwin, a former minister, who struggles with his own fall from grace, and Miss Hayok Kay, the ultimate outsider, formerly a punk rocker from a prominent Korean family, now at the mercy of the elements and predators.

Documentary | Poverty | Urban Studies | Sustainability | Business & Economics
94 min. | UPC: 602573215340 | SRP: \$59.95 | PPR: \$250.00
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SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

Austrian designer Stefan Sagmeister is doing well. He lives in New York, the city of his dreams, and he has success in his work, designing album covers for the Rolling Stones, Jay-Z and the Talking Heads. But in the back of his mind he suspects there must be something more. He decides to turn himself into a design project. Can he redesign his personality to become a better person? Is it possible to train his mind to get happier? He pursues 3 controlled experiments of meditation, therapy, and drugs, grading himself along the way. But real life creeps in and confounds the process: art, sex, love, and death prove impossible to disentangle.

Documentary | Lifestyle | Design | Mental Health & Wellness
96 min. | UPC: 888295558488 | SRP: \$59.95 | PPR: \$325.00 | Closed Captioned
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FINDING THE GOLD WITHIN



"...one of the best films I've ever seen about the challenges facing African-American males in our society."
- Mark Phillips

edutopia

"An extraordinary film, worthy of the widest possible audience as our country continues to grapple with racial injustice, particularly the persistent stereotyping and criminalizing of young Black men. **Highly recommended for all library film collections.**"

EDUCATIONAL
media reviews online

Finding the Gold Within follows six African American college students from Akron, Ohio for three and a half years. They have been mentored for three to seven years by the award-winning youth program Alchemy, Inc. and are well-equipped with self-confidence and critical thinking skills, ready to become the heroes within their own stories. The protagonists grow before our eyes, whether navigating racial provocations, or seeking support with friends, estranged fathers, and wise grandmothers. Each of them is hell-bent on disproving society's stereotypes and low expectations. What will their paths and trials look like? How will they follow their dreams?

Documentary | Race | Education | Masculinity/Gender Studies
92 min. | UPC: 602573165041 | SRP: \$59.95 | Closed Captioned
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THE LAND BENEATH OUR FEET

"A model for historical filmmaking"
- Nancy Jacobs, Professor of History at Brown University, for the journal *Environmental History*

"The film dramatizes urgent questions of distributive justice that reverberate well beyond Liberia."

- Rob Nixon, Princeton University, author of *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*

"The film ends with an uneasy sense that a revolt, brewing especially among the young, is all but inevitable. **Recommended.**"

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The Land Beneath Our Feet weaves together rare archival footage from a 1926 Harvard expedition to Liberia with the journey of a young Liberian man, uprooted by war, seeking to understand how the past has shaped land conflicts in his country today. This film is an explosive reminder of how large-scale land grabs are transforming livelihoods across the planet.

Documentary | African Studies | Liberian History | Environmental | Politics | War
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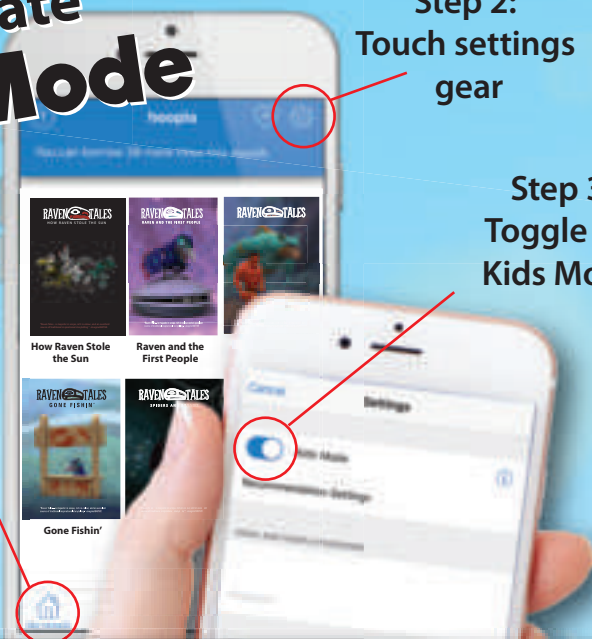
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